

Fundamental Belief 19: The Law of God

The great principles of God's law are embodied in the Ten Commandments and exemplified in the life of Christ. They express God's love, will, and purposes concerning human conduct and relationships and are binding upon all people in every age. These precepts are the basis of God's covenant with His people and the standard in God's judgment. Through the agency of the Holy Spirit they point out sin and awaken a sense of need for a Saviour. Salvation is all of grace and not of works, and its fruit is obedience to the Commandments. This obedience develops Christian character and results in a sense of well-being. It is evidence of our love for the Lord and our concern for our fellow human beings. The obedience of faith demonstrates the power of Christ to transform lives, and therefore strengthens Christian witness. (Exod. 20:1-17; Deut. 28:1-14; Ps. 19:7-14; 40:7, 8; Matt. 5:17-20; 22:36-40; John 14:15; 15:7-10; Rom. 8:3, 4; Eph. 2:8-10; Heb. 8:8-10; 1 John 2:3; 5:3; Rev. 12:17; 14:12.)

In Jesus' sermon on the mount he talked about a lot of stuff, including God's law. He said, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them." (Matthew 5:17).

Apparently, Jesus is in tune with how people think about the law, and he cares enough to offer corrections to our wrong thinking. Jesus knows what the original intentions of the law are. He knows how special and loving and life-giving it could be to people. Then he sees people wishing to do away with the law, or interpreting it as a list of harsh rules, or approaching it with graceless legalism. Jesus says, "Don't think that way." Do you suspect that you might have some wrong thinking about the law?

This message will check our thinking about God's Law. First, by receiving a science experiment focused on a single drop. Then, by reviewing Jesus' words in Matthew 25, with a focus on a single word. ***What do you think about the law?***

The One Drop

When you visit <http://thetenthwatch.com/> you are introduced to "the world's longest running lab experiment", The Pitch Drop. When you click the live feed button you see the view from a camera that is streaming live from The Parnell Building at the University of Queensland in Brisbane Australia. In the shot is a clock and a suspended drop of dark fluid in a glass display case. It takes about 10 years for the drip to drop. The last drop was in 2014. So, it could happen any time now. If you enjoy live streaming videos that are full of action, you might find this live stream a bit boring. But not everyone finds it boring. The website reports that, "More than 35,000 people from some 160 countries are registered to view the stream."ⁱ

Do you have any idea why people are interested in this slow drip?

The website for the experiment explains a bit of the history.

"We're home to the famous Pitch Drop experiment, which holds the Guinness World Record for the [longest-running laboratory experiment](#).

The experiment demonstrates the fluidity and high viscosity of pitch, a derivative of tar that is the world's thickest known fluid and was once used for waterproofing boats.

Thomas Parnell, UQ's first Professor of Physics, created the experiment in 1927 to illustrate that everyday materials can exhibit quite surprising properties.

At room temperature pitch feels solid - even brittle - and can easily be shattered with a hammer. But, in fact, at room temperature the substance - which is 100 billion times more viscousⁱⁱ than water - is actually fluid.

In 1927 Professor Parnell heated a sample of pitch and poured it into a glass funnel with a sealed stem. He allowed the pitch to cool and settle for three years, and then in 1930 he cut the funnel's stem.

Since then, the pitch has slowly dripped out of the funnel - so slowly that it took eight years for the first drop to fall, and more than 40 years for another five to follow.

Now, 87 years after the funnel was cut, only nine drops have fallen - the last drop fell in April 2014 and we expect the next one to fall sometime in the 2020s.

In the 86 years that the pitch has been dripping, various glitches have prevented anyone from seeing a drop fall.”ⁱⁱⁱ

This is why people watch. They want to be the first one to see, in real time, the action of a fraction of a second that concludes a decade of anticipation. They would simply like to observe the mechanics of how this drip drops.

The drop has been elusive. And in a way that makes me feel sympathetic for one man's experience. Professor John Mainstone oversaw the experiment for 52 years beginning in 1961. During this time the pitch dropped 5 times. He missed them all. The first two, (drop 4 in 1962 and drop 5 in 1970) didn't come very close to viewing. The next three he did come close. Drop six took place in 1970. He noted that it was close on a Friday and he checked again on that Saturday night. It still hadn't dropped. But when he came in on Monday morning, it had dropped, and he missed it. Drop seven took place in 1988. He watched this one more closely. At one point he left the room for 5 minutes to get some tea. It dropped while he was gone. Drop 8 happened in 2000. In the new millennium Mainstone got techy. He set up a camera to capture the drop. When it was getting close he was traveling in London. He got an email saying that it was close. He then got an email saying that it had dropped. He then got an email saying that the camera had failed to capture it. In 2013 Mainstone predicted that the drop would happen that year. This time he had set up three cameras to ensure that the drop would be captured. Unfortunately, he passed away in August 2013. Just short of the 9th drop that was successfully captured on camera in April 2014.

All of this attention is given because people want to see one drip drop.

This is a huge effort to learn about the scientific world through one drop of tar. Imagine the effort, funding, research, curiosity, and interest devoted to the scientific study of space, marine life, geology, physics, chemistry... Think of the intense effort of the Wright Brothers to be the first in flight. Think of the focus given by Newton to grasp scientific laws. Think of Edison's persistence through failed attempts to create a light bulb. The examples could go on of people who gave themselves fully to the learning of a particular function of the natural world. They were curious, absorbed, intensely focused, determined, and their learning has been a benefit to us all.

You know what all of them have in common? They gave themselves fully to the study of some minute detail of God's law. They might not have said it that way, many of them not believing in the existence of God. But that is what they were doing.

Now, let me propose an irony. An atheist scientist gives themselves enthusiastically to the study of God's law while the religious person makes a case that God's law is no longer important. One pursues it as a precious key to learning and advancement. The other justifies why they should no longer follow it, value it, or expect to find any benefit in it.

The example of the Pitch Drop and the interest in the scientific community can help us to check our thinking about God's law. Has this exploration sparked any thoughts in that way for you? Let me suggest a few.

Consider, why does the scientific world pursue a knowledge of God's law with such eagerness? I can think of a few good reasons that ought to apply to a believers thinking about the law of God.

1. It is interesting. Maybe the suspended drop appears boring to you but there is interest there to the scientist. There is something to learn. Maybe you have also found God's law boring. But you haven't looked at it with the heart to learn of God as a scientist seeks understanding of the natural world. Do you need to change your thinking about God's law? It is not boring but infinitely fascinating.
2. It is truth. Scientists want to know how things work. They have an understanding that there are laws that don't change. Experiment after experiment they pursue truth. God's laws are not an outworking of God being stubborn about a silly rule he made. He has established laws of how life works. When normal people fall down, they don't complain that God is being all legalistic about that gravity rule again. They understand that it is a law that they simply need to live with. God's laws are not there because God has picky preferences but because they are truth. They are the laws he has established as boundaries for our reality. Do you need to change your thinking about God's law? They are not arbitrary rules but actual truth.
3. It is beneficial. Without scientific discovery we would not have most of what we enjoy today. We would not have electricity in our homes, engines in our cars, or iodine in our salt. A knowledge of God's law helps us to live better! It puts us in line with reality so

that we can thrive. Do you need to change your thinking about God's law? It is not to be a burden but a benefit.

What do you think about the law?

The One Word

As John Mainstone focused on a single drip we are going to give our attention to a single word of Jesus. In this word we will explore ways of thinking about God's law.

The word is "fulfill". It appears in Matthew 5:17 when Jesus says, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to **fulfill** them."

With the curiosity of a scientist we will ask, "What did Jesus mean when he said he came to fulfill the law?"

The Greek word translated here as "fulfill" is the verb pléroó (πληρόω). It means "to make full, to complete."

There are many possibilities of what Jesus meant by "fulfill". We will consider 7. These possibilities are just that, possibilities. I am presenting them with more questions than answers. Scientists learn of God's law by asking questions, being curious, challenging their hypothesis, and exploring the possibilities. In each of these possibilities I find some aspect of Biblical truth and see a real possibility this might have been what Jesus was communicating.

The goal, to check what you think about God's law. ***What do you think about the law?***

Possibility #1- Jesus fulfilled the law by perfectly keeping the law.

SDA Fundamental Belief 19 The great principles of God's law are embodied in the Ten Commandments and exemplified in the life of Christ.

Hebrews 4:15 For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.

Christ perfectly kept God's law. He was the spotless lamb whose righteousness offers salvation to sinners. Jesus "fulfilled" the law by keeping it.

What do you think about the law?

Possibility #2- Jesus fulfills the law by empowering believers to keep it.

SDA Fundamental Belief 19 Salvation is all of grace and not of works, and its fruit is obedience to the Commandments. This obedience develops Christian character and results in a sense of well-being. It is evidence of our love for the Lord and our concern for our fellow human beings.

The obedience of faith demonstrates the power of Christ to transform lives, and therefore strengthens Christian witness.

Romans 8:3-4 For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be *fulfilled in us*, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

Romans 8:4 uses the same Greek word (Pleroo) when it says “fulfilled”. His perfect law keeping fulfills the law in us.

2 Corinthians 5:21 He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

The danger of these first two possibilities is that we fall for the idea of perfectionism. Some people reason that since Christ was human and kept the law perfectly, we have no excuse to not keep it perfectly. Then they crash into the ditch of legalism. Christ does call us to perfection. Notice how Jesus wraps up this portion of the sermon on the mount in the final words of this chapter, “You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matthew 5:48). The call to keep God’s law is always as the fruit, not the root, of our salvation. We love because he first loved us!

So long as we keep far from the ditch of perfectionism, let’s acknowledge the serious call that Jesus makes to keep the law. Right in this passage he says, “Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments” and “unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.” Don’t let the truth that you cannot earn salvation keep you from living up to the holiness that Christ offers you. Some have learned this Bible teaching that none of us are perfect and have let it become an excuse to reject the righteousness that Christ offers us. Of course, God wants you to live holy, to obey his law. Obedience is a work of grace. Never forget that Christ’s righteousness saved you. And don’t be deceived to think that your righteousness doesn’t matter. Jesus’ words in Matthew five do intend to call us to obedience.

What do you think about the law?

Possibility #3- Jesus fulfilled the law as an affirmation that the law was not abolished.

SDA Fundamental Belief 19 They express God’s love, will, and purposes concerning human conduct and relationships and are binding upon all people in every age.

The text makes clear that the fulfilling of the law is in contrast to the wrong idea that Jesus was abolishing it. The two ideas are separated with a strong “but”.

I phrased possibility #3 in the negative (“not abolished”) because I don’t care for the term “binding” to describe the continued importance of the law. It sounds too much like slavery to be an accurate description of the “law of liberty” (James 2:12; Galatians 5:1-7). Nor have I found a better word to describe it. But it is clear in the scripture, the law has not been abolished.

Let’s back up and consider what Jesus was referring to when he said it was not abolished. He was referring to “the Law and the Prophets”. The Jewish Bible is divided into the Law, Prophets and Writing. When the New Testament writers spoke of the “Law and the Prophets” they were speaking of what we call the Old Testament (Matthew 7:12; 11:13; 22:40; Luke 16:16; John 1:45; Romans 3:21). Jesus later gave examples of the law and prophets from the 10 Commandments (vv 21, 27) and from the laws of Moses (vv 33, 38, 43).

Jesus ushered in a New Covenant. This is where many go to show that the law has been abolished. Notice what this New Covenant does to law.

Hebrews 8:10 For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

This does not sound like an abolishment of God’s law but an exaltation of it.

Luke 16:17 But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one dot of the Law to become void.

When Jesus says that not a “jot” or a “tittle” will disappear from the law he is speaking of the smallest letters and markings in the written law. He emphasizes the unchanging nature of the law.

Remember, Jesus began by calling out wrong thinking, “do not think”. To the Jewish onlookers Christ appeared to be breaking the law. He was only breaking their man-made laws. He knew that they were thinking that his disregard for their man-made laws was an abolishment of the law. They were always suspicious of Jesus’ approach to the law.

On this point The Desire of Ages says, “As He swept away the rubbish under which the truth had been buried, they thought He was sweeping away the truth itself. They whispered to one another that He was making light of the law. He read their thoughts, and answered them, saying,--“Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill.” DA 307

What do you think about the law?

Possibility #4- Jesus fulfilled the law by being the ultimate end of the law.

Romans 10:4 For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

There are some who subscribe to this possibility as the opposite of possibility #3. They interpret Jesus' words about fulfilling the law as doing away with it, the very thing he is speaking against in this text. There is good reason for the confusion. There are some ways in which Jesus does fulfill the law in a way that makes it no longer necessary.

Colossians 2:14 By canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.

Hebrews 8:13 In speaking of a new covenant, he makes the first one obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.

That same chapter in *Desires of Ages* says, "The system of types that pointed to Jesus as the Lamb of God was to be abolished at His death; but the precepts of the Decalogue are as immutable as the throne of God." (*Desire of Ages* page 309)

We need to acknowledge that there are some things that pass away when Jesus fulfills them. Jesus' words in Matthew 5 indicate that there is some element of passing away to some parts of God's law by the use of the word "until".

Matthew 5:18 For truly, I say to you, *until* heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law *until* all is accomplished.

Additionally, in regard to Christ being the end of the law, we should recognize that all of the law and prophets point to him.

John 5:39 You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me.

I read through the verses in the Strong's Concordance that use the word "Pleroo" (fulfill). There are several other words that are translated "fulfill". This same one appears in the gospels 38 times, 28 of those times it comes in a phrase very similar to "That scripture might be fulfilled" (Matthew 1:22; 2:15; 3:15, 17, 23; 4:14; 8:17; 12:17; 26:54, 56; 27:9, 35; Mark 1:15; 14:49; 15:28; Luke 22:16; 22:16; 24:44; John 3:29; 12:38; 13:18; 15:25; 17:12; 18:9, 32; 19:24, 28, 36). Over 70% of the time it is used in the gospel it is speaking of Jesus bringing to pass the things that were written in the law and the prophets.

What do you think about the law?

Possibility #5- Jesus fulfilled the law by bringing about the judgment required for breaking the law.

SDA Fundamental Belief 19 These precepts are the basis of God's covenant with His people and the standard in God's judgment.

This one might make you a bit defensive. After all, Jesus did not come to condemn but to save (John 3:17). But Jesus had a message about judgement too. And the law has always been God's standard for judgment.

John 9:39 Jesus said, "For judgment I came into this world..."

Matthew 5:19 Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

Interestingly, the word for "relax" or "break" (lou) in verse 17 is related to the word "abolish" (katalou) in verse 17. It may be a grammatical tie to suggest something like, "I am not destroying the law, you are."

When Jesus says, "the least of these" he is referring to the ranking system that the Jews had for degrees of sin. He was teaching that the sin they call the least is not a small deal in the eyes of God. The law has a judgment role in revealing sin in our lives.

Romans 3:20 Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

Romans 7:7 What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, "You shall not covet."

Ultimately there will be a judgment. Those who are saved will be saved by the righteousness of Jesus. Those who are condemned will be condemned for their lawless deeds.

2 Corinthians 5:10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.

Revelation 20:12 And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done.

John the Baptist gave a picture of Jesus fulfilling the law with judgment.

Matthew 3:7-12 "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruit in keeping with repentance... Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire... His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

When the law is carried out there is no way around judgment. The law always leads to justice.

Possibility #6- Jesus fulfilled the law by showing how the law reflects God's character.

SDA Fundamental Belief 19 They express God's love, will, and purposes concerning human conduct and relationships.

I appreciate the description of God's law as the "transcript of God's character".^{iv} In giving his law he is giving a description of who he is. This close connection between his law and his character is illustrated in the fact that the 10 Commandments were kept in the Ark of the Covenant in the Most Holy Place where the shekinah glory dwelt. It would suggest that those things expressed in the law are at the core of who God is.

God is Love (1 John 4:8). Love is the most succinct description of God's Character. The law is also love. Jesus said, "On these two commandments (love God, love others) depend all the Law and the Prophets." (Matthew 22:40). Paul said, "Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law." (Romans 13:8). He also said, "For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'" (Galatians 5:14). God is love. Law is love. Law is a transcript of God's character.

Jesus embodied that. As the fulfillment of the law Jesus gave us the clearest picture of love, the character of God. In doing this, he showed us what the law is all about.

John 15:13 Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.

John 3:16 For God so loved the world...

Jesus' life showed us the love that we have often failed to see in the law.

The following comparison verses I copied from an online Bible marking tool.^v

1 John 4:8	God = Love	1 Corinthians 10:4	God is spiritual.
Romans 13:10	Law = Love	Romans 7:14	Law is spiritual.
Leviticus 11:44	God is holy.	1 Corinthians 1:9	God is faithful.
Romans 12:7	Law is holy.	Psalms 119:86	Law is faithful.
Matthew 5:48	God is perfect.	1 John 3:2-3	God is pure.
* Psalm 19:7	Law is perfect.	Psalm 19:8	Law is pure.
Psalm 34:8	God is good.	Deuteronomy 32:4	God is just.
1 Timothy 1:8	Law is good.	Romans 7:12	Law is just.
John 14:6	God = truth.	Malachi 3:6	God is unchangeable.
Psalm 19:42	Law = truth.	Matthew 5:18	Law is unchangeable.
Jeremiah 23:6	God = righteousness	Isaiah 40:28	God is everlasting.
Psalm 119:172	Law = righteousness	* Psalm 111:7-8	Law is everlasting.

One danger that is present in seeing the law in these exalted terms is that we make an idol out of the law. Wouldn't that be ironic? It has happened. Some have been so into the law that they have forgotten about the Lord of the law. I read an article about this in preparation for this sermon. It was written by a former Adventist who believes that Adventists are guilty of this idolatry. In some cases, he is right. You can read the article as a word of caution at the link in the end notes.^{vi}

What do you think about the law?

Possibility #7- Jesus fulfilled by giving us a fuller understanding of it.

We easily see the law through a legalistic lens. Jesus wants us to see the heart of it.

Consider the rest of the chapter. After saying that he came to fulfill the law he goes on to expand the requirements of the law past the legalistic understanding of the time. He taught on anger, lust, divorce, oaths, retaliation, and loving your enemies. In each teaching he follows a pattern of saying "you have heard it said... but I say...". Jesus fulfilled the law by showing us its heart.

There was a fair bit of shock factor to what Jesus taught. The religious leaders considered him to be lax on law. But he spoke against being lax on law. Then he said, "For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 5:20). He was directing his comment to young believers. He was telling the amateurs that they needed to be better than the pros. They were not to be better at legalistic righteousness but at receiving the heart of the law.

Whatever your understanding is of the law, let Jesus fulfill it by teaching you the greater meaning of it.

What do you think about the law?

I suggest that the longest experiment is not the Pitch Drop, but the Great Controversy. God's character and his law are slowly being vindicated. He is the master of patience.

Back in 1927 Professor Parnell's motivation for the Pitch Drop experiment was to show his students that things are not always as they seem. God's slow experiment also shows that things are not always as they seem. The pitch appears like a brittle solid but in time it is shown to actually be a fluid. The law appears to be oppressive but in time it is shown to actually be love.

It tries our patience to wait for the drip to drop. But God knows that in the end, all those who follow him will eventually see his law completely fulfilled, valued, vindicated, understood, trusted, celebrated, and lived out for eternity.

ⁱ <https://smp.uq.edu.au/pitch-drop-experiment>

ⁱⁱ The FAQ's says 200 Billion

<http://pitchdrop.science.uq.edu.au/mediakit/releases/Pitch+Drop+Frequently+Asked+Questions.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ same

^{iv} Christ Objects Lessons p. 305 and in many other placed in the writing of Ellen White.

^v <http://biblemarking.faithweb.com/studies/ydstudies/ltc.html>

^{vi} <https://blog.lifeassuranceministries.org/2019/05/16/a-transcript-of-gods-character/>