

# ***Sabbath School Today*** **With the 1888 Message Dynamic**

## ***How to Interpret Scripture*** **Lesson 3: Jesus and the Apostles' View of the Bible**

### **"Jesus and the Law"**

Ellen White declared in 1889, that before 1888 "we" had "preached the law until we [were] as dry as the hills of Gilboa that had neither dew nor rain." [1] "We" thought we were doing great, fulfilling Revelation 12:17 and 13:12: we were the wonderful "remnant" distinguished by "keeping the commandments of God." Then came 1888!

During those pre-1888 years we lacked what later came as "a most precious message." The gospel was far better than "we" had thought it could be.

The basic theme that permeates what we hear in pulpits and at camp meetings is that in order to be saved there are three things we must *do*: (1) Read the Bible, (2) pray, and (3) witness. The theme is played almost endlessly, "Maintain your relationship with the Lord," which means get up in the morning, read something devotional, and pray. Once we get far enough along that we have what we think is a "relationship," it's commonly understood that *maintaining* it is the believer's job.

And here's where we often fall down. We forget or we get too busy, and then it seems the Lord is far away. And of course it's all our fault, isn't it? So ... enter Old covenant guilt. Ever since *Early Writings* was written (1850) we had been praying for the Lord to send the "latter rain." And now at last in 1888 He did so with refreshing advance "showers" in a message that startled and even alarmed "us."

The question naturally arises, How does the 1888 message (which Ellen White endorsed so heartily) relate to God's law? Does it proclaim cheap grace? Does it encourage disobedience to the law of God? Does the message lower church standards? Does it dwell too much on the cross of Christ and what happened there, and then neglect to remind us of our works, the obedience we must continually demonstrate?

We know that Ellen White was overjoyed to hear A. T. Jones and E. J. Waggoner present the message. She declared it to be the clearest presentations of the gospel she had heard publicly "for the last 45 years." [2] She also said that if they had not brought the message, we wouldn't have had it, meaning that the Lord laid a burden on them He had not laid on her. [3] If in any way their message weakens obedience to God's law, it could not be "precious," let alone "*most precious*." What made her so happy was that their understanding of justification by faith was fresh, unique, and dynamic. It set the law before the people in its true light. She was painfully aware that the views held by the Sunday-keeping Evangelical churches denigrated God's law, declaring either (1) that it

had been abolished at the cross or (2) it was impossible for us fallen humans to obey. Either way, this popular view of justification by faith was employed to refute the Sabbath truth. She rejoiced that the 1888 message presented the Ten Commandments as ten promises—glorifying obedience.

### **God's Ten Commandments Become Good News!**

Rightly understood, the Ten Commandments, which people have long thought spoil our fun (“Don’t do this!” or “Don’t do that!”), turn out to be ten categories of Good News if we understand why God gave them. This discovery is lifting heavy burdens from tired hearts all over the world.

For example, when the commandment reads, “You shall not steal!” what it actually says is that God will save you from ever stealing even a shoelace! You’ll never have a problem, even if you’re alone in the treasurer’s office with a million dollars on the desk. *God will save you from stealing.*

It is the talked-about topic in some of the highest placed circles of Bible scholars. As the Internet is a discovery that has revolutionized modern communications, so this discovery of Bible truth revolutionizes the preaching of the gospel worldwide. People are waking up as from a dream; the Ten Commandments have become Good News!

Now at last we can experience the freedom that the Bible has been telling us but which seemed so difficult to understand: “Oh, how I *love* thy law! [not many of us have ever felt *that way!*] It is my meditation all the day [boring, we have thought!]. Thou, through thy commandments hast made me wiser than mine enemies; ... I have more understanding than all my teachers, ... I understand more than the ancients, ... How sweet are thy words unto my taste ... sweeter than honey to my mouth! [this *will* be a miracle!] Through thy precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way” (Psalm 119:97-104). Most people have never begun to discover this joy.

Even church-goers have usually had a love/hate relationship with the Ten Commandments. The law has seemed like a heavy burden, ten precepts carved in cold stone, heavy prohibitions that crush out all the joy of life. Everything that was fun doing seemed to be, “You shall not!” The Ten Commandments seemed like roadblocks in the highway of happiness.

Yet deep in our human hearts we have realized that it’s wrong to break them; suffering must be the result either in this life or in the next. Yet we just couldn’t know how to keep them, let alone *love* them. They seemed too hard.

Now comes this fantastic revelation: The Ten Commandments are actually ten assurances of victory. And what we have to do is different than the “Do this or else!” rules we have thought them to be: our job is to *believe* the Good News that God has embedded in them. Then faith will work to produce a loving obedience.

First comes an astounding disclosure: probably we have been misquoting the Ten Commandments without realizing what we've done. Whoever taught them to us since we were kids usually left out one verse that God put in at the very beginning, before any of the prohibitions. Leave it out and the Ten indeed become Bad News, a "yoke of bondage."

Here it is—the missing verse that belongs at the beginning of any true version of the Ten Commandments:

*"And God spoke all these words, saying, 'I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage'" (Ex. 20:1, 2).*

There are some dynamite-like truths implicit here that can shake the earth.

First, God tells us what His true name is: "The Lord." Second, this neglected verse tells us that He is everybody's God, "I am the Lord *thy* God." Third, in His Preamble God tells us that we don't belong in spiritual Egypt. Fourth, God has *already* delivered you "out of the house of bondage." Fifth, such Good News is true because the Son of God became incarnate.

*"Godly fear" is appropriate for any true-hearted Christian.* Jesus describes a group who will appear before Him in judgment at last. They think they have "kept the commandments." But Jesus must tell them sorrowfully, "I never knew you" (Matt. 7:21-23). What could have gone wrong? Their good "works" were "wonderful."

Paul can help us understand this: these dear people had misunderstood what true commandment-keeping is. It *does* include Sabbath-keeping, health reform, tithe-paying, all the good works we can think of; but it fails to be true obedience unless it is motivated by *agape*: "Love [*agape*] worketh no ill to his neighbour; therefore love [*agape* in the original] is the fulfilling of the law" (Rom. 13:10).

Popular Christianity, which teaches that we can be saved *in* sin rather than *from* it, fails to grasp the import of *agape* because people generally hold to the natural immortality of the soul. The world needs to hear the "most precious message," which if proclaimed will be "Pentecost" over again.

—*From the writings of Robert J. Wieland*

### **Endnotes:**

[1] *Review and Herald*, March 11, 1890.

[2] *The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials*, pp. 348, 349.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 608. Ellen White never claimed that she herself was bringing the message of the latter rain or the loud cry; she said that of their message.

**Notes:**

Pastor Paul Penno's video of this lesson is on the Internet at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=70f4cnlo8R0>

Many of Pastor Penno's sermons are on YouTube in Spanish. Just type **pastor paul penno en español** in the search bar.

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