

Law and Mercy



SABBATH—NOVEMBER 6

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Ezekiel 28:15, 16; Deuteronomy 17:19; Deuteronomy 10:1–15; Matthew 18:21–35.

MEMORY VERSE: “So I do not make the love of God useless. But if a person can be made good by the law, then Christ [Jesus] died for nothing” (Galatians 2:21, WE).



“All men are guilty of sin”
(Galatians 3:22, NLV).
Only the mercy of God
can save us.

MOST CHRISTIANS BELIEVE in the law of God and His mercy. Most Christians understand the connection between law and mercy, too. The law of God shows us that God is holy. Sin breaks the law of God: “Everyone who sins breaks the law. In fact, breaking the law is sin” (1 John 3:4, NIV). The Bible says we all have broken the law: “all men are guilty of sin” (Galatians 3:22, NLV). Only the mercy of God can save us: “You have been saved by God’s love and kindness [mercy] because you believed. It was not because of anything you did, but it was a gift from God” (Ephesians 2:8, WE).

(There is one small problem with the law for many Christians: the Sabbath is part of the law. Many Christians do not accept the Sabbath. They come up with many reasons and excuses for why they do not need to keep the Sabbath any longer. But these reasons and excuses are a topic for another time.)

The idea about law and mercy is found all through the Bible. We see this idea in the book of Deuteronomy. Yes, Deuteronomy also shows us the connection between law and mercy. But Deuteronomy shows us this connection in a very special way.

LAW IN HEAVEN (Ezekiel 28:15, 16)

God is a God of love. Love is the most important part of His government. God wants us to love Him back. So, He made us free to love, and free to choose right from wrong.

An important part of our freedom to choose is the law of God. Atoms are some of the smallest things God made. But atoms do not need to choose between right and wrong. They do not need a law that shows them what is right. Sea waves and kangaroos also cannot choose between good and evil. So, they do not need a law to show them right from wrong.

Read Ezekiel 28:15, 16. These verses talk about Lucifer. The Lord announces that this mighty angel was “ ‘filled with bad ways, and you sinned’ ” in heaven (Ezekiel 28:16, NLV). How do these words about Lucifer show us that the law of God was a real part of heaven and that everyone in heaven needed to keep the law?

Do you see the words “filled with bad ways” and “sinned”? The Bible often uses these words to talk about what happened when humans broke the law. As you see in Ezekiel 28, the Bible also uses these same words to talk about what happened in heaven. This information shows us something important about the law of God. The law is important for both angels in heaven and humans on earth.

Paul writes, “Then what are we saying? Is the Law sinful [the same as sin]? No, not at all! But it was the Law that showed me what sin is. I did not know it was sin to follow wrong desires [feelings and wishes], but the Law said, ‘You must not follow wrong desires’ ” (Romans 7:7, NLV). How can this important rule help us to understand better why the law is important for angels to follow, too?

Ellen G. White explains: “The law of God shows us what God thinks is important. The important rules of His law also govern heaven. Angels wish to learn and do what God wants. This knowledge and work are the most important things angels can learn and do.”—*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, page 109, adapted.

Why must we not separate the idea of the law of God from the idea that God made us free to choose right from wrong? Without this law, what shows us right from wrong?



Sea waves and kangaroos cannot choose between good and evil.

LAW IN DEUTERONOMY (Deuteronomy 17:19)

The Hebrew people are on the borders of Canaan. God is about to give His chosen people the land He promised them. As we have seen, Moses gives the Hebrews some final lessons and advice before they take the land. Part of these teachings includes commands that the people must obey.

Read Deuteronomy 4:44; Deuteronomy 17:19; Deuteronomy 28:58; Deuteronomy 30:10; Deuteronomy 31:12; Deuteronomy 32:46; and Deuteronomy 33:2. What is the Lord saying to His people in these verses? Why is this message so important?



Our obedience comes from our friendship and connection with God.

These verses show us that obedience is very important for Israel. Obedience is part of their agreement with God. God did so much for them. God will continue to help them in the future. God will do the things for them that they cannot do on their own. God will give them things they have done nothing to earn. (This idea shows us the meaning of mercy: God gives us forgiveness we did not earn.) What does God want from His chosen people in answer to this precious gift? God wants His people to obey Him.

Things are the same today. God saves us by His mercy when we believe in Him. We are not saved by our own good behavior. “We firmly believe that a person is made right with God because of their faith. They are not saved by obeying the law” (Romans 3:28, NIV). So, we do not obey the law to be saved, “because no one can be made right with God by following the law. The law only shows us our sin” (Romans 3:20, ERV). We obey the law because God has saved us by His love and mercy. So, Jesus asks us to love Him back and obey His commands: “‘If you love me, you will obey me’ ” (John 14:15, WE).

From the first page to the last, Deuteronomy teaches us all about the mercy and law of God. God saves us by His mercy. He does for us the things we cannot do for ourselves. (In the same way, Israel did not escape from Egypt without the help of God.) In answer to this gift, we obey God and His law. We live this obedient life by faith. God forgives us because of His mercy. His mercy helps us obey His law, too. Our obedience comes from our friendship and connection with Him.

When we obey God, we must not try to earn His favor by our good behavior. How can we avoid making this mistake?

FOR YOUR GOOD (Deuteronomy 10:1–15)

Some people look for any excuse not to accept Bible truth. So, they say that the God in the Old Testament is mean and nasty, while Jesus is kind and nice. This idea is not new. The idea is just as wrong today as it was when someone first invented it hundreds of years ago.

Again and again, the Old Testament shows us how much the Lord loves His people. He wants only the best for them. His love is shown in a powerful way in Deuteronomy.

Read Deuteronomy 10:1–15. What does Moses tell the people just before he gives them the message of love from God in verses 12–14? What do all these verses show us about how God feels about His people after their sin? What do these verses also teach us about mercy?

These verses show the people how much God loves them. Pay special attention to verses 12 and 13. Do you see what God says to His people? He really says, “I want you to obey Me. Love Me. Serve Me. Keep My commandments for your own good.” Do you also see the words written as “you” and “your” in these verses? In the Hebrew language, these words show us only one person. Of course, God talks to all the Israelites as a whole group in these verses. At the same time, God talks to each person in the group. What good will this message do for the people if each person, one by one, does not obey God? So, that is why the Hebrew language shows that the Lord talks to each person, too.

We cannot end our study today without first talking about verse 13: “ ‘So obey the laws and commands of the LORD that I am giving you today. These laws and commands are for your own good’ ” (Deuteronomy 10:13, ERV). God commands His people to obey, because God wants the best for them. God made His people. God takes care of them. God also knows what they need. So, God wants the best for them. That is why they should obey Him.

Some people compare the law of God to a wall. When we stay inside this wall, God will protect us from many evil things that can destroy us. In short, God gave His people His law because He loved them. Their obedience is “ ‘for [their] own good’ ” (Deuteronomy 10:13, ERV).

What is your experience with obeying the law of God? How has obedience been “for your own good”?



God will protect us from many evil things that can destroy us.

A SLAVE IN EGYPT (Deuteronomy 5:6–22)

God showed His mercy when He made the Sabbath rest for everyone.

In Deuteronomy, we see the same topic again and again: the Lord saves His people from slavery in Egypt. Moses tells the people to remember how the Lord made them free: “ ‘ “And the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a strong hand and a long arm, causing much fear by doing powerful works” ’ ” (Deuteronomy 26:8, NLV; read also Deuteronomy 16:1–6). Other Old Testament writers talk about this story, too: “ ‘I brought you out of the land of Egypt. I took you out of the land where you were servants. And I sent Moses, Aaron and Miriam to lead you’ ” (Micah 6:4, NLV).

In the New Testament, Paul uses this story as a word picture to show how God saves His people by faith in Jesus: “Because the Jews had faith, they went through the Red Sea as if they were on dry ground. But when the people of Egypt tried to go through, they were all killed by the water” (Hebrews 11:29, NLV; read also 1 Corinthians 10:1–4).

Read Deuteronomy 5:6–22. In these verses, Moses says the Ten Commandments again. Do you see the reason Moses gives the people for why they must obey the 4th commandment? What is that reason? How does this reason show us the connection between law and mercy?

When Moses tells the people the Sabbath commandment in Deuteronomy, he adds something new. Yes, the people should keep the Sabbath holy because it shows that God made the earth and sky. But they also must keep the Sabbath because God saved them from Egypt. The mercy of God made them free and offered them rest (Hebrews 4:1–5). Now, God wants His people to show this same mercy to other people.

For sure, Deuteronomy 5:6–22 shows us that the Sabbath is a powerful word picture for the mercy of God. God showed His mercy when He made the Sabbath rest for everyone. That includes children, servants, animals, and foreigners. So, the Sabbath shows that God gives His mercy to His own people and to people who do not belong to Israel. This truth is so important. Maybe that is why the Sabbath truth is in the center of the law of God. The Sabbath helps us to remember to show other people the mercy God showed us.

Read Matthew 18:21–35. What important rule do you see in this picture story? How does the Sabbath commandment in Deuteronomy show us this important rule?

NOT BECAUSE OF YOUR OWN GOOD BEHAVIOR (Mark 7:1–13)

The most important teaching in Christianity is the teaching that God saves us by our faith in His mercy: “What do we find in Scripture [Bible]? It says, ‘Abraham believed God. God accepted Abraham’s faith, and so his faith made him right [holy] with God’ ” (Romans 4:3, NIV).

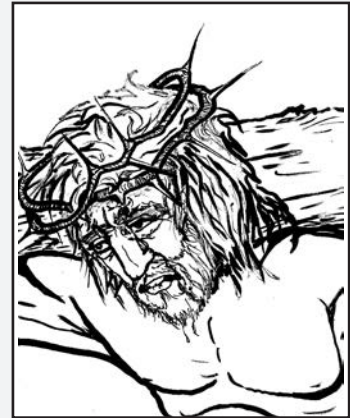
Ellen G. White explains this teaching this way: “What does it mean that God saves us by our faith in His mercy? This teaching means that God does for man what man cannot do for himself. That is why all the glory in saving humans goes to God. Men cannot accept any praise for this work. When men see that they are nothing, they are ready to accept the holy life of Jesus.”—*The Faith I Live By*, page 111, adapted.

When you remember that God is holy and we are sinners, you can see why only a wonderful act of mercy can save us. And it did. Mercy happened at the cross when Jesus, the innocent One, died for the sins of the guilty.

Read Deuteronomy 9:1–6. In these verses, what does Moses say to the people? How does his message show the mercy of God for people who did nothing to earn His mercy? How does this story show us the important teaching that God saves us by His mercy?

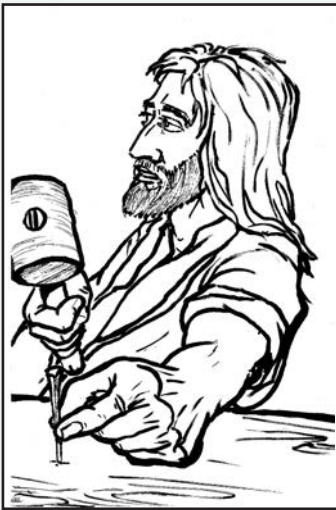
Deuteronomy 9:5 shows us the good news. Paul taught this same Bible truth: God does not save you “ ‘because you are good and live right’ ” (Deuteronomy 9:5, ERV). The Lord saves you because of the promises He made to you in “the Good News that lasts [continues] forever” (Revelation 14:6, NLV). Paul also tells us: “God saved us and chose us to be his holy people, but not because of anything we ourselves did. God saved us and made us his people because that was what he wanted and because of his grace [mercy]. That grace was given to us through [because of] Jesus Christ before time began” (2 Timothy 1:9, ERV; read also Titus 1:2). Do you see that God gave us this promise before time began? We were not alive at that time. So, our good behavior cannot be the reason God saves us.

In short, the Lord is going to do a wonderful work for you and in your heart. So, you must obey His laws. Your good behavior does not save you. Your good behavior comes because you are saved. The Lord saves you by His mercy. He writes His law in your heart and gives you His Holy Spirit to help you obey.



Mercy happened at the cross when Jesus, the innocent One, died for the sins of the guilty.

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: “Satan is the enemy of Jesus. Satan fought in heaven against the law of God. Now he works the same as a general. He uses all his skills and tricks to make the law of God mean nothing and have no control over our lives. The law of God is the only thing that shows us sin and what it means to be holy.”—Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, November 18, 1890, adapted.



Jesus lived a human life and did not sin.

Think about what this verse means: “The Word (Christ) was in the beginning. The Word was with God. The Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. He made all things. Nothing was made without Him making it” (John 1:1–3, NLV). Yes, God made everything. He made all the millions and millions of stars and everything else. Then what did He do later on? He became a very small human baby. He lived a human life and did not sin. Then He died on the cross. On the cross, Jesus accepted the punishment for our sins and our evil. He did that so we can have the promise of everlasting life.

Here is a wonderful Bible truth: God gives us mercy because Jesus died for us on the cross. What does God expect us to give Him for this precious gift? Solomon answers the question this way: “Everything has now been heard. And here’s the final thing I want to say. Have respect for God and obey his commandments. This is what he expects of all human beings” (Ecclesiastes 12:13, NIV).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① How is our obedience different from a legal religion? That is, why is obeying the law not the same as trying to save ourselves by our own good behavior?
- ② What personal stories have you heard about people who broke the Ten Commandments and suffered because of their law-breaking? How do these stories show us the love of God for us in a very real way?
- ③ How does the Cross show that we are silly and foolish if we think we can try to enter heaven because of our good behavior?

ANGELS PROTECTED MY BOY

August 4, 2020 was different from all other days in Beirut, Lebanon.

I just finished cleaning our home. We lived near the Middle East University of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. I work at the school as a business teacher. That day, my family and I invited friends to come visit our home. We had not seen them in a long time because of COVID-19.

My oldest son James was seven. He was so excited about our guests coming to visit. He made a welcome picture and hung it on the door for our guests to see. "Welcome," the picture said. James also drew three faces and three hearts to show himself, his brother Peter, who was four, and his sister Katelyn, who was two.

I collected the trash from each room in our house. When I got to the front door to throw out the trash, the house shook. I looked out the window to see what was happening. I saw James standing next to the sliding glass door that led to our back porch. "Move away from the glass!" I shouted.

A second blast caused the glass door to break and fall on James. My other two children started to cry. My husband reached under the broken glass. He lifted up James and ran with him outside. From what I saw of the blast, I knew James must be dead. I ran outside and took James from my husband. I held him tight in my arms and cried. I believed my son died. I was in shock. I did not hear anything for a while. Then I heard my husband say again and again, "James is fine."

On August 4 at 6:08 P.M., God sent angels to protect my son. James was barefoot. He wore only shorts and a T-shirt. But he did not have any cuts on him from the glass. Not a single scratch! Angels covered him. "The LORD will command his angels to take good care of you" (Psalm 91:11, NIV).

That night, James prayed before he went to bed. He said, "Dear Jesus, please bless this day and every day. Please do not let this awful thing with the glass ever happen again. Help to keep us safe. Stay with us. Amen."

The prayer of my son makes me wish for Jesus to come back.

The next day, I remove the welcome picture from the door. I will keep the picture always. The picture will help me remember the things that are most important in life. Sometimes we forget how fast our plans can change and our loved ones can be killed. So, we always need to be ready for Jesus to come back.

This story shows Spiritual Growth Teaching number 5 of the "I Will Go" plan for the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Teaching number 5 says: "We will make new followers for Jesus. We will teach persons and families how to live Spirit-filled lives." Learn more at IWillGo2020.org.

INSIDE
Story

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James made a welcome picture and hung it on the door.

