

## Pine Knoll Sabbath School Study Notes

### Second Quarter 2021: *The Promise: God's Everlasting Covenant*

#### Lesson 8 "Covenant Law"

#### Read for this week's study

Exodus 19:6; Isaiah 56:7; Hebrews 2:9; Deuteronomy 4:13; Deuteronomy 10:13; Amos 3:3; Genesis 18:19.

#### Memory Text

"Know therefore that the LORD your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commandments" (Deuteronomy 7:9, NIV).

#### Lesson Outline from Adult Sabbath School Study Guide

- I. Introduction
- II. The Election of Israel (*Deuteronomy 7:7*)
- III. Ties That Bind
- IV. Law Within The Covenant (*Deuteronomy 10:12, 13*)
- V. The Stability of God's Law
- VI. If . . .
- VII. Further Study

#### Questions and Notes for Consideration

##### Facilitator: Daniel Duda

1. "Our lesson this week centers on God's law and its place in the Sinai covenant." (Sabbath Afternoon)
2. To understand the Mosaic covenant, we need to understand the preceding covenants with Noah and Abraham (and the priestly covenant (Exodus 28-29) which runs in parallel with the Mosaic covenant, yet remains clearly distinct).
3. What is the purpose of God's election of Israel (Deuteronomy 7:7-9)? (Sunday's lesson) How was it (mis)understood later (Galatians 3 & 4)? Is there any parallel between Israel's election and our own?
4. The Mosaic covenant echoes the preceding 'covenant between the pieces' (Genesis 15): God delivers Abraham's descendants from oppression in a foreign land. Though

- it is clearly a covenant of grace, what role does the law play in it (Deuteronomy 4:13)? (Monday's lesson)
5. What is the function of the law within the covenant (Deuteronomy 10:12, 13)? (Tuesday's lesson)
  6. "Like ancient Israel, Seventh-day Adventists have received a wide range of counsels pertaining to every phase of Christian living through a modern manifestation of the prophetic gift. Why should we view these counsels as a gift from God rather than a detriment to independent thought and action? At the same time, what dangers do we face of turning that gift into something legalistic, as the Israelites did with their gifts? (See Romans 9:32.)" (Tuesday's lesson)
  7. How do all these laws provide for stability of the relationship? (Wednesday's lesson) How is that different from our contemporary or cultural perception of the law(s)?
  8. Thursday's lesson considers the clear conditional framework of the covenant (i.e. 'if you obey ... then ...' NIV). What is the significance of these bilateral obligations? How are they important for our understanding of the rest of the biblical storyline?
  9. What are the implications and lessons of this conditionality for us? Why didn't God begin with the 'new' covenant in the first place? Didn't he know what path Israel would take? How does the covenant in Deuteronomy reveal that it is not simply a remaking of the covenant with a new generation, but that future disobedience of Israel and their subsequent exile will not thwart God's ultimate purpose (Deuteronomy 30:4-6)?
  10. How can the concept of covenant be helpful to us in our individual and corporate lives in a contemporary society?

### Thoughts from Graham Maxwell

Anybody have a question about that? God so often saying, "I am doing this for my own name's sake, for my own glory's sake, and not because you are good." Does that seem distressing? Couldn't one even say that the whole history of the human race has continued on so that God might say something about himself? Do you object to being, as was mentioned in a preceding occasion, "used" like this? Or if God is able to reveal the truth about himself and let us know that he values nothing higher than our freedom, do we lose, or do we win? Don't we all win if God clarifies things? And we are caught up in the revelation, in the clarification, to be sure, as God has revealed himself through this long history. And sometimes when we've looked our worst he has looked his best. Aren't we glad that's true?

But it does make for a measure of humility here, that when God calls a people it's not because they're so good. It seems sometimes he calls them because through them he can most eloquently say what needs to be said. Of course, among them he has some very good friends

too. But I've wondered; I was thinking of it driving over tonight. How about his assignment to the Adventist Church? Did he call us because we are so good? Or is it because he knew that through us he could eloquently say some things that needed to be said? Does he bless us because we are so good, or because he is so good? And does he have some friends among us, and some very good friends? Might it be somewhat a repetition of the past? {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, The Picture of God in All 66 – Deuteronomy, recorded November 1981, Riverside, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct links:*

\*Audio links to the West Covina series recorded in 1983:

<http://pkp.cc/9MMPOGIA66> (Part 1) <http://pkp.cc/10MMPOGIA66> (Part 2)

If God is the gracious Person we believe Him to be, why does He make such extensive use of law?

If this really is a free universe, and God can accept only love and faith that are freely given, why does He have so much to say about law?

Jesus said, "Come to Me, all who labor and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light." Matthew 11:28-30, RSV.

But Jesus also had much to say about the continuing authority of God's law and the benefits that come to those who are willing to keep all His commandments. He emphasized this from the beginning of His public ministry, as in the Sermon on the Mount.

"For truly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. Whoever then relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but he who does them and teaches them shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven." Matthew 5:18, 19, RSV.

Jesus was still emphasizing obedience at the end of His ministry. "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments," He urged His disciples in the upper room. And on the way out to the Garden of Gethsemane He added, "If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love." "You are My friends if you do what I command you." John 14:15; 15:10, 14, RSV.

What kind of friendship is it that demands obedience? How does "keep My commandments" fit with "the truth will set you free"?

I believe that one's understanding of God's use of law has much to do with one's conception of God Himself and hence the quality of one's relationship with Him.

Some fourteen hundred years after the giving of the law on Mount Sinai, Jesus came to live among the people who had been entrusted with this revelation of God's will. He found a people who were much preoccupied with God's law and obedience to its every detail.

Jesus never had to tell them not to set up any graven image. They had shunned idolatry since learning their lesson in Babylonian captivity.

Nor did He have to tell them which day was the Sabbath, or that in it they should not do any work. They saw it as their highest duty to keep all ten of the Ten Commandments.

Nor did Jesus have to urge them to pay tithe. They even tithed such small items as mint, dill, and cumin. See Matthew 23:23, RSV.

Or to obey the Old Testament laws of hygiene. They were careful to strain the gnat from a drink, lest they swallow a forbidden insect. See Matthew 23:24; Deuteronomy 14:19.

Or to read the Scriptures. They searched them diligently to find eternal life. See John 5:39, 40, RSV.

Or to be careful in their association with unbelievers. They even performed certain cleansing rituals on returning from the market, and shrank from eating with the Gentiles. See Mark 7:1-5; Galatians 2:11, 12.

They could say with the rich young ruler, "We have obeyed all these laws since our youth." See Luke 18:18-21.

In the face of such rigor and devotion, one might have thought the Lord would be pleased. But all heaven watched the extraordinary scene of people claiming to love the law while hating the Lawgiver.

Jesus ventured to suggest that they were obeying for the wrong reason and as a result were not really obeying at all; that their picture of God was in error; that if they knew the truth about God, they would obey for a different reason—a reason that would make it possible for them to be obedient and free at the same time. {Maxwell, A. Graham. *I Want to be Free*, 26-28. Mountain View, California: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1970}

"Oh" he says, "every time I want to do what is right, evil lies close at hand. All the good that I want to do I don't do, and the evil that I don't want to do is what I do. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this doomed body?"

Of course when he says that, he knows the answer which he promptly gives. But Paul has surely made it clear that in the condition in which we find ourselves, we are above all things else

utterly untrustworthy. It would be totally unsafe to turn us loose in the kind of society God has given his life to preserve. He takes it that seriously. It will remain a free universe, without prisons, and penitentiaries, and police, where everyone can be trusted and no one would do harm to his neighbor. No one would lie, or steal, or cheat, he insists on that. As *Christ's Object Lessons* says, "The Ten Commandments have been given to us so there may be no mistake as to the kind of people who can be entrusted with the privileges of eternal life."

It is *not to deprive us of freedom, but to describe the kind of people who can be entrusted with freedom*. And God has shown by the death of his Son that he doesn't intend to bend or change that law. He insists on that law of love and trustworthiness. And he can only admit to his kingdom people whose lives can be described by those Ten Commandments. How strange that the Decalogue is thought to be a deprivation of our freedom. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series Romans, chapter 5, recorded October 1977, Loma Linda, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct links:*

<http://pkp.cc/9MMROMANS66> (Part 1) <http://pkp.cc/10MMROMANS66> (Part 2)

Do you know the word "obedience" in the Greek, and one can't press the etymological meaning of the word too far, means literally "listening under, a humble willingness to listen."

A doorkeeper is called by this word. Now if you had a doorkeeper who said, "I'm listening, but I don't intend to carry through with what I hear." This isn't just an idle, rude willingness to listen; it's a *humble* willingness to listen. So when the doorkeeper listens, he hears his master knock, and he proceeds to open the door. Hence the word came to mean "obedience", but the essence of the word is "a willingness to listen."

Now does God expect of us perfect performance? He knows better. Can he expect of us perfect willingness to listen? What if we have a 25-percent reservation here? Then we're not safe to save. I mean we've got a lot of listening to do in the hereafter. So God can demand obedience in this sense, a willingness to listen. And without it he can't help us.

And he says, "All the good things that have come to you have come by hearing; by a willingness to listen, in a mood of trust." That's all that is asked. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio presentation, Galatians, #3, recorded February 1978, Loma Linda, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct link:*

<http://pkp.cc/3MMGALATIANS66>

In the introduction to his letter to the believers in Rome, Paul states his conviction that he had been specially commissioned to bring about a new kind of obedience. It was to be different from the kind of obedience he himself had offered before he met Jesus on the Damascus road. It was to be what he calls literally “obedience of faith,” “obedience of trust.”

“Law-obedience” is what Paul used to practice with such zeal, and he was not at all pleased with the results. It had made him intolerant toward other people, even cruel. “Law-obedience” had actually led him to violate the whole spirit of God’s law, the law of love.

By now urging “faith-obedience” or “trust-obedience,” is Paul doing away with the law? “By no means!” Paul exclaims. “On the contrary, we uphold the law.”(Romans 3:31, NSRV) Phillips interprets, “We put the Law in its proper place.”

One proper place for the law has been to serve as “our attendant on the way to Christ.” But the ultimate place is the one Jeremiah described. Paul agrees with the prophet. What the law requires may be written on the heart—the place, Paul explains to the Romans, where the conscience is active and people do their thinking. (See Romans 2:15)

“Trust-obedience” is the kind that results from “knowing” God, in the full meaning of that word. It comes from learning the truth about him and his use of law. It is the result of being won back to trust him as a Friend, to admire him for his wise and gracious ways.

This means that the Spirit of Truth has succeeded in writing the law “on our hearts.” Now we freely do what the law requires, not because we’ve been ordered to, but because we’re convinced in our own minds that what the law requires is right. {Maxwell, Graham. *Servants or Friends? Another Look at God*, 103-104. Redlands, California: Pine Knoll Publications, 1992.} <http://www.pineknoll.org/graham/sof/chapter8.html>

### **Further Study with Ellen White**

God desired to bring all peoples under His merciful rule. He desired that the earth should be filled with joy and peace. He created man for happiness, and He longs to fill human hearts with the peace of heaven. He desires that the families below shall be a symbol of the great family above. {COL 290.2}

But in heaven, service is not rendered in the spirit of legality. 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. Obedience is to them no drudgery. Love for God makes their service a joy. So in every soul wherein Christ, the hope of glory, dwells, His words

are re-echoed, “I delight to do Thy will, O My God: yea, Thy law is within My heart.” Psalm 40:8. {MB 109.2}

Even when he was cast out of heaven, Infinite Wisdom did not destroy Satan. Since only the service of love can be acceptable to God, the allegiance of His creatures must rest upon a conviction of His justice and benevolence. The inhabitants of heaven and of the worlds, being unprepared to comprehend the nature or consequences of sin, could not then have seen the justice of God in the destruction of Satan. Had he been immediately blotted out of existence, some would have served God from fear rather than from love. The influence of the deceiver would not have been fully destroyed, nor would the spirit of rebellion have been utterly eradicated. For the good of the entire universe through ceaseless ages, he must more fully develop his principles, that his charges against the divine government might be seen in their true light by all created beings, and that the justice and mercy of God and the immutability of His law might be forever placed beyond all question. {PP 42.3}

Satan is ever at work endeavoring to pervert what God has spoken, to blind the mind and darken the understanding, and thus lead men into sin. This is why the Lord is so explicit, making His requirements so very plain that none need err. God is constantly seeking to draw men close under His protection, that Satan may not practice his cruel, deceptive power upon them. He has condescended to speak to them with His own voice, to write with His own hand the living oracles. And these blessed words, all instinct with life and luminous with truth, are committed to men as a perfect guide. Because Satan is so ready to catch away the mind and divert the affections from the Lord’s promises and requirements, the greater diligence is needed to fix them in the mind and impress them upon the heart. {PP 503.3}

But the plan of redemption had a yet broader and deeper purpose than the salvation of man. It was not for this alone that Christ came to the earth; it was not merely that the inhabitants of this little world might regard the law of God as it should be regarded; but it was to vindicate the character of God before the universe. To this result of His great sacrifice—its influence upon the intelligences of other worlds, as well as upon man—the Saviour looked forward when just before His crucifixion He said: “Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all unto Me.” John 12:31, 32. The act of Christ in dying for the salvation of man would not only make heaven accessible to men, but before all the universe it would justify God and His Son in their dealing with the rebellion of Satan. It would establish the perpetuity of the law of God and would reveal the nature and the results of sin. {PP 68.2}

Love, the basis of creation and of redemption, is the basis of true education. This is made plain in the law that God has given as the guide of life. The first and great commandment is, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength.” Mark 12:30. To love Him, the Infinite, the Omniscient One, with the

whole strength and mind and heart, means the highest development of every power. It means that in the whole being—the body, the mind, as well as the soul—the image of God is to be restored. {CT 32.1}

Like the first is the second commandment, “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.” Mark 12:31. The law of love calls for the devotion of body, mind, and soul to the service of God and our fellow men. And this service, while making us a blessing to others, brings the greatest blessing to ourselves. Unselfishness underlies all true development. Through unselfish service we receive the highest culture of every faculty. {CT 32.2}

God’s law is the law of love. He has surrounded you with beauty to teach you that you are not placed on earth merely to delve for self, to dig and build, to toil and spin, but to make life bright and joyous and beautiful with the love of Christ—like the flowers, to gladden other lives by the ministry of love. {MB 97.3}

Our will is not to be forced into co-operation with divine agencies, but it must be voluntarily submitted. Were it possible to force upon you with a hundredfold greater intensity the influence of the Spirit of God, it would not make you a Christian, a fit subject for heaven. The stronghold of Satan would not be broken. {MB 142.1}

A sullen submission to the will of the Father will develop the character of a rebel. The service is looked upon by such a one in the light of drudgery. It is not rendered cheerfully and in the love of God. It is a mere mechanical performance. . . . Such service brings no peace or quietude to the soul. {TMK 120.4}

Sin originated in self-seeking. Lucifer, the covering cherub, desired to be first in heaven. He sought to gain control of heavenly beings, to draw them away from their Creator, and to win their homage to himself. Therefore he misrepresented God, attributing to Him the desire for self-exaltation. With his own evil characteristics he sought to invest the loving Creator. Thus he deceived angels. Thus he deceived men. He led them to doubt the word of God, and to distrust His goodness. Because God is a God of justice and terrible majesty, Satan caused them to look upon Him as severe and unforgiving. Thus he drew men to join him in rebellion against God, and the night of woe settled down upon the world. {DA 21.3}

The earth was dark through misapprehension of God. That the gloomy shadows might be lightened, that the world might be brought back to God, Satan’s deceptive power was to be broken. This could not be done by force. The exercise of force is contrary to the principles of God’s government; He desires only the service of love; and love cannot be commanded; it cannot be won by force or authority. Only by love is love awakened. To know God is to love Him; His character must be manifested in contrast to the character of Satan. This work only one Being in all the universe could do. Only He who knew the height and depth of the love of God

could make it known. Upon the world's dark night the Sun of Righteousness must rise, "with healing in His wings." Malachi 4:2. {DA 22.1}

We are not to think of God only as a judge, and to forget him as our loving Father. Nothing can do our souls greater harm than this; for our whole spiritual life will be molded by our conceptions of God's character. {RH, April 5, 1887 par. 10}

In the truths of His word, God has given to men a revelation of Himself; and to all who accept them they are a shield against the deceptions of Satan. {GC 465.1}

As a Teacher sent from God, Christ's work was to explain the true significance of the laws of God's government. His work was important; for He sought to present truth in contrast to the many false theories so destructive to the salvation of all who entertained them. He came, not to abrogate the law, but to be in His life a correct expositor of the character of God, which the law revealed. To remove the confusion of opinion existing everywhere concerning the meaning of the law, He Himself lived the law in its purity. {ST, May 7, 1902 par. 7}

Christ came as One able to expound the law of God, so long misunderstood and misinterpreted by priests and leaders. He tore away the gloomy framework of error and doubt, tradition and superstition, with which men had surrounded truth and obscured its brightness. Resetting the jewels of truth in the framework of God's law, He caused them to shine in their original, heavenly luster. He taught a religion entirely different from the religion taught by the Pharisees. He showed that true happiness springs from purity of heart. True religion is not a mere theory; it affects the heart, and is expressed in the life by good works. {ST, May 7, 1902 par. 8}

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. {1SM 235.1}

We are not to regard God as waiting to punish the sinner for his sin. The sinner brings the punishment upon himself. His own actions start a train of circumstances that bring the sure result. Every act of transgression reacts upon the sinner, works in him a change of character, and makes it more easy for him to transgress again. By choosing to sin, men separate themselves from God, cut themselves off from the channel of blessing, and the sure result is ruin and death. {1SM 235.2}

So far from making arbitrary requirements, God's law is given to men as a hedge, a shield. Whoever accepts its principles is preserved from evil. Fidelity to God involves fidelity to man. Thus the law guards the rights, the individuality, of every human being. It restrains the superior from oppression, and the subordinate from disobedience. It ensures man's well-being, both for

this world and for the world to come. To the obedient it is the pledge of eternal life, for it expresses the principles that endure forever. {Ed 76.4}

When it is in the heart to obey God, when efforts are put forth to this end, Jesus accepts this disposition and effort as man's best service and he makes up for the deficiency with his own divine merit; for he is the source of every right impulse. {OW, December 1, 1909 par. 10}

Christ came to the world with the accumulated love of eternity. Sweeping away the exactions which had encumbered the law of God, He showed that the law is a law of love, an expression of the Divine Goodness. He showed that in obedience to its principles is involved the happiness of mankind, and with it the stability, the very foundation and framework, of human society. {Ed 76.3}

Prayer is heaven's ordained means of success in the conflict with sin and the development of Christian character. The divine influences that come in answer to the prayer of faith will accomplish in the soul of the suppliant all for which he pleads. For the pardon of sin, for the Holy Spirit, for a Christlike temper, for wisdom and strength to do His work, for any gift He has promised, we may ask; and the promise is, "Ye shall receive." {AA 564.1}

God's ideal for His children is higher than the highest human thought can reach. "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." This command is a promise. The plan of redemption contemplates our complete recovery from the power of Satan. Christ always separates the contrite soul from sin. He came to destroy the works of the devil, and He has made provision that the Holy Spirit shall be imparted to every repentant soul, to keep him from sinning. {DA 311.2}

The covenant of grace is not a new truth, for it existed in the mind of God from all eternity. This is why it is called the everlasting covenant. {FLB 77.5}

It is God's pleasure and will that the blessings bestowed on man shall be given in perfect completeness. He has made provision that every difficulty may be overcome, every want supplied through the Holy Spirit. (MS 148, 1897). {7BC 932.5}

As we partake of the divine nature, hereditary and cultivated tendencies to wrong are cut away from the character, and we are made a living power for good. Ever learning of the divine Teacher, daily partaking of His nature, we cooperate with God in overcoming Satan's temptations. God works, and man works, that man may be one with Christ as Christ is one with God. Then we sit together with Christ in heavenly places. The mind rests with peace and assurance in Jesus. . . . In Him there is inexhaustible fullness. . . . {AG 235.5}

God has given us every facility, every grace. He has provided the riches of heaven's treasure, and it is our privilege to draw continually from this capital. {AG 235.6}