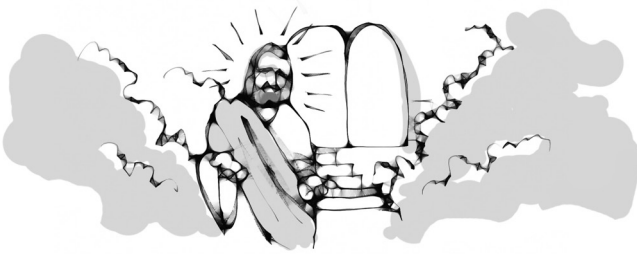


# Christ, *the End of the Law*



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Rom. 5:12–21, 6:15–23, 7:13–25, 9:30–10:4, Gal. 3:19–24.*

**Memory Text:** “For Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes” (*Romans 10:4, NRSV*).

A well-known magazine ran a full-page ad with a headline that read: “Achieve Immortality! (we’re not kidding).” In a sense they were kidding, because the ad went on to say, “To find out how you can leave a charitable legacy that will make gifts in your name forever, contact us for our free booklet.”

Writers, scholars, philosophers, and theologians through the millennia have all wrestled with the question of death and what death does to the meaning of our lives. Hence, the ad was a clever, if ultimately unsuccessful, way to help people deal with their mortality.

In contrast, all throughout the New Testament we have been shown the only way to achieve immortality, and that is through faith in Jesus as opposed to the keeping of the law—even though we are to keep it. Indeed, obeying the law is not in conflict with grace; on the contrary, it’s what we’re supposed to do as a result of receiving grace.

This week we continue exploring law and grace.

\* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 17.

## Where Sin Abounded *(Rom. 5:12–21)*

Though it points out sins, the law is powerless to save us from them. That very powerlessness, however, shows us our need for Jesus, the only solution for sin.

**Read** Romans 5:12–21. In what way is the message of God’s grace revealed in these texts?

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Notice in this passage the constant association between sin and death. Time and again they appear in immediate relationship with each other. And that’s because sin, the violation of God’s law, leads to death.

Now read Romans 5:20. When the law “entered,” sin abounded, in the sense that the law clearly defined what sin was. However, instead of bringing in the natural result of sin, which is death, Paul says this: “But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more” (*NKJV*). In other words, no matter how bad sin is, God’s grace is sufficient to cover it for those who claim His promises by faith.

Influenced by the translation of 1 John 3:4 in the King James Version (“sin is the transgression of the law”), many restrict sin to the violation of the Ten Commandments alone. However, a more literal translation is “sin is lawlessness” (*NKJV*) (*anomia*). Anything that goes against the principles of God is sin. Hence, although the Ten Commandments had not yet been formally revealed when Adam ate the forbidden fruit, he violated a command of God (*Gen. 2:17*) and was consequently guilty of sin. Indeed, it is through the sin of Adam that the curse of death has affected all generations of humanity (*Rom. 5:12, 17, 21*).

In contrast to Adam’s unfaithfulness, Jesus’ loyalty to God’s law resulted in the hope of eternal life. Although tempted, Jesus never yielded to sin (*Heb. 4:15*). Here in Romans, Paul extols Jesus’ righteous obedience, which has resulted in eternal life (*Rom. 5:18–21*) for those who accept it. As the Second Adam, Jesus kept the law fully and broke the curse of death. His righteousness can now become that of the believer’s. A person condemned to death by inheriting the sin of the first Adam can now embrace the gift of life by accepting the righteousness of the Second Adam, Jesus.

## Law and Grace *(Rom. 6:15–23)*

One of the most difficult concepts for Christians to comprehend is the continued role of the law for the one saved by grace. If a believer attains righteousness by accepting the sufficiency of the life and death of Jesus, why is it still necessary to keep the law? This question provides another opportunity to repeat a key point: the law was *never* intended to provide salvation; its function (after the Fall) was to define sin. Yet, the Cross doesn't negate the need for a person to follow God's law any more than someone having been pardoned for violating the speed limit can now continue to violate it.

**According to Romans 6:12, 15–23, what are the implications for living a life of grace? See especially Rom. 6:12, 15, 17.**

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Grace and the law are not contraries; they do not negate each other. Instead, they are powerfully connected. The law, because it can't save us, shows us why we need grace. Grace is not opposed to law but to death. Our problem was not the law itself but the eternal death that resulted from violating it.

Paul warns the Christian to be careful about using the promised gift of grace as an excuse to sin (*Rom. 6:12, 15*). Because sin is defined through the law, when Paul tells Christians not to sin, He is basically telling them: keep the law, obey the commandments!

“Paul had ever exalted the divine law. He had shown that in the law there is no power to save men from the penalty of disobedience. Wrongdoers must repent of their sins and humble themselves before God, whose just wrath they have incurred by breaking His law, and they must also exercise faith in the blood of Christ as their only means of pardon.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 393.

**Why is it so easy to get caught up in the faulty logic that says that because we are not saved by the law, we no longer have to obey it?**

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## O Wretched Man! *(Rom. 7:21–25)*

**Read** Romans 7:13–25. How are we to understand these verses? Is Paul talking about an unconverted man, or is this the experience of the converted? What reasons can you give for your answer?

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If you were unsure as to whom these verses refer, you are not alone. Theologians also have wrestled with this question for centuries. The person described here is someone who delights in the law of God (hardly sounds like a nonbeliever) yet who seems to be enslaved to sin (which makes no sense because Christians are promised power over sin). *The SDA Bible Commentary*, after looking at the arguments from both sides, says: “Paul’s main purpose in the passage seems to be to show the relationship that exists between the law, the gospel, and the person who has been awakened to earnest struggles against sin in preparation for salvation. Paul’s message is that, although the law may serve to precipitate and intensify the struggle, only the gospel of Jesus Christ can bring victory and relief.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 554.

No matter how we look at these verses, we must always remember that the person who struggles with sin is still capable of making right choices. If this were not the case, all the Pauline (as well as other) promises about power over sin would be meaningless. Also, as Matthew 5 demonstrates, sin often starts before an act is committed. Consequently, a person is in violation of the law simply by thinking something sinful. Ordinarily, this reality could be a source of frustration. However, in the context of Romans 7, the individual may be helpless, but he is not hopeless. For the person who lives in the Spirit, the ever-present law serves as a constant reminder that deliverance from condemnation comes through Jesus (*Rom. 7:24–8:2*).

**Read again the verses for today. In what ways do they parallel your own experience with the Lord? Despite your struggles, how can you experience the hope that Paul nevertheless expressed there?**

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## The Goal of the Law *(Rom. 9:30–10:4)*

The title for this week’s lesson comes from Romans 10:4—“Christ is the end of the law” (*NKJV*). Many who have been preconditioned to think negatively about the law automatically interpret the text to mean, “Christ made the law obsolete.” However, this reading goes against the many references in the book of Romans and other parts of the New Testament that discuss the continued relevance of the law.

**Read** Romans 9:30–10:4. How is Paul explaining here how salvation is by faith and not by the law?

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As with the rest of the epistle to the Romans, Paul’s purpose in these verses is to demonstrate the true source of righteousness. The law is an indicator of righteousness, but it is powerless to make people righteous. Hence, Paul portrays a paradox: the nations (Gentiles) who did not even strive for righteousness have obtained it, while Israel, who strove to keep the righteous law, did not obtain it. Paul is not excluding Jews from righteousness; neither is he saying that every non-Jew is righteous. He is simply saying that the law does not bring righteousness to a sinner, whether Jew or Gentile.

Many Jews were sincere in their desire for righteousness, but their quest was futile (*Rom. 10:2*). They were zealous about serving God but wanted to do so on their own terms. They had taken an object of God’s revelation (the law) and confused it with the Source of their salvation. As good as the law is, it’s not good enough to save anyone. In fact, rather than making a person righteous, the law highlights the individual’s sinfulness; it amplifies the need for righteousness. That’s why Paul describes Christ as the “end” of the law. He is not the “end” in the sense of terminating the law, but in the sense of being the “goal” of the law, the One to whom the law points. The law leads a person to Christ as the repentant sinner looks to Him for salvation. The law reminds all Christians that Christ is our righteousness (*Rom. 10:4*).

**People who take the law seriously are always in danger of legalism, of seeking to establish “their own righteousness.” As we seek to obey God’s law, how can we be careful not to fall into what can be a very subtle trap?**

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## The Disciplinarian *(Gal. 3:19–24)*

In harmony with the book of Romans, Paul is careful to stipulate in Galatians that the purpose of the law is to define sin and not to make people righteous (*Gal. 3:19, 21*).

**Read Galatians 3:23, 24.** What images does Paul use to describe the purpose of the law? What do you think the images mean?

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Depending on the translation, the law is identified in verse 24 as a “schoolmaster,” “taskmaster,” “tutor,” and “custodian,” among other designations. The Greek term refers to a slave employed by a wealthy individual to be a disciplinarian for his son. It was the tutor’s responsibility to ensure that the son learned self-discipline. Although a slave, the tutor was given the authority to do that which was necessary to keep the son in line, even if it meant physical punishment. When the son reached adulthood, the tutor no longer had authority over him.

**In light of the explanation of the role of the tutor, what do you think is the purpose of the law for someone who has received salvation in Christ?**

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Although the tutor no longer had authority over the adult son, it was expected that the lessons that the son had learned would enable him to make mature decisions. Similarly, while the Christian is not under the condemning power of the law, as a person who has attained maturity, he or she is expected to govern his or her actions in accordance with the principles of the law.

In addition to its role as tutor, the law also operated as a caretaker that protected the believer until “the faith” came (*Gal. 3:23*). Here again we see that Christ is the “end,” the goal, of the law. Paul makes that point explicitly when he says that the law brought us to Christ, so that “we might be justified by faith” (*vs. 24*).

**Read carefully Galatians 3:21.** What does it say that should forever end any idea that we can be saved by obedience to the law? Why is this such good news? Bring your answer to class on Sabbath.

**Further Study:** “The law reveals sin to us, and causes us to feel our need of Christ and to flee unto Him for pardon and peace by exercising repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. . . .

“The law of ten commandments is not to be looked upon as much from the prohibitory side, as from the mercy side. Its prohibitions are the sure guarantee of happiness in obedience. As received in Christ, it works in us the purity of character that will bring joy to us through eternal ages. To the obedient it is a wall of protection. We behold in it the goodness of God, who by revealing to men the immutable principles of righteousness, seeks to shield them from the evils that result from transgression.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, pp. 234, 235.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1** In class, talk about the wonderful hope found in Galatians 3:21. How is the gospel of grace so clearly presented there? Why should this text be the absolute antidote to legalism?
- 2** Godly living is not optional for those who call themselves children of God. Many well-meaning individuals stress the need for us to attain “perfection” if we desire to enter the kingdom. Unfortunately, those who embrace this doctrine not only promote self-sufficiency as a key to salvation, but they also ignore the reality of sinful human nature. Humans have to live with inherited tendencies toward sin and are constantly bombarded with temptation. Even more troubling is the discouragement that can come to those who are constantly looking to themselves and how well they are doing as a barometer of their salvation. Compared to the holiness of God and His law, who among us can ever measure up? How, then, can we be careful that while seeking to live godly, faithful lives, we do not get caught up in any theology that puts the hope of our salvation in anything other than the righteousness of Christ covering us?
- 3** What is the goal of the law?

## Toogii's Triumph

My friends call me Toogii [TAW-gee]. I live in the capital city of Mongolia.

My family isn't Christian, so I grew up not knowing much about Jesus. One day a friend of my grandmother gave her an invitation to meetings at the Seventh-day Adventist church, where a missionary was speaking. Grandmother gave the invitation to my aunt, who asked me to go with her to the meetings. I wasn't really interested, but I went out of respect for her. And I was curious about Christians.

I was surprised that I enjoyed the meetings. The people were kind, and the pastor spoke about the kingdom of God. I decided to return to the church again. Before too long, I asked to join the church.

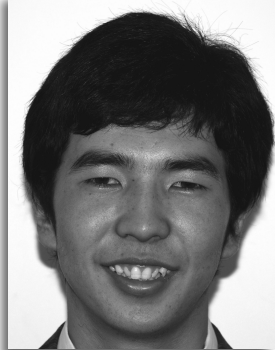
I am the only member of my family who is a believer, and this creates some problems for me. My father tries to keep me from attending church by giving me work to do on Sabbath. But my mother lets me go because what she's heard about Jesus and His teachings is good.

My friends teased me about becoming a Christian, and I felt ostracized by them. Some of them were a bad influence, so when I became a Christian, I quit hanging out with them. Some kids thought I was bad before I became a Christian, and when I became a Christian, they thought I was becoming something even worse. I didn't know how to explain my faith. There aren't that many Adventists in Mongolia, so I felt alone.

The pastor invited me to camp meeting that summer. I was so excited! I made lots of new friends and had lots of fun playing sports and learning about God. It was a great experience. Being with other Christian young people has helped me mature in my faith.

I was shy and didn't talk a lot before, but I'm learning to speak in front of people and express myself. Christ and my new friends in church have given me confidence. Now I can talk to people easily and can express myself better. When my classmates see the changes in me, they realize that God has made a difference in my life and that Christianity isn't a bad thing.

It's difficult to be the only believer in my family, but the friends I've made in church are like my family. They help me stay faithful to God when I feel weak. I'm especially grateful for the youth ministries the church offers. The youth camp was established in part with a recent Thirteenth Sabbath Offering. Thank you for caring.



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