



## 2025 God's Love and Justice Lesson 2 Covenantal Love

by Tim Jennings

### SABBATH

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Read memory verse:

- Jesus replied, “If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. (John 14:23 NIV84).

What does this mean?

- Does it mean that the Father doesn't love us unless we obey?
- Or is this exposing the difference between God's heart of love and God's functional love, God's ability to act in love, pour His love into our lives and have His love heal and transform us?
- Doesn't God love everyone whether they obey or not?
- But for those who don't obey, does their disobedience obstruct God's love from living, functioning, working in their lives?

So while God loves everyone in heart attitude, motive, desire, the way love functions, it cannot be forced, coerced, mandated, and if people disobey, which is breaking God's design laws of love, they cut themselves off from God's love and thus God's love, while poured out freely from Him, doesn't do them any good. It would be like a person who hides in a cave from the sun—the sunlight is still shining just as bright as always, but by going into the cave one cuts themselves off from its warming rays.

Read the last paragraph,

- Scripture also teaches that God's love is not unilateral but deeply relational, in that it makes a profound difference to God whether or not humans reflect His love back to Him and to others. (Adult SS Guide 1<sup>st</sup> Q 2025, God's Love and Justice p. 12).

Is there something off about this paragraph? There is one word used in this paragraph that immediately struck me as not quite right, at first I thought, maybe an innocent word choice, but it comes up multiple times in the lesson:

In the second paragraph in **WEDNESDAY's** lesson we read,

- God’s love always comes first. If God did not first love us, we could not love Him in return. While God created us with the capacity to love and to be loved, God Himself is the ground and Source of all love. We have the choice, however, whether we will accept it and then reflect it in our lives. This truth is exemplified in Christ’s parable of the unforgiving servant (*see Matt. 18:23-35*). (Adult SS Guide 1<sup>st</sup> Q 2025, God’s Love and Justice p. 16).

And in **THURSDAY**’s lesson the second paragraph we read,

- However, what we can and should do is to reflect God’s love to others as much as we possibly can. If we have received such great compassion and forgiveness, how much more should we bestow compassion and forgiveness on others? Recall that the servant forfeited his master’s compassion and forgiveness because he failed to bestow them on his fellow servant. If we truly love God, we will not fail to reflect His love to others. (Adult SS Guide 1<sup>st</sup> Q 2025, God’s Love and Justice p. 17).

Did you notice the lesson repeatedly takes the position that we are to be reflectors of God’s love. What do you think of this idea? Does this sound right or does it introduce a corrosive and destructive element that if embraced sets loving people up to be deceived by God’s enemy?

Jesus said,

- **“You are the light** of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people **light a lamp** and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let **your light shine** before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:14–16 NIV84, emphasis mine).

Is there a difference between a reflector and a light? What is the difference?

Does a reflector have any light to shine? Or does it, like a mirror, only reflect the light from another source?

Is this what Jesus taught? What did Jesus teach?

Consider this historical quote:

- Every human being, created in the image of God, **is endowed with a power akin to that of the Creator—individuality, power to think and to do**. The men in whom this power is developed are the men who bear responsibilities, who are leaders in enterprise, and who influence character. It is the work of true education to develop this power, to train **the youth to be thinkers, and not mere reflectors of other men's thought**. Instead of confining their study to that which men have said or written, let students be directed to the sources of truth, to the vast fields opened for research in nature and revelation. Let them contemplate the great facts of duty and destiny, and the mind will expand and strengthen. Instead of educated weaklings, institutions of learning may send forth men strong to think and to act, men who are

masters and not slaves of circumstances, men who possess breadth of mind, clearness of thought, and the courage of their convictions. (Education p. 17, emphasis mine).

What is the difference between a reflector and a light?

What is that difference when the metaphor is applied to the reality of our hearts and minds?

Reflectors have no light of their own, they have no experience of their own, they don't have knowledge that they know for themselves, they only reflect the light, experience, perspectives, knowledge of others. Does God want us only to reflect His truth, or to experience Him, His love and truth so that it becomes our experience, our understanding, our individualized method, mode, and principle of life that we share God's love and truth from our experience, from what it has done in and for us, that our love for God is individualized, we really love Him? Or does God want us to merely reflect His own love back at Him?

What happens in a person who is a reflector?

When Paul wrote in Romans 14:5 that every person must be fully persuaded in their own mind, is he recommending people be indoctrinated, be taught the right things to think, or be taught how to think and then having understood why the truth is the truth they agree?

In Hebrews 5-6 when the Bible talks about the mature being those who have developed by practice the ability to discern right from wrong does that sound like reflectors or lights?

Does a reflector, someone who reflects, have their own thoughts, their own perspectives, their own understanding and individuality, or do they become a drone, a lemming, a blind follower? And are blind followers vulnerable to following blind guides?

What is the sealing? It is the work of the Holy Spirit that brings a person to the point that by their choice and agreement they surrender themselves to God and by humbly, actively, intelligently, following the leading of the Holy Spirit they become so settled into the truth both intellectually and spiritually that they cannot be moved.

Can a person be sealed into God's kingdom if they are only a reflector? Or does the sealing require a person to be settled both intellectually and spiritually such that they actually comprehend, understand and agree in heart and mind?

Is brainwashing that cults do the same as the sealing of God? Would cult members be more like the lights Jesus described or more like reflectors of the cult leader? What does God want for us?

But some might argue that, via the law of worship, which is that by beholding we are changed (2 Cor 3:18), that we are to fix our eyes upon Christ and by doing so we become more like Him and thus reflect His character and glory—what do you think about that?

It is absolutely true that by beholding we become changed, transformed into the image of Christ, and as *we become more like Christ* does our mind, our heart, our faculties become more like His or less? And was Christ a thinker and a doer, someone who did what He did because He understood, agreed, and freely chose to do it, or was Jesus a person who simply asked the Father what to do, you tell me and I will do it, I don't need to agree or understand, I only need to obey and reflect?

What about us, as we behold Jesus do we become less capable of thinking and comprehending and simply end up mindlessly reflecting what Jesus said, or do we actually become like Him and come to understand God, Jesus, their designs and methods and choose to do what is in harmony with Their will, methods, purposes because we prefer it?

When Jesus said to His disciples,

- I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. (John 15:15 NIV84).

wasn't He contrasting two types of minds, two types of attitudes, two types of responses to Him? Could we describe the friend who understands as a thinker, a person with their own light, their own thoughts, their own individuality and the servant as a reflector, one who doesn't question, one who simply follows the rules and does what they are told?

Which type of follower does Satan want? Does Satan want followers that will question and think or followers that will mindlessly reflect and obey?

I find real danger in suggesting that we are to be reflectors of God's love. No, we are to be recipients of God's love which transforms us and wells up inside of us and becomes living water that flows over to others. We are to be the lights of the world, not reflectors to the world.

## **SUNDAY**

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Read third paragraph,

- The verse after John 3:16 adds: " 'For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.' " (*John 3:17 NKJV*). If it were up to God alone, every human being would accept His love and be saved. Yet, the Lord will not force His love on anyone. People are free to accept or reject it. (Adult SS Guide 1<sup>st</sup> Q 2025, God's Love and Justice p. 13).

The lesson says "Yet, the Lord will not force His love on anyone." Thoughts about this? I wonder how many around the world read this and said, "Praise God!"

But is this the same as saying, "The Lord *cannot* force His love on anyone"?

What is the difference in the two statements?

Does the way the lesson states it, contain a suggestion that it is possible for the Lord to force His love on people, but He simply chooses not to?

Is that actually true? Can the Lord force His love on people? Can love be forced ever, by anyone, even God?

If God could force love, then why hasn't He done so? Why the long history of sin and rebellion? If love can be forced and God hasn't done so, then what would that say about God?

Consider this historical quote from the Bible commentary on the life of Christ called *The Desire of Ages*, do you agree with this?

- 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. (The Desire of Ages p. 22, emphasis mine).

What kind of law is imbedded in the statement "Yet, the Lord will not force His love on anyone"?

It is another subtle infection of human law, the idea that God makes up rules and imposes them on people, that because He is all powerful He runs His universe by imposing His will and making things happen and in this case God simply chooses not to force His love—but He could if He wanted to.

But this is false, God *cannot* force love, because love cannot be forced. To use force violates the laws of love and liberty and always destroys love and incites rebellion.

And this leads to another question that those who hold to the human law model always get wrong, and that is what does God do to those who reject His love?

If we say that God is required by law and justice to use His power to inflict appropriate legal penalties upon those who reject His love, then we say that in the end God uses His power to cause them pain and death, to torture and execute. And if that is what God were to do then are we really free to reject Him and His love or are we being coerced?

If one believes that God's law functions like human law, then people are, in fact, not free to reject it; they are punished for rejecting it. And external inflicted punishment destroys love and incites rebellion and thus sin spreads. This is how Satan has advanced his kingdom through false Christianity. How Satan has set himself up in God's temple proclaiming himself to be God as Paul warned in 2 Thessalonians 2:4; how Christianity has been suborned such that it has a form of godliness with no power; it is why the rate of child abuse, spouse abuse, addictions, pornography use are no different in Christian homes than non-Christian homes.

**Whenever Christians teach that God's law functions like human law, and justice is the use of power to inflict punishments they are obstructing the kingdom of God, undermining love and trust and delaying the gospel from going to the world and thus delaying the second coming of Christ.**

Love only exists in an atmosphere of freedom and God cannot get what God wants by the exercise of might and power. God cannot get love, trust, friendship, loyalty, devotion from people by threatening to punish them if they don't give it.

Does that mean there is no punishment for those who reject God's love? No it doesn't mean that at all. There is a punishment for the unrepentant, but the reality is, under design law, under the laws God built into the fabric of the cosmos, the punishment does not come out from God, the punishment comes from unremedied and unremoved sin from the heart/mind/soul of the sinner. As Paul wrote to the Galatians, those who sow to the carnal nature from that nature reap destruction (Galatians 6:8) or James wrote sin when full grown brings forth or gives birth to death (James 1:15).

The punishment for sin occurs when God stops using His restraining and protective power that has been holding at bay what unremedied sin does. This is reality, this is the truth that the devil does not want people to comprehend and it is the truth denied by all those who stubbornly hold to the lie that God's law functions like human law.

## **MONDAY**

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Read the second paragraph,

- “Deuteronomy 7:9 describes a special kind of love that God has with His covenant people, a relationship that is partially dependent on whether or not they remain faithful. God's love is not conditional, but the covenant relationship with His people is. (Adult SS Guide 1<sup>st</sup> Q 2025, God's Love and Justice p. 14).

Any concerns, anything confusing?

I found this paragraph had a lot of ideas that were imprecise and could easily be misconstrued.

Who are the covenant people? Is this referring to the nation of Israel in the OT times and God's calling for them to be a kingdom of priests, representatives, to share the gospel to the world, protect the inspired record and be the branch of the human family through whom Messiah would come? Or is this speaking of the covenant of grace given to the entire world, to all people, in Genesis 3:15 when the Messiah was promised?

Did God have a covenant relationship with Seth, Noah, Melchizedek, Enoch, and many others who were not descended from Abraham?

Does God have a covenant relationship with every human being who surrenders their heart to Him in trust (Hebrews 8:10)?

So the term covenant people seems imprecise and could lead one to think that only the Jews are included in the covenant of grace, but was the covenant intended only for the Jews, or were the Jews called for mission, evangelism, to take the promised covenant of grace to the entire world because the covenant relationship is for all human beings descended from Adam?

Second, the lesson states that the covenant relationship is "a relationship that is partially dependent on whether or not they remain faithful."

This doesn't make sense to me, perhaps I am simply failing to comprehend, and if so, can someone explain how this statement makes sense?

I guess the lesson could mean that a covenant relationship couldn't exist if God didn't offer it, so it is partially dependent upon God offering the relationship and partially dependent upon our response. If that is what they meant I wish they would have said that because the way it is written it leaves open the possibility for misunderstanding.

Understand that God is love, and that God does offer us salvation through a covenant relationship, is that covenant relationship, once God took the initiative to offer it to us, partially dependent upon our response, or it *is* dependent upon our response?

Can God have a covenant relationship with anyone who rebels, rejects Him won't talk to Him, runs from Him, gives their heart to other gods? While God can continue to love them, pursue them, call after them, send messengers to them, if they refuse to engage with God, can God have a covenant *relationship* with them?

God could use His power to capture them, imprison them, punish them, and have a master/slave relationship or a warden/prisoner relationship without their cooperation, but can God have a covenant relationship with people who refuse Him?

So is having a covenant relationship *partially* dependent on their response or simply dependent on their response?

The reason my mind asks questions like this is because I am thinking how reality works, and reality works on design law. You cannot have a covenant relationship without two individualities actively participating. You cannot have a healthy marriage with only one person who loves and values the other. If the other partner is selfish and deceitful the marriage will not be healthy even with one mature healthy partner. One can have a dysfunctional relationship with a dysfunctional and rebellious person, but one cannot have a healthy relationship with a dysfunctional and rebellious person—and that includes God.

Consider the relationship Jesus had with Judas—was it a saving, covenantal, relationship? No, it was not, because Judas rejected the truth and love coming from Jesus and chose fear and selfishness.

So, when we understand design law, we understand how reality works and then statements like the lesson sometimes uses don't make sense or insinuate concepts or ideas that are imprecise, confusing, or false.

The lesson describes that the English words “lovingkindness” and “mercy” are from the Hebrew word *hesed*.

Read the fourth paragraph,

- God's *hesed* shows that His loving-kindness is extremely reliable, steadfast, and enduring. Yet, at the same time the reception of the benefits of *hesed* is conditional, dependent upon the willingness of His people to obey and to maintain their end of the relationship. (Adult SS Guide 1<sup>st</sup> Q 2025, God's Love and Justice p. 14).

Why are the benefits of God's loving-kindness and mercy dependent upon our obedience?

Does the law model have any impact on how we answer?

Do we hear obedience like obeying human law, behavioral conformity doing bad deeds is law-breaking that justice requires must be punished? That God uses power from heaven to deny us blessings we would merit or earn if we were obedient?

Or do we hear obedience like the laws of health, and realize that you cannot have health while breaking the laws of health? And thus we cannot benefit from God's healing power and presence while continuing to disobey the protocols He built life to operate upon—even if we pray for it!

What happens to the lungs of the smoker who smokes two packs per day—even if they pray every day for healthy lungs?

What happens to the vision of a welder who welds without eye protection—even if they pray for good vision?



What happens to the health of a person who eats burgers, fries and milkshakes every day—even if they pray for good health?

What happens to the reception of God’s love and mercy into the heart of the authoritarian Christian husband who diligently prays for a happy and healthy marriage while he dominates, controls, and takes freedom away from his spouse, all under the name of obeying God and citing the Bible claiming that husbands are to rule over their wives?

Does our understanding of God’s law, character, methods and principles directly impact our understanding of why things happen and that understanding impacts our ability to both trust God and the subsequent choices we make in governance of ourselves.

When we believe the lie that God’s law functions like human law then with all desire to obey, to do what is right and good, we will be led to injure and harm whenever the rules don’t fit the objective realities of how life is built to operate. Like the Pharisees in Christ’s day who refused to help or heal on the Sabbath—they obeyed the law as they understood it because they thought the law was imposed and **obedience was restrictive and behavioral**, rather than understanding God’s laws are the laws of life and obedience is intelligently living in harmony with how God built life to operate. But, **when we replaced design law for imposed law, we always end up doing things that are unjust and unrighteous under the guise of obeying the law.**

## TUESDAY

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Read second paragraph,

- In these and other texts, enjoying the benefits of a love relationship with God is repeatedly depicted as conditional upon the human respond to His love. Yet, we should not make the mistake of thinking that God ever actually stops loving anyone. As we have seen, God’s love is everlasting. And, although Hosea 9:15 includes God saying of His people, “I will love them no more,” it is important to remember that later in the same book God declares of His people, “I will love them freely” (*Hos. 14:4 NKJV*). Hosea 9:15 cannot mean that God entirely ceases to love His people. It must refer, instead, to the conditionality of some particular aspect or benefit of a love relationship with God. And how we respond to His love is crucial for this relationship to continue. (Adult SS Guide 1<sup>st</sup> Q 2025, God’s Love and Justice p. 15).

What do you think? What do you understand the Bible means when it records God as saying, “I will love them no more”? Is God talking about His heart, attitude, character, desire? No, it isn’t about God’s heart attitude, longing, affections, or method, mode, or action, it is about function. I will love them in function no more because they have closed themselves off from receiving my love—despite the fact I love them with an everlasting love I cannot act with my love in them because they won’t receive and respond to my love.

Understanding love as more than God's attitude, affection, intentions, to being living protocols upon which reality functions and that God cannot force love, that He cannot love within a person who doesn't freely surrender in love and trust, despite loving them in His heart, gives understanding to texts like this:

- Just as it is written: "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated." (Romans 9:13 NIV84).

God loves all people with an infinite love, but only those who open their hearts to Him receive His love and thus God can love in action, in function, in healing presence and power only those who respond positively to His love. Those who close their hearts to God do not receive His healing love and God hates it when His children are cut off from Him—He doesn't hate them, but He surrenders them to their freewill choice to cut themselves off from Him and thus He doesn't functionally love, but while His heart breaks in love for them He loves them enough to give them freedom to reject Him who is the source of life and therefore God hates to let go for it results in the loss of His children, but He ultimately does because love cannot be forced. Love will, after all efforts to redeem, reconcile, and save, surrenders those who refuse to their choice and allow the sinner to divorce themselves from His love.

The lesson describes this in the last paragraph,

- These and other texts teach that maintaining the benefits of a saving relationship with God depends upon whether we will accept God's love (which involves willingness to be vehicles of that love, as well). Again, this does not mean that God's love ever ceases. Rather, just as we cannot stop the sun from shining but can cut ourselves off from the rays of the sun, we cannot do anything to stop God's everlasting love, but we can finally reject a relationship with God and, thus, cut ourselves off from what it offers, especially the promise of eternal life. (Adult SS Guide 1<sup>st</sup> Q 2025, God's Love and Justice p. 15).

There are a lot of good things in this paragraph, like God's never-ending love shines freely like the rays of the sun and there is nothing we can do can change that. And the metaphor of the sun, which operates upon design law is an excellent illustration for we either put ourselves in its rays or remove ourselves from it and we benefit or suffer accordingly.

## **WEDNESDAY**

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Read second paragraph,

- God's love always comes first. If God did not first love us, we could not love Him in return. While God created us with the capacity to love and to be loved, God Himself is the ground and Source of all love. We have the choice, however, whether we will accept it and then reflect it in our lives. This truth is exemplified in Christ's parable of the unforgiving servant (*see Matt. 18:23-35*). (Adult SS Guide 1<sup>st</sup> Q 2025, God's Love and Justice p. 16).

It is absolutely true that God is the source of love, that we don't have within us the ability to love innately, that in our current state, whenever we see a human being living out love it is evidence of God's grace functioning there.

But let's consider God's intention in creating Adam and Eve. Of course, it is true that as created beings they did not have life original to themselves, so their existence, their life, their bodies, their everything was a gift from the Creator who created them. So in that sense all of their abilities originated and came from God.

But after God created them, before they sinned, did they have the ability in their own strength to love or did they need to reach out to God and receive love from God being poured into them in order to love?

What about us today? Can we love without receiving God's love, without God first reaching out to us to intercede in our hearts to put a desire for Him and His love in us and then when we respond in trust to connect with us?

John wrote:

- We love because he first loved us. (1 John 4:19 NIV84).

Paul wrote:

- God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:5 NIV84).

And this historical quote describes God working to draw us away from fear and selfishness, away from sin and Satan and back to Him. Do you agree?

- The Lord says, "I will put enmity between thee and the woman." The enmity does not exist as a natural fact. As soon as Adam sinned, he was in harmony with the first great apostate, and at war with God; and if God had not interfered in man's behalf, Satan and man would have formed a confederacy against heaven, and carried on united opposition against the God of hosts. There is no natural enmity between evil angels and evil men; both are evil through transgression of the law of God, and evil will always league against good. Fallen men and fallen angels enter into a desperate companionship. (Signs of the Times, July 11, 1895 par. 5).

What is described? Is the author describing that evil humans and evil angels have the same legal problem, or is the author saying that evil is something that operates in the heart and wars against God? Fear and selfishness war against love and trust, lies war against truth.

Since the fall every human is born with hearts animated, motivated, driven by fear and selfishness—the life, spirit, animating energy that we inherited from Adam. But God did not abandon humanity in this terminal state, but stepped in and began interceding.

God intercedes in three places, here in Genesis 3:15 God promises to intercede by sending His Son to be our Messiah, but He also begins right there to intercede in our hearts and minds by the Holy Spirit working to bring conviction, creating a longing for something better, causing us to be dissatisfied with sin, wooing us and calling us back to Him and when we respond to the Holy Spirit He pours His love into our hearts and we are reborn and transformed and begin to actively choose to live lives motivated by love and trust.

And God throughout human history has interceded with the principalities and powers of darkness holding them in check, as in the book of Job, and providing a hedge of protection to allow His grace to do its work and redeem us from this terminal sin condition through the intervention/intercession of Jesus as our Savior.

Is this love that originates in God only an emotion, a feeling, compassion, or is it also functional, operational, and in fact a design protocol upon which life is built to operate?

Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 13 that love is not self-seeking, love is other-centered, giving, beneficent. And Paul wrote in Romans 1:20 that God's divine nature is seen in what He has made, and since God is love we should be able to nature and see if this is the principle of life. You have heard many examples over the years, such as breathing, the water cycle, the pollination cycle, and the many operations of our bodies, digestion, and so forth, all of it is the law of love built into reality.

Consider these historical quotes:

- The divine beauty of the character of Christ, of whom the noblest and most gentle among men are but a faint reflection; of whom Solomon by the Spirit of inspiration wrote, He is "the chiefest among ten thousand. . . . Yea, he is altogether lovely" (S. of Sol. 5:10-16); of whom David, seeing Him in prophetic vision, said, "Thou art fairer than the children of men" (Ps. 45:2); Jesus, the express image of the Father's person, the effulgence of His glory; the self-denying Redeemer, throughout **His pilgrimage of love on earth, was a living representation of the character of the law of God.** In His life it is made manifest that **heaven-born love, Christlike principles, underlie the laws of eternal rectitude.** . . . Those principles that were made known to man in Paradise as the **great law of life will** exist unchanged in Paradise restored. (Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing, pp. 48-51, emphasis mine).
- By coming to dwell with us, **Jesus was to reveal God both to men and to angels.** He was the Word of God,--God's thought made audible. In His prayer for His disciples He says, "I have declared unto them Thy name,"--"merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth,"--"that the love wherewith Thou hast loved Me may be in them, and I in them." But not alone for His earthborn children was this revelation given. **Our little world is the lesson book of the universe.** God's wonderful purpose of grace, the mystery of redeeming love, is the theme into which "angels desire to look," and it will be their study throughout endless ages. Both the redeemed and the unfallen beings will find in the cross of Christ their **science and their song.** It will be seen that the glory shining in the face of Jesus is the **glory of self-sacrificing love.** In the light from Calvary **it will be seen that the law of self-renouncing**

**love is the law of life for earth and heaven;** that the love which "seeketh not her own" has **its source in the heart of God**; and that in the meek and lowly One is manifested the character of Him who dwelleth in the light which no man can approach unto. (The Desire of Ages 19, emphasis mine).

- But turning from all lesser representations, we behold God in Jesus. Looking unto Jesus we see that it is the glory of our God to give. "I do nothing of Myself," said Christ; "the living Father hath sent Me, and I live by the Father." "I seek not Mine own glory," but the glory of Him that sent Me. John 8:28; 6:57; 8:50; 7:18. **In these words is set forth the great principle which is the law of life for the universe.** All things Christ received from God, but He took to give. So in the heavenly courts, in His ministry for all created beings: through the beloved Son, the Father's life flows out to all; through the Son it returns, in praise and joyous service, a tide of love, to the great Source of all. And thus through Christ the circuit of beneficence is complete, representing the character of the great Giver, **the law of life.** (The Desire of Ages 21, emphasis mine).

What kind of law is this?

This is the law that governs the operation of reality. This is the law that was in operation in heaven when Lucifer rebelled, when Lucifer instead of seeking to love others sought to exalt self at the expense of others. This is the law that Adam and Eve broke when they believed the lies of Satan and broke trust with God. And this law is the protocol upon which life is built and we cannot survive, live, exist without this law operating in our being.

Thus, the Bible teaches, the wages of sin is death, sin when full grown brings forth death, those who sow to the carnal nature from that nature reap destruction, because sin breaks the protocols, parameters, design laws that God built life to operate upon. And God has been using His power throughout human history to hold at bay the damage that sin causes and to restore humanity back into harmony with Himself by restoring His living law of love in our hearts and minds.

This is reality—how reality is built to operate and there is nothing penal/legal going on.

## **THURSDAY**

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Read first paragraph,

- Just as the servant could never repay his debt to his master, we can never repay God. We could never earn or merit God's love. "God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were sinners, Christ died for us" (*Rom. 5:8, NKJV*). What amazing love! As 1 John 3:1 puts it, "Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God!" (*NKJV*). (Adult SS Guide 1<sup>st</sup> Q 2025, God's Love and Justice p. 17).

What is the impact of this paragraph on you? When you read it, what does the ideas in it cause you to experience?

Is it true that we can never earn or merit God's love? Yes, it is true—but do you hear being suggested by this statement and description? Is it suggestion that we are undeserving of His love because of our sinful state? Does hearing this cause a feeling of unworthiness, triggering one to feel inadequate, undeserving?

Would it be a true statement to say the following,

*sinless angels in heaven and sinless Adam and Eve in Eden could never earn or merit life from God, it was a complete and free gift from God?*

Is that a true statement?

When you hear this statement, that *sinless beings could never earn or merit life from God, that God gives life to His creation freely*, does that truth undermine the value or worth of those beings?

What about the sinless beings today, can they earn or merit God's love? Or is God's love given freely to them just like it is to us?

What does the idea of earning or meriting do to your mind? Does it cause one to think down lines of reward and punishment—which is how human law systems work.

Satan's lie about God's law and character is so deeply imbedded in human systems and human thoughts that even when trying to present God as love these concepts creep in and undermine the truth.

What about the idea of being called children of God? Who are God's children?

Have you heard the idea that all human beings are a member of God's family? The question is sometimes asked to help bring this point across, "in your family, are only the good children members of the family?"

And it is absolutely true that all beings, saints and sinners, are God's children by creation—but does the Bible describe that because of sin, there is a split in God's family and that while God loves all of His created children, not all of His children are actually members of God's heavenly family?

There are two human family trees, one descended from Adam in Eden, and one descended from our second Adam, Jesus Christ. We are all born into the first family, the family dying of a terminal sin condition, the family that is naturally in rebellion against God, the family in whose image Satan's character is dominant and forms. But, only those who are **reborn** with a new life received by faith become part of the new family, grafted into the Vine with Jesus as their new family head, because only those people have the life of Christ living within them so that they now bear the image of their heavenly Father.

So we are all God's children by creation, but only those who are reborn are part of God's eternal, righteous, saved heavenly family.

- “Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God!” (1 John 3:1 NKJV).

Jesus makes this point when He said to the Jewish leaders:

- **You belong to your father, the devil**, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies (John 8:44 NIV84, emphasis mine).

Jesus is making a distinction between being born a descendant of Adam, of being part of the *human* family, and what it means to be part of *God's* family?

The apostle John tells us that

- **“To all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God**—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God” (John 1:12, 13 NIV84, emphasis mine).

If we become children of God when we believe in Jesus and accept Him as our Savior, wouldn't that mean we were not considered children of God before we accepted Him?

Consider these verses:

- You are all sons of God **through faith in Christ Jesus** (Galatians 3:26 NIV84).
- **Those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.** For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you **received the Spirit of sonship**. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father.” The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory (Romans 8:14–17 NIV84, emphasis mine).

To be a member of God's family, we must first be born into the world physically—born into the *human* family—and then we must be reborn spiritually, reborn into *God's* family.

Why? To be considered part of God's family means and requires that we bear the image of God, that we have God's law, methods, principles, and character within us, and that we look like God to the world. Whereas those who internalize and embrace the principles of selfishness and sin become like Satan in character, look like him, and are considered part of his family.

Notice what John tells us:

- The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil’s work. No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God’s **seed** remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God. This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: **Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; nor is anyone who does not love his brother** (1 John 3:8–10 NIV84, emphasis mine).

Children resemble their parents, carrying within them attributes of the parents, genetically and physically, yes, but also in attributes of language, character, practice, and beliefs.

Likewise, those who are born of God become like God; they carry within themselves the attributes, characteristics, methods, and principles of God (the seed of God), thereby resembling God, having been restored to the image of God and, thus, are part of God’s family. With that new heart-orientation, they do not go on living for self but, instead, live for the glory of God and the benefit of His kingdom. They live lives of service, of usefulness, of other-centeredness rather than lives seeking to aggrandize self. Such people live like Jesus and, thus, carry His image into the world and are considered part of His family.

In contrast, those who internalize the methods, principles, practices, and characteristics of Satan and thereby become like him are considered part of Satan’s family because they resemble him and carry around his image.

John confirmed that the children of God live like Jesus lived when he wrote,

- “No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God’s seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God.” (1 John 3:9).

Does this verse make you uncomfortable?

Do we believe that, via the Holy Spirit, we are reborn, that we receive new hearts and right spirits, that the “seed” of God is planted within us? In other words, we receive the very life of God, we become partakers of the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4), and it works a change in us so that our motives, desires, attitudes, understanding, perspectives, and practices change, and we grow, develop, transform, and become ever more like Jesus!

Or do we instead believe that we merely have a legal adjustment in a book, have adoption papers filed in the heavenly court, and are legally declared to be part of God’s family—even though we go on living sinful lives and still look like Satan in character?

Which idea are you more comfortable with:

- Those born of God will go on sinning until Jesus returns, or
- Those born of God will not go on sinning?



What law lens do you understand this through? What is the essence, the root, of sin? Is it deed and task performance, or is it attitudes of the heart? And the root attitude of sin is distrust of and disloyalty to God, attitudes predicated upon fear and selfishness.

Those reborn into the family of God may be tempted by fear and selfishness, they may have struggles in personal performance, they may make errors in judgment (like Peter did when he didn't associate with the uncircumcised), but they do not break trust with God. They remain humble; they have hearts that love truth and are willing to be corrected and grow. They love God and others. They do not love their lives so much as to shrink from death (Revelation 12:11). Thus, they develop, advance, and grow in godliness—in the same way that children grow. This growth in godliness is evidence that they are children of God, that they are part of God's family, and that they are not going on living in rebellion (sinning) but are living victoriously.

We become part of God's family when we are reborn through Jesus and become like Him in character, people who live out the principles of God—truth, love, and freedom—in how we treat others.