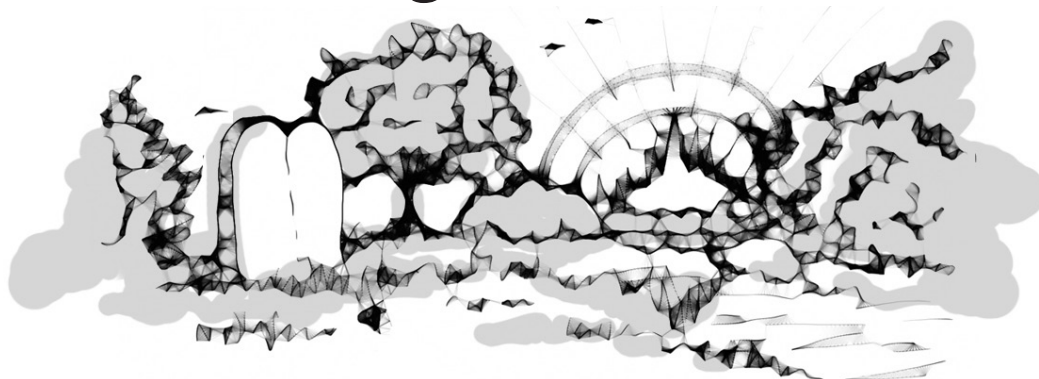


Christ's Kingdom and the Law



SABBATH—JUNE 21

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Matthew 4:8, 9; Daniel 2:44; 1 Peter 2:11; 1 Corinthians 6:9–11; Revelation 22:14, 15; 1 Corinthians 15:26.

MEMORY VERSE: “ ‘This is the covenant [agreement] I will make with Israel after that time,’ announces the LORD. ‘I will put my law in their minds. I will write it on their hearts. I will be their God. And they will be my people’ ” (Jeremiah 31:33, NIV).

IN 2011, STEVE JOBS, THE COFOUNDER OF APPLE, DIED. He was 56 years old. Years earlier, after fighting cancer, Jobs called death “the single best invention of life.” This is because it forces us to do the best we can here. In other words, because our time is so limited, we must try to be as successful as we can now.

But Jobs got it backward. What pushed Jobs to look for a greater prize in this world? Death. But death should have shown him the uselessness of putting down roots too deeply in the world. In fact, the world is always shallow ground. Sure, Jobs did a lot. But when you compare it to a million years or to eternity, what does it matter?

We have been promised that this world and all that is in it will be destroyed. God will build a new and eternal world where there will be no more sin and death.

This week we will look at the question of God's eternal kingdom and the important part of the law in it.

THE KINGDOM OF GOD (Ephesians 2:2)

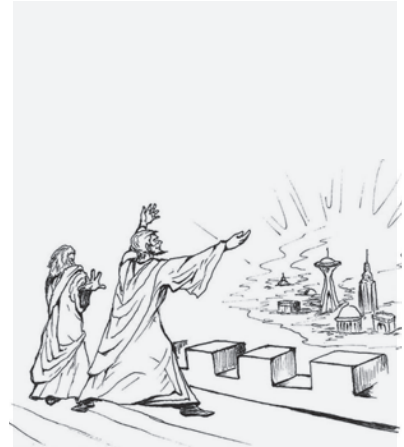
When God created the first humans, He gave them control over all things. Adam was to rule the world. But, because he broke God's law, Adam lost his right to rule the earth. And ownership went to man's enemy, Satan. When the representatives from the other worlds met before God during the time of the early Bible leaders, it was Satan who appeared as the representative from earth (Job 1:6).

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

What happened during the wilderness temptations tells us a lot. Satan offered to give Jesus rulership over all the earthly kingdoms if Jesus would fall down and worship him (Matthew 4:8, 9; read 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 own life. Imagine how strong the temptation must have been when Satan stood there and offered to give the world to Jesus! If Jesus had bowed to Satan, He would have fallen into the same trap as Adam had. And, as a result, Jesus would also have been guilty of breaking His Father's law. Had Jesus done so, the plan of salvation would have been spoiled. And we would be dead in our sins.

Of course, we know that Jesus stayed victorious. In His victory, we have the promise of our own victory, which is life in God's everlasting kingdom. This kingdom is described in Daniel 2, when the stone cut out without hands destroys all kingdoms of this world. And then, "the God of heaven will set up a kingdom. It will never be destroyed. And no other nation will ever take it over. It will crush all of those other kingdoms. It will bring them to an end. But it will last [continue] forever" (Daniel 2:44, NIV).

All the kingdoms described in Daniel 2 did everything that God said they would. This even includes the disunity in Europe, shown by the iron and clay in the toes of the statue. Why should these wonderful facts help us to trust in the promise of God's last kingdom that will "stand forever"?



How strong the temptation must have been when Satan offered to give Jesus the world!



God's kingdom, pictured in Daniel 2, is the stone cut out without hands that destroys all kingdoms of this world.

CITIZENS OF THE KINGDOM (1 Peter 2:11)



There is no dual citizenship in the war between Christ and Satan.



Once we choose Christ, we turn our backs on the devil's kingdom.

In many nations, people who move to a country from other countries have to surrender loyalty to their land of birth if they want citizenship in their new country. But some countries let a person hold dual (two) citizenship. That means they can promise loyalty to both places.

But there is no such thing as dual citizenship in the great war between Christ and Satan. We are on one side or the other. The kingdom of evil has been battling the kingdom of righteousness (holiness) for thousands of years. 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 loyalty.

Read 1 Peter 2:11; Hebrews 11:13; Ephesians 2:12; Colossians 1:13; Deuteronomy 30:19; and Matthew 6:24. How do these verses help us to understand that dual citizenship is not possible in the great controversy (war) between Christ and Satan? How does keeping the law help to make clear which kingdom we belong to as citizens? Read Revelation 14:12.

Once people make a decision to follow Christ, they have chosen to turn their backs on the devil's kingdom. They are now part of another kingdom, which belongs to the Lord Jesus Christ. As a result, the people now obey His rules, His law, His commandments, not those of the devil. The devil does not like it when people are obedient to God. The devil is anxious to get these people back under his control. No matter what the problems are, God has a people whose first loyalty is to Him, not to Satan, 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, stand out as different from other people? Or do we?

FAITH AND THE LAW (1 Corinthians 6:9–11)

The important theme in the Bible is simple: God is love. God's love is best shown in His grace.¹ With His unlimited power, God could easily have wiped humans from the face of the earth. But He chose to use patience and give all people a chance to experience the fullness of life in His eternal kingdom. Even more so, His love is shown in the price that He Himself paid at the cross.

God's love is also connected with His justice. Having given many opportunities for people to choose their own futures, the God of love will not force them into a kingdom that they have refused to accept. When the wicked stand before God's throne in the judgment, they are judged guilty by their own choices. No one who stands before the throne can truthfully say that he or she did not know of God's requirements. Whether through the Bible or nature, all have known the basic principles of the law of God (Romans 1:19, 20; Romans 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 sharp difference between the two groups!

What is interesting is that if you put 1 Corinthians 6:11 together with Revelation 22:14, you get faithful Christians who are justified (forgiven) in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. This means that they are "made right with God because of their faith. They are not saved by obeying the law" (Romans 3:28, NIV). But they still keep that law.

"It is not an order on the part of God that separates the wicked from heaven unfairly. The wicked are shut out by their own unfitness. The glory of God would be to them a fire that destroys them. They would welcome being destroyed so that they might be hidden from the face of Him who died to save them."—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, page 18. How do these words help us to understand better the painful future end of the lost?

DEFINITIONS

1. grace—God's gift of mercy and forgiveness that He freely gives us to take away our sins.

THE EVERLASTING KINGDOM (Daniel 7:27)

God created a perfect world. Sin entered, and that perfect world became seriously damaged. The story of Jesus' sacrifice for our sins tells us that Jesus entered human history so that everything would be perfect again. The saved will live in a perfect world where love rules all.

Love can work only in a moral (righteous) universe. But being in a universe with righteous people means that they must also be free. This brings up a 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 meaning of the word *everlasting*?

When God created the universe, there were rules making everything work together. In Genesis 2:17, Adam was warned that breaking God's law would result in death. The talk about death shows that eternity was based on conditions. Adam would have experienced eternal life only if he remained loyal to God.

But in the re-created earth, there will be no death. This means that we will live forever. The Bible has many promises about this. Whether rebellion (war) could happen again is really a dead issue. The fact is, it will not!

Read Jeremiah 31:31–34. What principle (important rule) do we find here that helps us to understand why evil will not rise again?

The Messiah's kingdom will be filled with people who remained loyal to God throughout their religious experience. In the face of attacks, personal struggles, and suffering, these people chose the path of obedience and showed their willingness to live lives of faithful service. God promises to write 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 all defeated. And righteousness rules all.

THE LAW IN THE KINGDOM (Revelation 20:14)

Of all the terrible results of sin, death has been the worst. People can overcome sin. They can refuse to accept Satan. But with just two known exceptions (Enoch and Elijah) out of billions, who has escaped death? “When it comes to death,” wrote a famous thinker of old, “we humans all live in an unwallled city.”

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

With death’s known power, it is no surprise that just before Christ builds His kingdom on earth, He will first destroy death.

There is no question that death is connected with sin. This means that it is related to God’s law. This is because sin means the breaking of God’s law. As a result, there can be no sin without the law. Sin is dependent on the law, but the law is independent of sin. The law can continue without sin. It did so for all the ages until Lucifer rebelled in heaven.

“When Satan rebelled against the law of God, the thought that there was a law was something new to the angels. In their work the angels are not as servants, but as sons. There is perfect unity between them and their Creator.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, page 109.

With this in mind, the absence of death and sin in the kingdom of God does not require the absence of the law. The law of gravity is necessary for keeping things on the earth and its connection with the universe. In the same way, God’s moral law (the Ten Commandments) is needed to maintain the relationships among the saints. When God writes His law in the hearts of the saved, His only purpose is to seal their decision to walk in the way of righteousness for eternity. As a result, His law is an essential (necessary) part of His kingdom. So, we have good reasons to believe that the principles of God’s moral law will continue to rule in God’s eternal kingdom. The only difference is that those principles will never be broken there as they have been here.

Try to imagine the perfect surrounding 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 (who you are) would not fit comfortably in such a surrounding?

ADDITIONAL STUDY: Ellen G. White, “Without a Wedding Garment,” pages 307–319, in *Christ’s Object Lessons*.

“Satan had claimed that it was not possible for man to obey God’s commandments. In our own strength, it is true that we cannot obey them. But Christ came in human form, and by His perfect obedience He proved as God and Man combined that every one of God’s laws can be obeyed. . . .

“The life of Christ on earth was a perfect example of God’s law. 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 among the people who shall be members of the family of heaven. Clothed in the glorious robes of Christ’s righteousness, they have a place at the King’s feast. They have a right to join the blood-washed crowd.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, pages 314, 315.

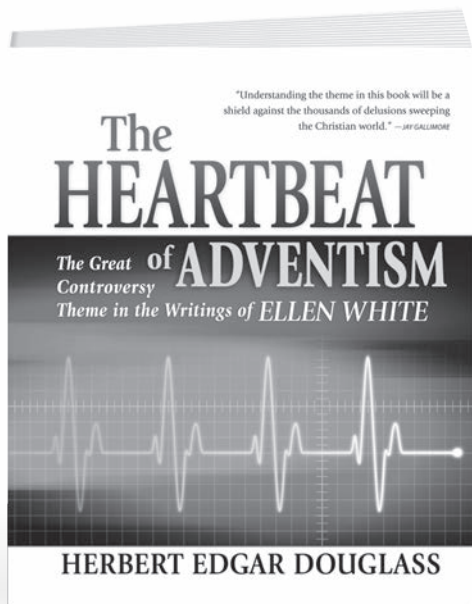
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① Read the Ellen G. White statement above in Friday’s additional study. In what ways are both law and grace shown in it? Why is it important that we always understand them both together? What happens when these ideas are taught apart from each other?
- ② The introduction to this week’s lesson talked about the late Steve Jobs and his claim that death should drive us to do all that we can here. There is some truth to that idea, in and of itself, but it is not enough. It never solves the problem of death itself and what death does to the meaning of the lives that come before it. In fact, after Jobs’ death, the cover of the *New Yorker* magazine showed Peter with an iPad in hand, checking Jobs into heaven. That might be cute. But what lesson can we learn from it? There probably will be no iPads, or anything that Jobs created here on earth, in heaven!
- ③ What things are on the earth now that will last forever? What will not continue after this world is finally destroyed? Why is it important that we know the difference between them?

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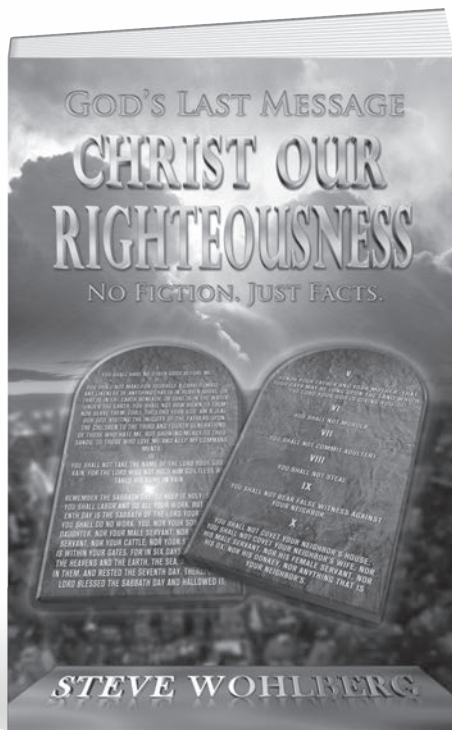


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