

Jew and
Gentile

*“The law was given through Moses; grace and truth came
through Jesus Christ” (John 1:17, NIV).*



Introduction

The Redeemer's Love

Matt. 19:16–22

One of the most frequent complaints many people have about Seventh-day Adventists is that we seem to be too rigid in obeying God's law. Indeed, it does seem that at times church members appear to be more focused on obedience than on having a relationship with their Savior. John, however, helps us to put obedience and love for Christ in their proper relationship. "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous" (1 John 5:3). We obey, not to be saved, but because we love God. And when we love Him, we learn that His commandments are reasonable and for our own good.

They thought that doing what they wanted would make their way easier.

The following quote helps us to better understand the motives behind obedience and disobedience: "In heaven itself this law was broken. Sin originated from self-seeking. Lucifer, the covering cherub, desired to be first in heaven."¹

God told Adam and Eve that they could eat from any tree in the Garden of Eden except from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. How generous God was! But they chose instead to disobey.

Because He never changes, God is also generous with us. His commandments apply to all cultures and every facet of life. Relatively speaking, there are very few of them, and following them truly helps us to have a better life and a good relationship with our Creator.

I remember during my Pathfinder years that rules were imposed for every activity—especially for track and trail. But to some, these rules were annoying. They thought that doing what they wanted would make their way easier. So they destroyed the trail signs in favor of shortcuts they were sure would make them winners. To their amazement, however, their team came in last, because they were unaware of hidden dangers along the shortcuts. Afterward, our Master Guide leader talked to us about the path to heaven and how God's law helps us to follow that path and keep us safe.

Read Exodus 20:1, 2. Did you notice that God redeemed Israel from slavery and then gave them His law? "Likewise, through the gospel, Christ frees us from the bondage of sin (John 8:34–36; 2 Pet. 2:19) in order that we may keep His law."² This week, we will learn more about the role of God's Ten Commandment law and the role other Old Testament rules and regulations should play in our lives.

1. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 21.

2. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 602.

Rom. 4:3

Evidence *Reluctant Revolutionary*

Paul's message was unthinkable for several reasons. First, it was the treasonous thought that the Jews could be rejected as God's chosen people. Then there was the idea that the Messiah could have come and not have been recognized by them. Finally, the thought that redemption could be based on something other than law-keeping seemed heretical.

Paul understood that faith is always pivotal.

Many Jews were not about to accept Paul's message on any level. This was not news to him. In his story, you see him as a Jew, struggling with all three aspects of his message. First there is the matter of faith. Read Philippians 3:6, 7. The "striking evidences of God's presence with the martyr [Stephen] had led Saul to doubt the righteousness of the cause he had espoused against the followers of Jesus."¹

Then there is the object of faith. Paul had to accept that Jesus was the Messiah. The revelation on the Damascus Road convinced him. "Now Saul knew for a certainty that the promised Messiah had come to this earth as Jesus of Nazareth."²

Finally, there were the people of faith. Perhaps the hardest thing to accept was the end of the Jews' special status. This explains his insistence on returning to Jerusalem late in his ministry. Read Acts 21:13.

Some members in today's Adventist Church would have us return to the trappings of Judaism, particularly to the festivals marking special sacrifices. Learning from the festivals is one thing, but using them for salvation purposes and to please God is another. Like Paul, we must separate the eternal covenant centered on God's law of love and the secondary covenant that marked a particular arrangement with a certain group of people. Focusing on (1) law-keeping and (2) ritual caused the Jews to reject the King of love. The two are not gospel. Paul understood that faith is always pivotal. "For what does the Scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness'" (Rom. 4:3, NKJV). When people are tempted to return to Jewish ritual as a means of salvation, they need to examine seriously the writings of Paul, for he had lived in both Jewish and Gentile worlds.

REACT

Which mission came first, God's calling to all people, or His call of the Jews?

1. *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 112, 113.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 116.

Logos
*The Mosaic Law and
God's Adoption*

Matt. 19:16–22;
Acts 15:1–29;
Gal. 1:1–12;
Heb. 8:6

Among the practices adopted and performed by God's people in the Old Testament were those written in what is known as the Mosaic law. These laws, found in Leviticus and Deuteronomy, included regulations concerning the sacred services of the tabernacle, civil laws, and health laws. Circumcision is often considered a part of this set of laws, even though long before this time, the Hebrew people were instructed to circumcise male infants as a reminder of their covenant with God (Gen. 17:1–14). Like all the other Mosaic laws, circumcision was observed by each succeeding generation of Hebrews.

**The same issue arose when Paul took Titus with him
to Jerusalem.**

The Mosaic Law and Converted Gentiles (Acts 15:1–29)

Certain leaders in the church (perhaps Pharisees, see verse 5) believed that in order to be saved, Gentile converts to Christianity needed to be circumcised: “‘Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved’” (Acts 15:1, NKJV). Paul and Barnabas, however, strongly disagreed, as did Peter. Read his impassioned speech in verses 7–11. So they, along with some other believers, sought the counsel of the apostles and elders in the Jerusalem church. After some discussion it was concluded that Paul and Barnabas, along with some church members from Jerusalem, would return to Antioch with a letter outlining a short list of requirements Gentile believers should observe. These requirements included abstaining “from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality” (verse 29, NIV). Circumcision was not on this list.

The same issue arose when Paul took Titus with him to Jerusalem. Because Titus was a Greek Christian, some Jewish Christians there felt that he should be circumcised. Once again, however, Paul held firmly to the belief that circumcision was not necessary for salvation (Gal. 2:1–5).

Paul's Defense Against the Perverted Message (Gal. 1:1–12)

After his first missionary journey, Paul traveled to Galatia. Many Jewish Christians who believed that Gentile converts should obey certain Old Testament laws such as circumcision in order to be saved followed him there. Their outspoken opposition confused the Galatians, and as a result, many were becoming quite legalistic in their beliefs. Thus, Paul wrote a letter to them, which we now refer to as the book of Galatians.

In Galatians 1:4, “Paul again presents the great truth that Jesus, through His atoning sacrifice, has provided a way of escape for all who will accept Him. Any attempt to earn this victory over the evil of the world through one’s own efforts is not according to God’s will. . . . If the Galatians persist in their legalism, they can hope neither for deliverance from sin now nor for admission to the future, sinless world.”¹

Master Who Saves (Matt. 19:16–22; Heb. 8:6)

The rich young ruler in Matthew 19:16–22 thought he could be saved based on the good works he did. Yet when Christ told him to sell all that he had and give to the poor, he couldn’t bring himself to do so. This showed his selfish nature and that he really worshiped his wealth instead of God.

But if we are saved by grace through faith, why did Jesus tell this young man to keep the commandments if he wanted eternal life (verse 17)? “It is the will of God that man shall reflect His character, and His character may be summed up in the one word ‘love’ (1 John 4:7–12). To reflect the character, or ‘love,’ of God, we will love Him supremely and our neighbor as ourselves. . . . If we inquire as to how we are to express our love to God and our fellow men, God gives us the answer in the Ten Commandments (see Exodus 20:3-17). . . . The young man professed to love God, but the real test of that love, Jesus says, is to be found in the way he treats his fellow men. . . . ‘If ye love me,’ Jesus says, ‘keep my commandments’ (John 14:15).”²

In the King James Version, the rich young ruler refers to Jesus as “Good Master” (Matt. 19:16). Indeed He is. And why, we might ask? He is loving, even toward sinners (1 John 4:8). He loves us so much that He died on the cross to save us. He is forgiving (1 John 1:9). Both His unfailing love and His forgiveness qualify Him to mediate for His people. Even now, He works as a Mediator in heaven for all who claim His grace through faith.

Regarding Hebrews 8:6, it is written that “God would have us contemplate His love, His promises, given so freely to those who have no merit in themselves. He would have us depend fully, gratefully, rejoicingly, in the righteousness provided for us in Christ. To all who come to God in His appointed way, He freely listens.”³

REACT

1. Someone you are talking with learns you are an Adventist. This person says that she (or he) has heard that Adventists believe people are saved by keeping the Ten Commandments. How would you respond? What Bible texts would you use?

2. Why is legalism so appealing to so many people?

3. What forms of legalism exist today? Other than the Ten Commandments, what other “laws” do people try to keep in order to be saved?

4. What other qualities does Jesus possess that make Him a “Good Master” (Teacher)? Explain your answer.

1. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 938.

2. *Ibid.*, vol. 5, p. 457.

3. *Ibid.*, vol. 7, p. 932.

Testimony The Test

John 14:15

Similar to the Gentile Christians we have been learning about in this week's lesson, a non-Adventist couple once asked a layman about the truth concerning salvation as it is presented in the Bible. Their interest in Scriptures came about as a result of their continual searching for the truth. After extensive Bible studies, they were glad they realized the right way to use and understand the biblical truth regarding God's saving grace. They left their previous beliefs and lifestyle and accepted completely the truth as it is in Jesus Christ. They longed for their family members and friends to accept the truth as well. But not only did their loved ones reject the truth, they rejected the couple as well.

“Good works do not purchase the love of God.”

Ellen White states of such situations that “God does not conceal His truth from men. By their own course of action they make it obscure to themselves. Christ gave the Jewish people abundant evidence that He was the Messiah; but His teaching called for a decided change in their lives. They saw that if they received Christ, they must give up their cherished maxims and traditions, their selfish, ungodly practices.”¹

Some Christians today are still struggling with their beliefs regarding salvation by grace through faith. They wonder where obedience fits in. Do we obey to be saved, or do we obey because we are saved? Christ said, “ ‘If you love me, keep My commandments’ ” (John 14:15, NKJV). Of this verse, Ellen White wrote, “Through the righteousness of Christ we shall stand before God pardoned, and as though we had never sinned. We will never gain strength in considering what we might do if we were angels. We are to turn in faith to Jesus Christ, and show our love to God through obedience to His commands.”²

“Good works do not purchase the love of God, but they reveal that we possess that love. If we surrender the will to God, we shall not work in order to earn God's love. His love as a free gift will be received into the soul, and from love to Him we shall delight to obey His commandments.”³

1. *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 105.

2. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 1142.

3. *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 283.

Gal. 1:1-12

How-to Knowing the Right Way

The world we live in today is so fast paced. Then there is all the bad news we face every time we pick up a newspaper or catch the news online. How is it possible to stay focused on God and our salvation? How is it possible to know the truth about how we are saved? Here are a few steps:

Look to Jesus only. Put all your faith in Him and Him alone.

Use a map and a compass. When traveling to a place you haven't been to before, it's wise to take a map and compass. In our journey toward heaven, our map is the Bible. It contains the directions we need to reach heaven. Our compass to help us better understand the map's instructions is the Spirit of Prophecy as given to us through Ellen White.

Follow the Master Guide. You are not the only one traveling to heaven. So do not place your trust solely in those who are traveling with you. Look to Jesus only. Put all your faith in Him and Him alone. Remember that Jesus said of Himself, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6, NKJV).

Beware of false directions and shortcuts. Along the way, we may encounter lots of signs and directions, but be cautious! Not all directions are right. Not all signs are correct. "There is a way that seems right to a person, but its end is the way to death" (Prov. 14:12, NRSV). Follow only the directions stated on the map. These directions are summarized in John 14:15, where Jesus said, "If you love Me, keep My commandments" (NKJV).

Hold on to the steering wheel; keep your eyes on the road. When the journey becomes difficult, we might be tempted to give up, to take our eyes off the road. During such times, we must remember the following advice: "If we will but keep our eyes fixed on the Savior, and trust in His power, we shall be filled with a sense of security; for the righteousness of Christ will become our righteousness."^{*}

REACT

1. Why are some Adventists easily tempted to doubt their faith?
2. Why do we tend to make the same mistakes as the early Christians who believed false teachers?

^{*}*Messages to Young People*, p. 107.

Opinion
*Tinted Religious
Eyeglasses*

Gal. 1:8-12

Although we worship one God, fellowship with one another, and witness together to the world under the name Seventh-day Adventist, we come from diverse family backgrounds, countries, cultures, and denominations. Like the early church, we are a church composed of “Jews” and “Gentiles.”

Evaluating and judging others based solely on our cultural standards is unchristian.

We commend ourselves for being a diverse church. Nevertheless, such diversity can cause problems. In my home country, the Philippines, candidates for ministerial ordination traditionally wear dark suits with neckties, even when ordination services are conducted in the hot, humid summertime. While church members in the United States often express appreciation by clapping, church members in Mexico wave. While hugging and kissing on the part of both men and women is one way to greet church members in Mexico, the same acts are totally unacceptable in the Philippines.

It's tempting to view Adventists from other cultures through eyeglasses tinted by our own cultural norms and traditions, and then to label these church members as either more permissive or more conservative than ourselves. Worse yet, often the view such glasses give us makes us want to force these members to conform to our ways, and even to make certain customs a test of fellowship or a means of salvation.

However, evaluating and judging others based solely on our cultural standards is unchristian. While we are busy pointing fingers at others because their customs and traditions are not our own, there are people suffering from physical and spiritual hunger. God desires us to alleviate both of these famines; but if we are fighting amongst ourselves about the appropriateness of certain cultural traditions, some of these people will perish. The Bible says, “Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you” (Rom. 12:3, NIV). To avoid sanctimonious attitudes toward others is to be aware of our own tinted religious eyeglasses. By diligently studying the Word of God and through humble prayer, we can receive new glasses that give us clearer vision concerning the true nature of His grace and salvation.

Eph. 2:8, 9

Exploration

Playing by the Rules

CONCLUDE

For generations the Mosaic Law defined the Jews' existence and their status in the world. It dictated their attitudes, their behavior, and even their diet. The more rules they could boast about keeping, the higher their status in the community. Their very identity was bound up in regulations. So when Paul came around preaching that Christ had nullified those laws, many Jews felt threatened.

The Christian Jews in Rome had a hard time giving up the laws that bound them. Without a detailed set of rules by which they could measure themselves, many felt robbed of their identity.

CONSIDER

- Giving up a favorite pair of jeans or a long-held opinion. Which would be harder for you, and why?
- Translating Romans 2:17–21 into another language. What theme is key to these texts?
- Baking something without using a recipe. Why is it good sometimes to follow the rules (2 Cor. 3:2, 3)?
- Making a list of five words that describe who you are. Try this in a group, with everyone making a list for each other, and then reading the lists aloud. Were others able to identify the person based on the list of descriptors?
- Reading Leviticus 19. The old Mosaic laws range from burdensome to bizarre, but there's a lot of practical Christianity too. Which are still relevant?
- Parachuting from a plane with a reputable company that provides such an activity. Because of Christ, we enjoy freedom—with the security of His parachute of salvation.
- Calculating the approximate number of generations that have passed since the time of Paul's writings to the Roman church. How has our attitude toward legalistic salvation changed over the centuries? How has it remained the same?

CONNECT

Galatians 5:6.

Clifford Goldstein, "The Henry VIII Factor," in *Life Without Limits* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald® Publishing Association, 2007).