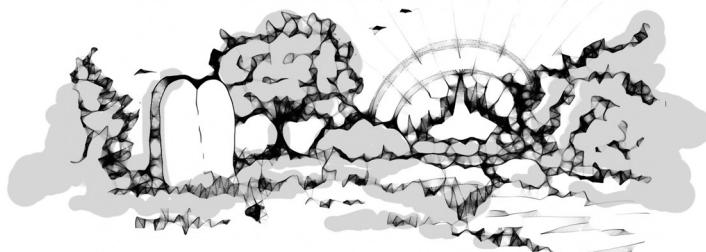


Christ’s Kingdom *and the Law*



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: Matt. 4:8, 9; Dan. 2:44; 1 Pet. 2:11; 1 Cor. 6:9–11; Rev. 22:14, 15; 1 Cor. 15:26.

Memory Text: “‘But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people’” (Jeremiah 31:33, NKJV).

In 2011 Steve Jobs, the founder of Apple, died. He was 56. Years earlier, after a bout with cancer, Jobs called death “the single best invention of life” because it forced us to achieve the best we could here. In other words, because our time is so limited, we must try to be as successful as we can now.

Jobs, though, got it backward. What pushed him to seek a greater stake in this world, death (or at least the inevitability of it), should have been what revealed the futility of putting down roots too permanently here, in what’s always shallow ground. Sure, Jobs accomplished a lot, but in contrast to a million years or to eternity, what does it matter?

Indeed, we have been promised that this world and all that’s in it will be destroyed, and God will establish a new and eternal world where sin and death (all the result of the violation of God’s law) will never exist.

This week we’ll look at the question of God’s eternal kingdom and the role of the law in relation to it.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 28.

The Kingdom of God

When God created the first human beings, He gave them dominion over all things. Adam was to rule the world. However, through violating God's law, he forfeited his right to earthly sovereignty, and ownership went to the archenemy, Satan. When the representatives from the other worlds gathered before God during the time of the patriarchs, it was Satan who appeared as the "delegate" from earth (*Job 1:6*).

Read Ephesians 2:2; 2 Corinthians 4:4; Matthew 4:8, 9. What do these verses tell us about Satan's power in this world?

What happened during the wilderness temptations is very revealing. Satan offered to give Jesus rulership over all the earthly kingdoms if Jesus would fall down and worship him (*Matt. 4:8, 9; see also Luke 4:5–7*). Jesus came to take the world back from Satan, but He could do so only at the cost of His life. How strong, then, the temptation must have been when Satan stood there and offered to give the world to Him! However, in bowing to Satan, He would have fallen into the same trap as had Adam and, consequently, would also have been guilty of violating His Father's law. Had He done so, the plan of salvation would have been aborted, and we'd be dead in our sins.

Of course, we know that Jesus stayed victorious, and, in His victory, we have the assurance and promise of our own, which is life in God's everlasting kingdom, the one depicted in Daniel 2, when the stone cut out without hands destroys all kingdoms of this world. And then, afterward, “ ‘the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever’ ” (*Dan. 2:44, NKJV*).

All the kingdoms depicted in Daniel 2 did everything predicted about them, including the continued disunity in Europe, symbolized by the iron and clay in the toes of the statue. Why should these incredible facts help us trust in the promise of the last kingdom, the one that will “stand forever”?

Citizens of the Kingdom

In many nations, those who move there from other countries have to surrender all allegiances to their land of birth if they want citizenship in their new country. However, some countries allow a person to hold dual citizenship; that is, they can pledge allegiance to both places.

There's no such thing as dual citizenship, however, in the great controversy. We are on one side or the other. The kingdom of evil has been battling the kingdom of righteousness for millennia, and it is impossible for a person to be faithful to both at the same time. We all have to make a choice about whose kingdom will have our allegiance.

Read 1 Peter 2:11, Hebrews 11:13, Ephesians 2:12, Colossians 1:13, Deuteronomy 30:19, and Matthew 6:24. What do these texts tell us about the impossibility of “dual citizenship” in the great controversy between Christ and Satan? What role does keeping the law have in helping to show where our citizenship truly resides? See Rev. 14:12.

Once people make a decision to follow Christ, they have chosen to turn their back on the devil’s kingdom. He or she is now part of another commonwealth, that of the Lord Jesus Christ, and as a result the person now obeys His rules, His law, His commandments, not those of the devil. The person’s obedience, however, isn’t universally appreciated—certainly not by the devil, who is anxious to get these people back, and often not by other people as well, who tend to distrust the “strangers and pilgrims” among them. Despite these obstacles, God has a people whose first allegiance is to Him, not to the “ruler of this world” (John 12:31, NKJV).

So often foreigners in a country stand out because they are different. How should we, as Seventh-day Adventists, as “strangers and pilgrims here,” stand out, as well? Or do we?

Faith and the Law

The dominant theme in Scripture is simple: God is love. God's love is most potently demonstrated in His grace. With His unlimited power, He could easily have wiped humanity from the face of the earth, but instead He chose to exercise patience and give all a chance to experience the fullness of life in His eternal kingdom. Even more so, His love is revealed in the price that He Himself paid at the Cross.

God's love is also directly related to His justice. Having provided countless opportunities for people to choose their own destiny, the God of love will not force them into a kingdom that they have rejected. When the wicked stand before God's throne in the judgment, they are condemned by their own testimony. No one who stands before the throne can truthfully say that he was unaware of God's requirements. Whether through written or natural revelation, all have been exposed to the basic principles of the law of God (*Rom. 1:19, 20; 2:12–16*).

Read 1 Corinthians 6:9–11 and Revelation 22:14, 15. Who gets into God's kingdom, who stays out, and why? What role does God's law play here? Also, notice the stark contrast between the two groups!

What's fascinating is that if you put 1 Corinthians 6:11 together with Revelation 22:14, you get faithful Christians who are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ; that is, they are “justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law” (*Rom. 3:28, NKJV*); yet, they also keep that law.

“It is no arbitrary decree on the part of God that excludes the wicked from heaven: they are shut out by their own unfitness for its companionship. The glory of God would be to them a consuming fire. They would welcome destruction, that they might be hidden from the face of Him who died to redeem them.”—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 18. How do these words help us to understand better the painful topic about the fate of the lost?

The Everlasting Kingdom

God created a perfect world. Sin entered, and that perfect world became severely marred. The story of redemption tells us that Jesus entered human history so that, among other things, the original perfection will be restored. The redeemed will live in a perfect world where love reigns supreme.

As we have seen, love can exist only in a moral universe, only in a universe with moral beings, and to be moral they must also be free. This prompts the question: could evil arise again?

How do Daniel 7:27, John 3:16, and Revelation 21:4 help to answer the question about whether evil will arise again? What is the significance of the term *everlasting*?

When God created the universe, there were conditions attached to its stability. This is most evident in Genesis 2:17, where Adam was warned that violation of God's expressed command would result in death. The very mention of death indicates that the concept of eternity from a human perspective was conditional. Adam would have experienced eternal life only if he maintained loyalty to God.

However, in the re-created earth, death will no longer be a reality, which means that we will live forever, a fulfillment of the many promises of Scripture. Whether rebellion could occur is really a moot point. The fact is, it won't.

Read Jeremiah 31:31–34. What principle do we see here that helps us to understand why evil won't rise again?

The Messianic kingdom will comprise people who maintained loyalty to God throughout their religious experience. In the face of persecution and personal struggles, they chose the path of obedience and demonstrated their willingness to live lives of divine service. God promises to inscribe His law in their hearts so that they will naturally do the things that are pleasing to Him. In the kingdom of Christ, sin is entirely vanquished, and righteousness reigns supreme.

The Law in the Kingdom

Of all the harsh consequences of sin, death has been the most persistent. Sin can be overcome, Satan can be resisted, but with just two known exceptions (Enoch, Elijah) out of billions, who has escaped the inevitability of death? “When it comes to death,” wrote an ancient philosopher, “we human beings all live in an unwalled city.”

What message is found in Revelation 20:14 and 1 Corinthians 15:26?

With the power ascribed to death, it is no wonder that just before Christ establishes the Messianic kingdom on earth, He will first utterly destroy death.

There is no question that death is related to sin, which means it's related to God's law, as well; because sin is violation of God's law. Consequently, there can be no sin without the law. Although sin is dependent on the law, the law is independent of sin. That is, the law can exist without sin. In fact, it did for all the ages until Lucifer rebelled in heaven.

“When Satan rebelled against the law of Jehovah, the thought that there was a law came to the angels almost as an awakening to something unthought of. In their ministry the angels are not as servants, but as sons. There is perfect unity between them and their Creator”—Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 109.

With this in mind, the absence of death and sin in the kingdom of God does not require the absence of the law. Just as the law of gravity is necessary for the harmonious interaction between the physical elements of the universe, God's moral law is needed to govern the righteous interaction between the saints. When God inscribes His law in the hearts of the redeemed, His sole purpose is to seal their decision to walk in the way of righteousness for eternity. Consequently, His law becomes the very essence of His kingdom. So we have every reason to believe that the principles of God's moral law will exist in God's eternal kingdom. The difference, of course, is that those principles will never be violated there as they have been here.

Try to imagine the perfect environment of heaven: no fallen natures, no devil to tempt us, no sin, and no death. Now ask yourself: what things in your life and character would not fit very comfortably in such an environment?

Further Study: Ellen G. White, "Without a Wedding Garment," pp. 307–319, in *Christ's Object Lessons*.

"Satan had claimed that it was impossible for man to obey God's commandments; and in our own strength it is true that we cannot obey them. But Christ came in the form of humanity, and by His perfect obedience He proved that humanity and divinity combined can obey every one of God's precepts. . . .

"The life of Christ on earth was a perfect expression of God's law, and when those who claim to be children of God become Christlike in character, they will be obedient to God's commandments. Then the Lord can trust them to be of the number who shall compose the family of heaven. Clothed in the glorious apparel of Christ's righteousness, they have a place at the King's feast. They have a right to join the blood-washed throng."—Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, pp. 314, 315.

Discussion Questions:

- ① Read the Ellen G. White statement in Friday's further study. In what ways are both law and grace revealed in it? Why is it crucial that we always understand them both together? What happens when these concepts are taught apart from each other?
- ② The introduction to this week's lesson talked about the late Steve Jobs and his claim that the specter of death, our own death, should drive us to accomplish all that we can here. Though there's some truth to that idea, in and of itself it's not enough. It never solves the problem of death itself and what death does to the meaning of the lives that precede it. In fact, after Jobs' death, the cover of the *New Yorker* magazine depicted Peter, iPad in hand, checking Steve Jobs in at the pearly gates. Though that might be cute, what lesson can we learn from the fact that there probably won't be any iPads, or anything that Steve Jobs created here, in heaven?
- ③ What things are on the earth now that will last forever? What won't last past the final destruction of this world? Why is it crucial that we know the difference between them?

A Place to Share

When Stephanie found life difficult in her public school in Denmark, her parents enrolled her in the local Seventh-day Adventist school. The family wasn't Adventist, but Stephanie quickly made friends and settled into her new school.

The school's religious teachings in Bible class seemed strange, but Stephanie's new friends talked to her about their faith, and she began to understand that the Adventist Church simply follows the Bible. Her friends invited her to Sabbath School and offered to take her to spend the entire day with them.

Stephanie found worship on Sabbath refreshing and vibrant. When she was 12, she gave her life to Christ. But her parents objected when she asked to be baptized. They wanted her to join their traditional church. Reluctantly, Stephanie attended her parents' church catechism classes, but her heart wasn't in it.

Stephanie was pleased when her parents allowed her to attend the Adventist boarding high school. The school provided a stable faith environment, and her friends and teachers became her family. Finally, when she was 17, Stephanie convinced her mother to give her permission to be baptized. "My friends and my teachers nurtured my faith and helped me grow strong."

Stephanie is now studying in a nearby university. She joined an Adventist café church, a church plant focused on reaching young people. The café church meets in the afternoon in the basement they share with a traditional Adventist congregation. About thirty young people attend worship each week. The youth-oriented congregation has formed small groups that meet for Bible study and prayer. They also hold social meetings with refreshments to attract community members. Anyone is invited.

During the town's yearly festival, the café church provides activities to draw young people to their booth. "We serve homemade waffles, offer a bouncing castle for some fun, and have short singing times during which we invite visitors to come to the café church on Sabbath afternoon. And we get many interests," Stephanie adds.

While interest in religion in postmodern and secular Denmark is fading, outreach programs such as café churches and international church congregations are drawing those wanting to know who God is.

Our mission offerings help to fund Adventist schools such as the ones Stephanie attended, where she met her Savior. Recent Thirteenth Sabbath Offerings have helped support outreach in Denmark by providing less traditional worship services such as the café church for young adults and international churches that attract guest workers and international students who come to the country seeking a vibrant worship experience. Thank you for helping revive the Adventist Church in Denmark.

STEPHANIE BEHRENDT shares her faith in Denmark.

During the third quarter guide of 2014, *The Teachings of Jesus* by Carlos Steger, we will study some of Jesus' main teachings as found in the Gospels. Our Savior taught many things pertaining to our spiritual and practical lives. He presented His teachings to different audiences, carefully adapting His method to each person. Sometimes He preached a sermon; other times He dialogued with individuals or groups. Sometimes He spoke openly; other times He concealed the meaning of His words. In each case, He taught truth about God and salvation.

When we open the Scriptures next quarter and read Jesus' words, let us picture ourselves among His attentive listeners at the mountainside, by the sea, or in the synagogue. Let us pray for spiritual discernment to understand His message and to grasp His unfathomable love manifested on the cross. And as we hear His voice calling us to follow Him, let us renew our commitment to walk daily with Him by faith and in obedience. The more time we spend at His feet, the more we will say, as did the two disciples of Emmaus: “‘Did not our heart burn within us . . . while He opened the Scriptures to us?’” (*Luke 24:32, NKJV*).

Lesson 1—Our Loving Heavenly Father

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: Our Father in Heaven (*Isa. 63:16, 64:8*)

MONDAY: Revealed by the Son (*John 14:8–10*)

TUESDAY: The Love of Our Heavenly Father (*Jer. 31:3*)

WEDNESDAY: The Compassionate Care of Our Heavenly Father (*Matt. 6:25–34*)

THURSDAY: The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (*John 17:4*)

Memory Text—1 John 3:1

Sabbath Gem: A father provides love, protection, security, sustenance, and identity for a family. We can enjoy these and many other benefits when we accept God as our Heavenly Father.

Lesson 2—The Son

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: The Son of Man (*Matt. 24:30*)

MONDAY: The Son of God (*Matt. 3:17*)

TUESDAY: Christ's Divine Nature: Part 1 (*Luke 5:17–26, John 5:18*)

WEDNESDAY: Christ's Divine Nature: Part 2 (*John 5:21, John 11:25*)

THURSDAY: Christ's Mission (*Luke 19:10*)

Memory Text—Mark 10:45

Sabbath Gem: Everyone has to decide, individually, who Jesus is. The destiny of every human being hangs on his or her response to this question.

Lessons for the Visually Impaired The regular *Adult Sabbath School*

Bible Study Guide is available free each month in braille and on audio CD to sight-impaired and physically handicapped persons who cannot read normal ink print. This includes individuals who, because of arthritis, multiple sclerosis, paralysis, accident, and so forth, cannot hold or focus on normal ink-print publications. Contact Christian Record Services for the Blind, Box 6097, Lincoln, NE 68506-0097. Phone: 402-488-0981; e-mail: info@christianrecord.org; Web site: www.christianrecord.org.