

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?

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.

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?

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?

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?

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?

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?

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?

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?

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?

The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *Romans 10:4*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: Understand the relationship between the law and grace.

Feel: Be convicted of a personal need for Jesus.

Do: Seek to live a godly, faithful life while not falling into legalism.

► **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: The Law Leads Us to Christ.

A In Romans 5, why does Paul closely associate sin and death?

B How did the first Adam's relationship to the law bring death, while the Second Adam's relationship to the law brings life?

C How can the law serve as a reminder to all Christians that Christ is our righteousness?

II. Feel: Jesus Is Our Only Hope of Heaven.

A After coming into contact with God's law, why should I be more conscious of my faults and shortcomings?

B Do you feel that God's law is more like a bodyguard or a police officer? Why?

III. Do: Being Godly Through Grace

A If I am struggling to do the things I know I should do, does this mean that I am not converted? Explain.

B Why can I never be good enough to merit heaven through keeping the law?

► **Summary:** Obeying the law is not in conflict with grace. It's what we do as a result of receiving grace.

Learning Cycle

►STEP 1—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: *Romans 10:4*

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: The law points out our sin and awakens in us the need for a Savior.

Just for Teachers: Ever since Paul's day, there have been questions regarding the relationship of law and grace. A superficial reading of some of Paul's writings has led some to suggest that obeying the law is in conflict with receiving grace. But a closer reading of these texts shows us that, though Paul strongly opposed those who were trying to earn their salvation by strict adherence to the law, obedience does play a central part in the Christian life. The law convicts us of sin and then points us to Jesus. After conversion, we live our lives according to the law as a result of receiving grace.

Almost everywhere Paul went and established a Christian church, he seemed to have been followed by a group that was intent on undoing his message of salvation through Jesus Christ. This group insisted on a strict keeping of the law as the true way to be saved. Paul reacted strongly to this group and often returned to the roles of the law and grace, using different examples from the world in which his hearers lived. This week, we explore some of his key writings on this topic.

On October 15, 1492, a group of indigenous people offered Christopher Columbus dried tobacco leaves as a gift. Soon after, sailors began to bring tobacco back to Europe, and the plant was grown all over the continent. One of the main reasons for tobacco's growing popularity in Europe was its supposed healing properties. Europeans believed that tobacco could cure almost anything, from bad breath to cancer. One Spanish doctor, Nicolás Monardes, wrote a book about the history of medicinal plants of the New World and went so far as to claim that tobacco could cure 36 health problems. At first, tobacco was chewed. Then in 1588, a man named Thomas Harriot promoted smoking tobacco as a way to get one's daily dose of tobacco. Even though he died of nose cancer (smokers would breathe the smoke out through the nose), people remained firm in their belief of the benefits of tobacco.

During World War II (1939–1945), cigarettes were included in a soldier's rations and were considered as essential as food. During the 1950s, more and more evidence surfaced suggesting that smoking was linked to lung cancer. Finally, laws for regulating the industry's advertising were

put in place, and tobacco companies had to warn their customers on the packaging. Today, smoking in public places is illegal in many countries. —Vernellia R. Randall, “The History of Tobacco,” University of Dayton, accessed October 9, 2013, <http://academic.udayton.edu/health/syllabi/tobacco/history.htm>.

Opening Activity: As a class, look at the above brief history of smoking and consider the following: were people dying of tobacco-related diseases before there were laws about it? Can legislation about smoking save lives? Can legislation help people who are addicted to nicotine?

Discuss: Are those who are unaware of God’s law suffering the consequences of breaking His law? If so, how? How would an awareness of God’s law help people?

►STEP 2—Explore

Bible Commentary

I. Salvation Beyond the Cross (*Review briefly Leviticus 16 with your class.*)

For many Christians, salvation through faith in Christ is centered upon the Cross. The logic goes like this: Jesus came voluntarily to offer Himself as atonement for the sins of humanity; He suffered and died on the cross for all of us and was then resurrected; and, after having spent some final moments with His disciples, He ascended to heaven. End of story. The Cross has become the focal point of salvation, and it should be. However, the biblical text does not stop here. Salvation is not just about the Cross (and our individual responses to the Cross) where all the sins of the world were atoned for; it is also about the problem of sin, per se. The Old Testament sacrificial system actually provides a helpful clue for that. When a sinner recognized sin in his life, he would bring the appropriate offering to the tabernacle (or, later, the temple). He would lay hands upon the head of the substitutionary animal before its slaughter. The blood of the animal would be collected and smeared around the altar and sprinkled against the curtain of the Holy of Holies in the sanctuary. The remains of the animal (or parts thereof) would be burned. This was, however, not the end of the story. Due to the transfer of sin, the sanctuary required cleansing, and God’s law demanded that this happen symbolically once a year during the Day of Atonement ritual (*Leviticus 16*). *Leviticus 16:16* describes the purpose of the sacrifices and blood manipulation during that day: “ ‘He [the high priest] shall make atonement for the holy place, because of the impurities of the sons of Israel

and because of their transgressions in regard to all their sins; and thus he shall do for the tent of meeting which abides with them in the midst of their impurities' ” (*NASB*). Finally, the sin of the entire congregation would be transferred upon the goat, who would be led into the wilderness so that the sanctuary would be cleansed from all the sins that had accumulated during the year (*Lev. 16:21, 22; compare vs. 30*).

Consider This: The complex sacrificial system was based upon divine laws. Why would God want the children of Israel to experience the Day of Atonement ritual if they had already offered a sacrifice for their sins? What was the meaning of all this action?

II. The True “Lamb of God” (*Review the implications of Jesus’ title as the “Lamb of God” in John 1:29 with your class.*)

The New Testament writers clearly understood that Jesus was the “Lamb of God” who would carry the sins of the world (*John 1:29, 36; Acts 8:32; 1 Pet. 1:19; Rev. 5:6*). Following the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, they understood the implications of Jesus’ sacrifice. The author of Hebrews is fully aware of the link between Jesus’ death and heavenly ministry and the larger sacrificial law of the Old Testament. Hebrews 9:15 talks about Jesus’ atoning sacrifice on the cross that covered all transgressions. Some verses later, its author describes Jesus’ entry into the heavenly sanctuary (in other words, the original, not the earthly pattern as noted in Exodus 25:9) and His ministry there (*Heb. 9:24–26*) that will result in the final putting away of sin. Following that task Jesus will return in order to bring salvation to those who are waiting for Him (*Heb. 9:27, 28*).

Consider This: What are the implications of Jesus’ title as the “Lamb of God”?

III. Lessons From the Heavenly Sanctuary (*Review Daniel 8:14 with your class.*)

The Cross is only one stop along the way in the plan of salvation. To be sure, it is *the* pivotal point of history, but salvation requires further work related to the heavenly sanctuary and the final elimination of sin. If Christ’s death had effected the abolition of the law, why would Hebrews highlight the important work of Jesus as heavenly High Priest?

It seems to be clear that, for the biblical writer, the Cross and the heavenly sanctuary were not mutually opposing realities but rather elements of the same divine plan of salvation that had been replicated on a small scale in the earthly sanctuary and its services. This important reality had already been foretold in the prophetic writings of Daniel, particularly in Daniel 8, which, in the context of successive world powers, describes a little-horn power that

would attack the sanctuary and its sacrificial service (*Dan. 8:9–11*) and would seek to change times and laws (*Dan. 7:25*). The question of how long God’s people would have to endure this godless power is answered in Daniel 8:14: “And he said to me, ‘For two thousand three hundred days [literal mornings and evenings]; then the sanctuary shall be cleansed’ ” (*NKJV*). This end-time judgment scene (*compare also Daniel 7*) links the Day of Atonement to the ultimate solution of the sin problem. The law describing this sequence cannot be the problem. Rather, the problem lies in our imperfect understanding of the divine law that underlies the plan of salvation and showcases the character of the Lawgiver. He recognizes sin for what it is: destructive, demeaning, egocentric behaviors, and attitudes that separate us from the Creator and Source of life.

Consider This: Why is the heavenly sanctuary so important in the theology and message of the Epistle to the Hebrews? What does the heavenly sanctuary teach us about the plan of salvation and the nature of sin?

►STEP 3—Apply

Thought Questions:

- ❶ In what way is Christ the “goal” of the law (*Rom. 10:4*)?
- ❷ What definition of sin do you prefer: “sin is the transgression of the law” or “sin is lawlessness”? What would the difference be?
- ❸ Why is it so difficult for Christians to comprehend the continued role of the law for someone saved by grace?

Application Questions:

- ❶ How can we avoid confusing the law with the Source of our salvation?
- ❷ How can we look at the Ten Commandments not as a list of prohibitions but as a sign of God’s love?
- ❸ How will I know if I am becoming legalistic?

►STEP 4—Create

Activity: Imagine that you are a lifeguard at a large public pool. You notice a small boy jump off the high-diving board in the deep end and start drowning. You jump in to rescue and resuscitate him. The next day he is back on the diving board and jumps in again. After you rescue him again, he says, “I know that you will rescue me; so, I don’t have to obey the rule that says only swimmers can jump off the diving board.” What would you say to him? How would your answers also apply to the requirement of keeping the law after we have been saved?