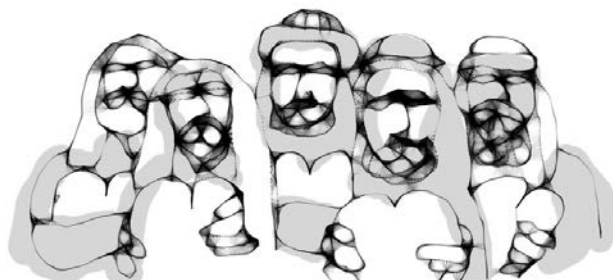


The Apostles (Teachers; Leaders) and the Law



SABBATH—JUNE 7

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Romans 3:31; Romans 6:15; Acts 10:9–14; John 15:1–11; James 2:1–26; Hebrews 3:7–19; Jude 5–7.

MEMORY VERSE: “So the law is holy. The commandment also is holy and right and good” (Romans 7:12, NlrV).

WITH SO MUCH PROOF IN SUPPORT OF GOD'S LAW, why do so many Christians argue against it? First, some people look at certain New Testament verses that criticize a false understanding of the law's role. But they decide that the problem is with the law itself. As a result, they claim that the Ten Commandments are not required for those under the new covenant.

Second, there are some people who strongly believe that Christians are not required to keep the Sabbath. To defend their position, they claim that all the commandments have been crucified (put to death) with Jesus on the cross.

Third, some people argue that nine of the Ten Commandments are still legal but that the fourth, the commandment about the seventh-day Sabbath, has been replaced by Sunday. They believe that Sunday should be kept in honor of the resurrection (return to life) of Jesus.

Many problems come from all of these positions. This week we will look at the attitude (thought and feeling) of Christ's apostles about the law. If the law were to have been removed or changed after Christ's death, the apostles would have known and written about the change.

PAUL AND THE LAW (Galatians 3:24, 25)

Some people claim that Paul was the true founder of Christianity. That is wrong. Paul helped much with our understanding of Christian doctrine (beliefs and teachings). He wrote 13 of the 27 New Testament books. But almost all of the teachings in his writings can be found elsewhere in the Bible. Some people claim that Paul started a new religion because they misunderstand his teaching about law and grace.¹

Read Romans 3:28; Romans 6:14; Romans 7:4; and Galatians 3:24, 25. Why is it easy to understand why some people think that these verses remove the law?

Read separately without reading the rest of what Paul has written, these verses seem to suggest that the law no longer matters to the Christian. But these verses are just part of Paul's writings that we must study to better understand what Paul is truly saying.

Study the above verses along with the chapters in which they are found. Pay special attention to Romans 3:31; Romans 6:15; Romans 7:7–12; and Galatians 3:21. How do these verses help us better to understand Paul's point about the law when we study them this way?

Some people do not understand justification by faith.² To them, Paul may seem to be mixed up in his mind. For example, Paul claims that the Christian is not under the law. But he also writes that the same Christian is responsible for keeping the law. The problem is solved when we remember that God requires righteousness (holiness) from those who claim to be in a relationship with Him. The measure of righteousness is His law. But when people measure themselves against God's law, they fall short and are found guilty by the law. If keeping the law were required for salvation, then none of us would have any hope of eternal life. The hope of the Christian is not found in the law but in Jesus Christ. Jesus kept the law perfectly. Through God's miraculous power, He lets believers share in His righteousness (Romans 8:3, 4). The Christian now can serve the law of God with a free conscience because Christ has taken away the law's curse (Romans 7:25–Romans 8:2). The grace that comes through Christ does not free us from the law, but rather, receiving this grace results in us wanting to obey the law with all our hearts.



Grace does not free us from the law, but rather, frees us from sin to obey it.

DEFINITIONS

1. grace—God's gift of mercy and forgiveness that He freely gives us to take away our sins.
2. justification by faith—forgiveness and cleansing from sin received by accepting Christ as Savior.

PETER AND THE LAW (1 Peter 2:9)

Peter was one of Jesus' closest apostles. Among the first chosen, Peter was at many of the important events in the ministry (work) of Jesus. It was Peter who, at Caesarea Philippi, announced that Jesus was the Messiah (Chosen One). When the first group of believers met on the Day of Pentecost,³ Peter was the chief spokesperson.⁴ Suppose the law had been changed in any way. Then Peter certainly would have known.

What does Acts 10:9–14 tell us about Peter's loyalty to the Jewish law after Jesus went to heaven? If Peter was this careful about laws for food, can we imagine what he thought about the lasting authority of the Ten Commandments?

Peter received his vision several years after Jesus went to heaven. As a result of the disciples' preaching, thousands of Jews had already accepted Jesus as the Messiah. There is nothing in the Bible that even hints at the idea that the Jewish Christians should refuse to keep the law. In a powerful way, the event in Acts 10 shows that the earliest Christians were loyal to their Jewish roots.

Compare⁵ 1 Peter 2:9 with Exodus 19:6. What is the meaning of Exodus 19:6 when it is studied along with the rest of chapter 19?

When Peter spoke of his listeners as a "royal priesthood, a holy nation" (1 Peter 2:9, NKJV), they quickly would have remembered the story of the giving of the law at Sinai. The people of Israel were expected to follow the requirements of the covenant that were made clear in the law of God. So, after reminding the people of their responsibility, Peter urges them to live lives of righteousness (1 Peter 2:11, 12). Peter also warns his listeners not to believe false teachers who preach a law-free gospel (2 Peter 2:21; 2 Peter 3:2).

Remember how badly Peter messed up. But look at the grace given to him. How can we learn (1) to give that kind of grace to others, and (2) to accept grace for ourselves when we mess up?

DEFINITIONS

3. Pentecost—the day the disciples received the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

4. spokesperson—a person chosen to speak for others.

5. compare—to show how two or more things are the same or different.

JOHN AND THE LAW (John 15:1–11)

Paul wrote the largest number of books in the New Testament and John wrote the second largest number. John wrote the Gospel of John, three letters (1 John, 2 John, and 3 John), and the book of Revelation. Like Peter, John was among the first disciples Jesus chose. And John also had a special relationship with Jesus. Surely one who was as close to Jesus as John would have known if Jesus wanted His followers to disregard (set aside) God's law.

Read John 15:1–11 and 1 John 2:3–6. What do these verses together tell us about how we should relate to God's "commands"?

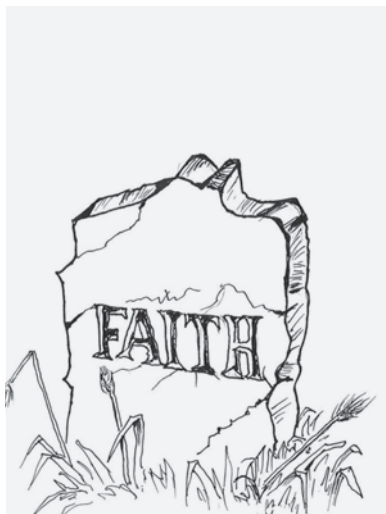
Toward the end of His earthly life, Jesus could tell His disciples that He had been faithful to His Father's commandments. So, as a result, He had remained in His Father's love (John 15:10). Jesus did not feel the commandments needed to be done away with. Instead, He thought of them as guidelines (rules) for a loving relationship with Him and with other people. When John, the beloved disciple, reminds Christians of their responsibility to God, he uses the same language of love and unity (oneness) that Jesus does in the Gospel of John. In fact, John understood that love has always been the most important part of the law (for example, 2 John 6). A person cannot claim to be keeping the law if he or she does not have loving relationships with God and other people.

"The law of God requires that we love our fellow men as we love ourselves. Then every power and action of the mind must be [used] . . . to do the greatest amount of good. . . . How pleasing to God for man to hold the royal gifts of the soul so that they shall tell with power upon others! They are the connection between God and man. And they are to show the Spirit of Christ and what is good in heaven. The power of a holy but humble life speaks better than the best sermons. The holy but humble life speaks of God, and opens to men their duty more powerfully than words can do."—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Manuscript Releases*, volume 20, page 138.

What is your own experience with the connection between law and love? In everyday life, how is love shown by obedience to God's law?

JAMES AND THE LAW

(James 2:7–9)



Faith without works is dead.



No one can truly claim to keep God's commandments if he or she does not do acts of love for others.

There is only one book in the New Testament that is credited to James. There are several men called James in the Bible. The author does not tell us which James he is. But many have accepted that the letter comes from James, the brother of Jesus. At first, James doubted Jesus was the Messiah (John 7:5). But James later became an important leader of the New Testament church (Acts 15:13; Galatians 1:19). Again, if Jesus had planned to abolish (do away with) God's law, His own brother certainly would have known.

Read James 2:1–26. What is the basic message of the chapter? Why would James summarize the law as he did in verses 7–9 and then quickly say what he said about keeping all the commandments? How do these verses show the connection between love and obeying God's law?

Some people misunderstand Paul's teaching on the law. They argue that James and Paul are opposed to each other about the role of the law. They point to what James and Paul each say about the place of works in salvation. Paul says that we are saved by grace through faith apart (separate) from works (Ephesians 2:8, 9). But James points out that "faith without works is dead" (James 2:26, NKJV). These statements are not really different. James is just using strong words to say what Paul has said many times about grace not abolishing (removing) the law. Like Paul in Romans 13:9, James fully understands that God's law is love (James 2:8). No one can truly claim to keep God's commandments if he or she does not do acts of love for others.

JUDE AND THE LAW (Jude 4)

Jude is one of the shortest books in the New Testament. Many people believe that the book of Jude was written by another brother of Jesus. The author (Jude) speaks of himself as a “slave” of Jesus Christ. But he does admit to being the brother of James. Because Matthew gives James and Jude as names for two of Jesus’ four brothers (Matthew 13:55), the Jude (sometimes called Judas) who wrote this short letter is accepted by most people to be the Savior’s brother. As with all of the other Bible writers we have studied, Jude would have known if Jesus had abolished (done away with) the law.

Jude does not speak anything about law or commandments. But his entire letter is about faithfulness to God and the results of breaking God’s law.

Read Jude 4. What is Jude saying here that relates to our whole discussion?

If we discuss grace, then there must be law involved. This is because grace would not be necessary if there were no sin (Romans 5:18–Romans 6:15). What these false teachers were saying was so bad that Jude called it denying the Lord Himself.

How does Hebrews 3:7–19 help to give light to Jude 5–7? How do these verses together show us the relationship between obedience and faith?

In his own style, Jude reminds his readers about the experience of the Israelites, who had been freed from Egyptian slavery. God had shown His strength to them. He had even given them His law. But when they became unfaithful, they faced terrible results because they were separated from Him. Jude makes it very clear that people can fall away. And those who do fall away will face judgment. Jude is as clear as is the rest of the Bible. All who claim to have faith must be willing to show their faith through obedient lives.

Read the book of Jude. Among all his strong warnings, what promises can you find there for yourself?



“Let him take hold of my strength,” Jesus promises, “that he may make peace with me.”

ADDITIONAL STUDY: Read Ellen G. White, “The Law in the Christian Age,” *Signs of the Times*, August 5, 1886.

“Why should the apostles teach repentance [turning back] toward God?—Because the sinner is in trouble with the Father. The sinner has broken the law. He must see his sin and repent [turn away from sin]. What is his next work? To look to Jesus, whose blood alone can cleanse from all sin. Faith in Christ is necessary because law does not save people. The law makes the sinner guilty. But it cannot pardon the sin breaker. The sinner must depend on what the blood of Christ does for him or her. ‘Let him [the sinner] take hold of my strength,’ says our merciful Savior. ‘That he may make peace with me; and he shall make peace with me’ [Isaiah 27:5, KJV]. Our Lord declared that he would love most the one whom was forgiven most. And this person will feel that he needs forgiveness. He will see himself as he is. The person sees himself as stained by sin and as a breaker of God’s holy law. He who takes the law most seriously will most clearly see how terrible his sins are. He then will feel that he is truly forgiven much.”
—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*, August 5, 1886.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① Carefully read the above statement by Ellen G. White. How does her writing give light to the Bible teachings covered in this quarter? What does it mean that a sinner must “depend on what the blood of Christ does for him or her”?
- ② Think more deeply about the warning in Jude 4. If the men are preaching the grace of God, they clearly are believers. But Jude says that they are denying the Lord. How serious is this for those who claim that God’s grace abolished the law? When people claim the law was done away with, what are they really trying to get rid of?
- ③ How does denying the law, or even one of the commandments, play into Satan’s hands as he tries to “overthrow” the law of God?