

A Commentary on *The Desire of Ages*, ch. 79: "It Is Finished"

Christ did not yield up His life till He had accomplished the work which He came to do, and with His parting breath He exclaimed, "It is finished." John 19:30. The battle had been won. His right hand and His holy arm had gotten Him the victory. As a Conqueror He planted His banner on eternal heights. Was there not joy among the angels? All heaven triumphed in the Saviour's victory. Satan was defeated and knew that his kingdom was lost.

Only in light of the great controversy between God and Satan can Jesus' death be fully understood. Origen taught the death of Christ within this framework. Even the early Ransom Theory was cast within a context of a conflict between God and Satan. To the extent that later theologians such as Tertullian and Anselm, shifted toward a more legal view, they eclipsed the great controversy motif. With the transition to an entirely legal model, Luther and Calvin virtually abandoned the notion of a conflict between God and Satan as central to the plan of salvation. In their view, Satan became God's agent of wrath to punish the impenitent. Therefore Ellen White received visions specifically about this conflict in order to shift the atonement back and place it once again within that setting.

To the angels and the unfallen worlds the cry, "It is finished," had deep significance. It was for them as well as for us that the great work of redemption had been accomplished. They with us share the fruits of Christ's victory.

Ellen White will return to this theme once again at the end of this chapter. This is thus the framework for her explanation of why Jesus had to die. The whole universe is involved. Something far greater than merely the salvation of human beings was at stake in Jesus' death. If the angels and other unfallen beings share "with us...the fruits of Christ's victory," then their eternal security is at stake. To this very belief she will come.

Not until the death of Christ was the character of Satan clearly revealed to the angels or to the unfallen worlds. The archapostate had so clothed himself with deception that even holy beings had not understood his principles. They had not clearly seen the nature of his rebellion. (758)

God works through revelation of the truth and not through mere compliance. Everything depends on the universe seeing clearly the nature of Satan's *principles* and the nature of God's *principles* in contrast to each other. The angels and other unfallen beings no doubt had questions. They had a hard time seeing what the problem was with Satan's agenda and plans. They did not understand his principles. What were those principles? And just what was the nature of his rebellion?

It was a being of wonderful power and glory that had set himself God. Of Lucifer the Lord says, "Thou sealest up the sun, full of wisdom, and perfect in beauty." Ezek. 28:12. Lucifer had been the covering cherub. He had stood in the light of God's presence. He had been the highest of all created beings, and had been foremost in revealing God's purposes to the universe. After he had sinned, his power to deceive was the more deceptive, and the unveiling of his character was the more difficult, because of the exalted position he had held with the Father. (758, 759)

God was dealing with His most brilliant created being, whose role had been to reveal God more than and above all other beings. If angels were still on the basic level of worshiping God because of His power and authority, not fully understanding what the basis of that power and authority was, it would be extremely difficult for them to see through the deceptions of Satan.

God could have destroyed Satan and his sympathizers as easily as one can cast a pebble to the earth; but He did not do this. Rebellion was not to be overcome by force. Compelling power is found only under Satan's government. The Lord's principles are not of this order. His authority rests upon goodness, mercy, and love; and the presentation of these principles is the means to be used. God's government is moral, and truth and love are to be the prevailing power. (759)

Destroying someone who is evil or who invents evil is to use force. When we portray God as ultimately destroying those who reject His mercy, we are ascribing Satan's principles: "Compelling power is found only under Satan's government." When God wiped out people in the flood and burned up Sodom and Gomorrah, He did so to preserve those who remained from wholesale destruction, not to drive people by force into serving Him. Indeed, one of the effects of God's use of these measures was the revelation that they did not bring

loyalty and love in the long run. The use of such methods *for the purpose of gaining converts* is therefore ultimately doomed.

The basis of God's authority is goodness, mercy, and love (note: she leaves out "justice"). God's authority is not based on His "sovereign right" or His power. The only method ("means") to be used to gain allegiance to God's authority is "the presentation of these principles" —not their enforcement. Therefore, God's government is not built upon power, but upon moral principles of love.

By contrast, Satan's principles are compelling power — found in his government alone. So the angels did not understand this — that Satan's principles were those of force. Principles corollary to force include: pride, selfishness, self-preservation, externalism, desire to control others, deception, compulsion, arbitrariness, unreasoning/unthinking obedience (equals legal compliance), command-response based on power, claims without evidence, power-based authority, detestation, taunt, murder, and open rebellion.

*It was God's purpose to place things on an eternal basis of security, and in the councils of heaven it was decided that time must be given for Satan to develop the principles which were at the foundation of his system of government. **He had claimed that these were superior to God's principles.** Time was given for the working of Satan's principles, that they might be seen by the heavenly universe. (759)*

God's solution to the Great Controversy was not to punish evildoers or to instantly destroy them. Time, development, demonstration, evidence — all are components of God's government based on truth and love.

Elsewhere Ellen White writes:

*The discord which his own course had caused in Heaven, Satan charged upon the law and government of God. All evil he declared to be the **result of the divine administration.** He claimed that it was his own object to **improve upon the statutes of Jehovah.** Therefore it was necessary that he should demonstrate the nature of his claims, and **show the working out of his proposed changes in the divine law.** His own work must condemn him. Satan had claimed from the first that he was not in rebellion. The whole universe must see the deceiver unmasked. GC (1888) 498*

The fact that God decided that Satan's "own work must condemn him" reinforces the fact that "God's government is moral, and truth and love are to be

the prevailing power” and that His method is “presentation” of evidence not the enforcement of His principles.

This paragraph means we could and should study history as the outworking of Satan’s way of improving upon God’s government and changing His law of love. We should look at the origins of His government as having begun with the rise of Sumero-Babylonian ways of governance through kingly power, a legal system, and economics. Then we may see how these work out in the Medo-Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman Empires. We may study them in the rise of Roman Christianity, the Crusades, the Inquisition, and in the conflicts between Lutherans and the Anabaptists or between Calvinists and other stepchildren of the Reformation. We may then note how violence ends in the Mennonite tradition when it rejects legal atonement.¹ Then we should follow Satan’s principles as they are carried out in the other extremes of atheism and rejection of God: Napoleon, the French Revolution, Hitler, Communism, and many, many other nations of oppression. Central to it all is Jesus, the only fully innocent victim ever, hanging from a Roman cross, while Satan and his followers seek to end His life—the life of Satan’s own Creator.

Satan led men into sin, and the plan of redemption was put in operation. For four thousand years, Christ was working for man’s uplifting, and Satan for his ruin and degradation. And the heavenly universe beheld it all.

Primarily, Satan accomplished his degradation of humanity through idolatry—false representations and portrayals of God. But eventually, God’s own people were cured of worshiping idols, coming instead to worship the law and turning God into a stern, forbidding King who was ready to punish any who broke any of their man-made rules. It was their preoccupation with an external, legal religion that led those of Christ’s day to crucify Him.

When Jesus came into the world, Satan’s power was turned against Him. From the time when He appeared as a babe in Bethlehem, the usurper worked to bring about His destruction. In every possible way he sought to prevent Jesus from developing a perfect childhood, a faultless manhood, a holy ministry, and an unblemished sacrifice. But he was defeated. He could not lead Jesus into sin. He could not discourage Him, or drive Him from a work He had come on earth to do. From the desert to Calvary, the

¹ See J. Denny Weaver, *Keeping Salvation Ethical: Mennonite and Amish Atonement Theology in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Studies in Anabaptist and Mennonite History 35; Scottdale, Penn.: Herald Press, 1997).

storm of Satan's wrath beat upon Him, but the more mercilessly it fell, the more firmly did the Son of God cling to the hand of His Father, and press on in the bloodstained path. All the efforts of Satan to oppress and overcome Him only brought out in a purer light His spotless character. (759)

If Satan's principles are of force, then his goal must be to prove that force works to accomplish its end, that the only way one will comply perfectly with divine law is through externally applied pressure. Therefore, Jesus was exhibit A in the universe to determine whether or not Satan was right. Was there no perfect obedience apart from force? Even more importantly, could there be perfect obedience to God through internal assimilation of divine principles of love and mercy even while force was applied? Or would Satan be the only one to gain perfect obedience (compliance) through force? Had Jesus failed and given in to Satan in the least, the entire great controversy would have ended—and Satan and his principles of force would have been supreme.

In an even larger setting, this is a statement about the Incarnation. Everything was at risk here, for if Jesus surrendered to any of Satan's principles of force—if He tried to force Himself to hold firm instead of merely trusting His Father, if He in any way acceded to arbitrary measures—Satan would have proven that God's character, laws, and government should, in reality, be built upon these principles and not on goodness, mercy, and love. The very nature of God Himself was at risk in Jesus, for Satan would have "proved" that his principles were superior to God's. Instead, because Satan vented his worst on Jesus, and because Jesus was truly innocent and sinless, it became completely clear to the universe that force was very, very evil and heinous.

*All heaven and the unfallen worlds had been witnesses to the controversy. With what intense interest did they follow the closing scenes of the conflict. They beheld the Saviour enter the garden of Gethsemane, His soul bowed down with the horror of a great darkness. They heard His bitter cry, "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me." Matt. 26:39. As the Father's presence was withdrawn, they saw Him sorrowful with a bitterness of sorrow **exceeding** that of the last great struggle with death. The bloody sweat was forced from His pores, and fell in drops upon the ground. Thrice the prayer for deliverance was wrung from His lips. Heaven could no longer endure the sight, and a messenger of comfort was sent to the Son of God. (759, 760)*

Keeping in mind that Jesus died from a broken heart (see *The Desire of Ages*, 753, 754), this means that Jesus experienced most of the final death in Gethsemane. Apparently, the angels were getting the full load of Satan's unmasking then and there and that's why an angel could be sent to strengthen Him. If this hadn't happened, Jesus would have died there before the cross.

Thus sin and its consequences are a chiefly emotional experience. It cannot be otherwise since sin is the offspring of Satan's administration of force. When one experiences force, one experiences the opposite of truth and love, and thus a violation of one's personhood and well-being. This makes the experience emotional, veering a person away from "an intelligent appreciation" of God's character (*The Great Controversy*, 493) that creates a balance between cognitive and emotional intelligence.

Heaven beheld the Victim betrayed into the hand of the murderous mob, and with mockery and violence hurried from one tribunal to another. It heard the sneers of His persecutors because of His lowly birth. It heard the denial with cursing and swearing by one of His best-beloved disciples. It saw the frenzied work of Satan, and his power over the hearts of men. Oh, fearful scene! the Saviour seized at midnight in Gethsemane, dragged to and fro from palace to judgment hall, arraigned twice before the priests, twice before the Sanhedrin, twice before Pilate, and once before Herod, mocked, scourged, condemned, and led out to be crucified, bearing the heavy burden of the cross, amid the wailing of the daughters of Jerusalem and the jeering of the rabble. (760)

Note the interplay of all the systems of law and justice devised by Satan. This is the ultimate culmination of the legal systems (invented by Satan through the Mesopotamians) working to try to force Christ and His followers into line. Jesus is repeatedly on trial before Jewish law, before Roman law, before a king, before a governor (all parts of the ancient systems of force). And violence is everywhere. All of Satan's forces and systems are unleashed in an effort to break His will and force Him to surrender to his principles. What makes Jesus' sufferings here so important and salvific is that He is not a legalist. Never once in His life has He by thought, word, or deed given into Satan's claims for his improved system of force. Even more importantly, Jesus is God. Now Satan has his chance to get to God as a victim so that He can try to turn God into the abuser and legalist Satan himself is.

[Now I understand more fully why God must stand by so often when His children are oppressed. For Him to intervene on a regular basis is to participate in the principles of Satan. Occasionally He has intervened (flood, Korah, etc.), but

this is not done to control people, but to remove the controllers so that people can be free. He can uplift, sustain, comfort, heal, restore, and so forth, but He will not use force against force. Take Hitler, for example; and here's where I depart from Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Think how easily God could have thwarted Hitler (just read his biography) time after time. But God does not do this. Once again, Hitler is an exhibit before the universe that force and oppression self-destruct.]

Heaven viewed with grief and amazement Christ hanging upon the cross, blood flowing from His wounded temples, and sweat tinged with blood standing upon His brow. From His hands and feet the blood fell, drop by drop, upon the rock drilled for the foot of the cross. The wounds made by the nails gaped as the weight of His body dragged upon His hands. His labored breath grew quick and deep, as His soul panted under the burden of the sins of the world. All heaven was filled with wonder when the prayer of Christ was offered in the midst of His terrible suffering,-- "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." Luke 23:34. Yet there stood men, formed in the image of God, joining to crush out the life of His only-begotten Son. What a sight for the heavenly universe! (760)

Amidst the hell of Satan's principles pounding on Jesus (Satan's shortened version of eternal torture), Jesus does not in His humanity, nor does He in His divinity forget to demonstrate the principles of His government: He forgives, forgives those who have made Satan's principles their own, forgives them while He suffers their abuse! Nothing could be clearer to us all (angel and human) that God does not use or submit to force.

The principalities and powers of darkness were assembled around the cross, casting the hellish shadow of unbelief into the hearts of men. the Lord created these beings to stand before His throne, they were beautiful and glorious. Their loveliness and holiness were in accordance with their exalted station. They were enriched with the wisdom of God, and girded with the panoply of heaven. They were Jehovah's ministers. But who could recognize in the fallen angels the glorious seraphim that once ministered in the heavenly courts? (760)

They once had the law of love written in their hearts and were eager to serve others. But they exchanged that for external measures that compensated for the hollowness of mind they now had, bereft of the love of God. Apart from the dynamic principle of divine love in the heart ("We love because he first loved us" 1 John 4:19), any of God's creatures will be left with only attempts to power. We

seek power to the extent that we are bereft of love. No wonder so many Christians are frustrated in trying to overcome sin—because they seek God’s *power* to overcome instead of intelligently responding to His *love* and coming to *trust* Him.

Satanic agencies confederated with evil men in leading the people to believe Christ the chief of sinners, and to make Him the object of detestation. Those who mocked Christ as He hung upon the cross were imbued with the spirit of the first great rebel. He filled them with vile and loathsome speeches. He inspired their taunts. But by all this he gained nothing. (760, 761)

This is how a legal religion ultimately leads people to treat sinners (see pp. 3:1 and 5:5ff.). And in the legal system Satan had inspired, Jesus was the chief of sinners. He would not obey the rules; He did not do right because He had to or was obligated to. Instead love shone out of Him from within; it was His very nature. But all his attempts to make Jesus obey or surrender to his principles failed. God is not like that; Jesus as a human being was not like that. And human beings don’t have to be like that either.

Could one sin have been found in Christ, had He in one particular yielded to Satan to escape the terrible torture, the enemy of God and man would have triumphed. Christ bowed His head and died, but He held fast His faith and His submission to God. "And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night." Rev. 12:10. (761)

So Satan tried to torture Jesus into submission to his legal system of arbitrary obedience. If Jesus had had one sin in Him, He would have sought escape from it through a legal means and thus would have yielded to Satan. Had He gotten angry with His enemies, or simply indulged in self-pity instead of thinking with pity for His enemies, Satan would have triumphed. And what makes this all so incredible is that all the while He hung from the cross, He suffered the loss of the sense of God’s loving presence. It *seemed* to Him that God was angry with Him, that He was indeed the way Satan had made Him out to be (see *DA* 753). It was in this setting that Jesus died victorious, submitting only to the sovereignty of divine love. He would not submit or obey the king of force.

*Satan saw that his disguise was torn away. His **administration** was*

laid open before the unfallen angels and before the heavenly universe. He had revealed himself as a murderer. By shedding the blood of the Son of God, he had uprooted himself from the sympathies of the heavenly beings. Henceforth his work was restricted. Whatever attitude he might assume, he could no longer await the angels as they came from the heavenly courts, and before them accuse Christ's brethren of being clothed with the garments of blackness and the defilement of sin. The last link of sympathy between Satan and the heavenly world was broken. (761)

Thus Satan's administration was exposed, not as an improvement upon God's administration, but as a totally immoral and false system. A legal religion is an immoral one because it opposes the dynamic, descriptive law of love in which we love only because God first loved us. It purports to be moral, righteous, and holy, but when faced with love, it becomes demonically evil.

Satan's administration was laid open to the universe when he murdered Christ. And he murdered Him by using the systems of force—legal and kingly power—that he himself had inspired through human beings. These systems, in both the Jewish nation and Roman empire, were used against Jesus. The darker elements of appeasement through human sacrifice are echoed by Caiaphas: "It is better for you to have one man die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed" (John 11:50, NRSV). This would be how Satan's *administration* was exposed, because they were able from Gethsemane to the tomb, to see the final results of Satan's regime of sin, and this included the results of the legal and kingly models, the very essence of his administration and thus of sin itself. At the cross the loyal universe saw the two systems of government—love and truth versus force laid wide open in stark contrast.

Yet Satan was not then destroyed. The angels did not even then understand all that was involved in the great controversy. The principles at stake were to be more fully revealed. And for the sake of man, Satan's existence must be continued. Man as well as angels must see the contrast between the Prince of light and the prince of darkness. He must choose whom he will serve. (761)

Do we understand now all that is involved? How can we, when we're so close to sin that we can't see its forest for its trees? How can we, when even angels who have watched it all develop, still do not fully understand? If the principles at stake were to be more fully revealed than they were at the cross, then all the horrors seen in our world since Jesus' death are but a part of their unveiling.

Greater understanding has also taken place in the world of the principles of love and truth. However, more is to be revealed.

Is it possible that the fullest revelation of these principles (on both sides of the great controversy) is to take place before Jesus comes? And would not that fullest revelation naturally lead to the fullest choice? Is it possible that it is this that enables both sides (good and evil) to become fully mature (perfect)?

In the opening of the great controversy, Satan had declared that the law of God could not be obeyed, that justice was inconsistent with mercy, and that, should the law be broken, it would be impossible for the sinner to be pardoned. Every sin must meet its punishment, urged Satan; and if God should remit the punishment of sin, He would not be a God of truth and justice. When men broke the law of God, and defied His will, Satan exulted. It was proved, he declared, that the law could not be obeyed; man could not be forgiven. Because he, after his rebellion, had been banished from heaven, Satan claimed that the human race must be forever shut out from God's favor. God could not be just, he urged, and yet show mercy to the sinner. (761)

Satan claimed that God's law could not be obeyed. Such a claim would have to be based on legal reasoning, since the heart of God's law is love, and we love because He first loved us. (The only other way it could be true is if God does not really love—since it is His love that begets love in others.) Love is by its very nature experiential; it cannot be commanded, only won by love. Thus the law by its very nature is dynamic and descriptive, not legal.

“Justice was inconsistent with mercy” and “every sin must meet its punishment.” Satan viewed descriptive law as inflexible: cause would inevitably be followed by effect. This only works with a slight twist, the twist that Satan invented—that descriptive law is arbitrary. The law of God is the law of love and love is dynamic, living because God is its source. Descriptive law does not operate by itself; God is the basis and means by which it works. Since it is not arbitrary but dynamic, God in His love can either permit sin to reap its results, thus lovingly respecting the choice of its victims or He can in love restrict those same consequences in those who choose to respond in trust to His love.

In his effort to prove that God's law and government were indeed arbitrary, Satan twisted the meaning of mercy and justice. They became split from each other with love becoming sentimentalism and justice becoming legal retribution. The words—“God could not be just, . . . and show mercy to the sinner”—is a sentiment of many forensic theologians: God cannot forgive without exercising justice by executing the penalty for sin, so Jesus' death was God exercising His

justice so that we could be forgiven. This, then, brings mercy into legal conformity to justice, thus avoiding a sentimental view of it. Of course, Satan went beyond this in his declaration, but the premise comes from the same kind of thinking.

*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. (The Desire of Ages, 22)*

In the dynamic and descriptive law of love, we are brought to love, won to love, and transformed by love. This is not sentimentalism but the pure and holy love of God. Not only is this how perfect beings keep the law, this is how imperfect beings maybe healed and restored to keep the law. Love is not merely an abstract, objective concept; it requires a Person and a dynamic Source (God) to embody it, generate it, and keep it alive and creating love in other people. Love cannot exist apart from the God who is love (1 John 4:8, 16). Thus we cannot force ourselves or even “work harder” to obey. We obey because we are loved and because we are loved we love God supremely and our neighbors as ourselves.

But since Satan was the first to bring up the notion of God's love as law (MB 106), it must be that he saw love merely as a legal principle and thus reasoned that no one could keep all of the rules for loving others perfectly—a sentiment expressed by many today. And it is true: unless we allow God's love in our hearts to work its work of transformation, we cannot love others., for we can only love to the extent that we are loved.

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.” Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing, 109),

For this reason, Jesus came to live a perfect life, to weave the robe of His kind of righteousness (dynamic, living love), without “one thread of human devising” (Christ's Object Lesson, 311). That is, He came not just to live a perfect life, but to reveal by the way He lived *how* obedience was possible—by responding in love

to the love of God revealed in Christ; to show us what obedience really is— internal harmony with God’s character; and thus to prove that it was never a legal or arbitrated, and thus forced, compliance. In Satan’s administration, it is impossible to obey apart from force and fear. In his construction of obedience, we are not won, but obey because we’re told to. We do not obey because we see intelligently the good sense of God’s ways and because we delight in His love, and thus His law of love, but because of God’s authority (cf. DA 22 above). Satan’s model leads to a performance of “obedience” without the heart and without the healing agency of God’s love shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. Satan’s kind of obedience is not really obedience but merely compliance, and mere compliance is a product of compelling power.

But even as a sinner, man was in a different position from that of Satan. Lucifer in heaven had sinned in the light of God’s glory. To him as to no other created being was given a revelation of God’s love. Understanding the character of God, knowing His goodness, Satan chose to follow his own selfish, independent will. This choice was final. There was no more that God could do to save him. But man was deceived; his mind was darkened by Satan’s sophistry. The height and depth of the love of God he did not know. For him there was hope in a knowledge of God’s love. By beholding His character he might be drawn back to God. (761-762)

By shifting from Satan’s claims about divine justice and mercy to the real situation of humankind (deception), Ellen White changes the paradigm from legal (Satan’s claims) to experiential (God’s plan). Experience is the stuff of the Hebrew Bible and even things legal were anciently rooted in experience. Experience is also the stuff of the natural world and natural law. It is in this latter context that she can say that human beings might be saved through a knowledge of God’s love. To argue that, because human experience differed from Satan’s experience, the outcome is therefore different, is to set the issues in the context of cause-and-effect (descriptive) relationships rather than legal (prescriptive) relationships. If human beings are deceived about God and can, through a revelation of the truth about Him, be won back to love and trust in Him, whereas Satan had made a final choice in the face of knowing fully that truth, then the paradigm is clearly a cause-effect one where because the conditions change, the outcome changes also. Thus, without using these terms, Ellen White shows that Satan’s claims came from his legal paradigm while God’s claims operate within a descriptive paradigm.

Through Jesus, God's mercy was manifested to men; but mercy does not set aside justice. The law reveals the attributes of God's character, and not a jot or tittle of it could be changed to meet man in his fallen condition. God did not change His law, but He sacrificed Himself, in Christ, for man's redemption. "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself." 2 Cor. 5:19. (762)

This is further clarified in this paragraph. If the divine law were a legal entity, it could be changed. In legal systems, laws are changed all the time because they operate through enforcement. Where the use of law is controlled by external powers through some use of force, then those same powers can change those laws. Even in the Persian Empire where the king made "unalterable decrees," decrees could be established to offset those decrees.² But if the law of God is *moral* and thus is built upon non-force, descriptive principles of how things work, in cause-and-effect relationships that are eternal, then such law cannot be changed. Without force being an ingredient in law, the only way it can operate is through inevitable and inherent consequences (cause-effect).

The law requires righteousness,—a righteous life, a perfect character; and man has not to give. He cannot meet the claims of God's holy law. But Christ, coming to the earth as man, lived a holy life, and developed a perfect character. These He offers as a free gift to all who will receive them. His life stands for the life of men. Thus they have remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God. More than this, Christ imbues men with the attributes of God. He builds up the human character after the similitude of the divine character, a goodly fabric of spiritual strength and beauty. Thus the very righteousness of the law is fulfilled in the believer in Christ. God can "be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus." Rom. 3:26. (762)

See page 11 above. Jesus' offer of a perfect life is not a legal transaction. It is real and experiential. Jesus showed us *how* we can live a perfect life—not through forcing ourselves to obey God's arbitrary laws, but through coming to know God and to trust Him, which allows Him access to our minds to transform our characters. Part of that transformation is to move from Satan's legal paradigm to God's paradigm of truth and love. Thus the way the universe has always lived

² See Esther 8:5-8 and note these comments: "A new law is written to offset the old law." (*The Jewish Study Bible*, 1635.

and loved is the way God is to reclaim us to live and love again: “we love because He first loved us.”

Note that she quotes the Bible to the effect that we have remission of sin “through the forbearance [equals patience] of God.” It is God who forgives through His patience, an attribute of His love, not through having been bought off by a legally imposed penalty. Christ’s life stands for our life, not arbitrarily nor in a legal sense, but in an experiential way. Jesus perfectly obeyed the law of love—that is, was loving, kind, considerate, truthful, honest, pure, and thus holy. He did this where we failed—and became unloving, unkind, inconsiderate, dishonest, untrustworthy, impure, and unholy. Since Jesus exhibited as a human being how to obey—by relying on His Father’s love, receiving it into His life through prayer and the study of His Word, and through ministering it to others—He demonstrated what we may become through His Spirit and grace by the same means. The evidence of this truth is what allows our redemption to continue. (Remember, God’s government is based upon demonstration of evidence, not enforcement or compelling power of any kind.)

God’s love has been expressed in His justice no less than in His mercy. Justice is the foundation of His throne, and the fruit of His love. It had been Satan’s purpose to divorce mercy from truth and justice. He sought to prove that the righteousness of God’s law is an enemy to peace. But Christ shows that in God’s plan they are indissolubly joined together; the one cannot exist without the other. “Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other.” Ps. 85:10. (762)

God’s love is both justice and mercy, with justice “the foundation of His throne and the fruit of His love.” Satan tried to divorce mercy from justice. Did he seek to prove what forensic theologians believe—that mercy and justice are in conflict and that God can only show mercy if He vents His anger on (Himself in) His Son?³ She goes on to say—not that Christ’s death made a reconciliation between justice and mercy, but rather that His death proved what was already true: “God’s justice did not destroy His mercy.” This only works if mercy and justice are in harmony with each other and that is only possible if God’s justice is built upon the moral law of cause-effect relationships. Thus if human conditions were to change and through the revelation of God’s character, they were won back into a harmonious relationship with God of love and trust and thus obedience, then the effect would be that God could heal them from sin. The idea is that the

³ J. W. Stott (*The Cross of Christ* [Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1986], 124) contends that God did this to Himself in Christ.

revelation of the truth about God, through the death of Christ, would be so complete that all could intelligently make up their minds for or against God just as the angels had to in the very beginning when rebellion first occurred.

By His life and His death, Christ proved that God's justice did not destroy His mercy, but that sin could be forgiven, and that the law is righteous, and can be perfectly obeyed. Satan's charges were refuted. God had given man unmistakable evidence of His love. (762)

By His life and death, Jesus established that God's law is rooted in intrinsic consequences. His death also revealed that the nature of God is love and that love is experiential and rooted in cause-effect, and thus God's love can effect great change in people. God could and did win people to love and trust Him so that He could heal them from sin. Thus justice and mercy are totally blended, since justice is but letting people go to their choice and its consequences while forgiveness is letting go of the sins of sinners. The variable in the process here is not God, but the choice of the sinner.

Another deception was now to be brought forward. Satan declared that mercy destroyed justice, that the death of Christ abrogated the Father's law. Had it been possible for the law to be changed or abrogated, then Christ need not have died. But to abrogate the law would be to immortalize transgression, and place the world under Satan's control. It was because the law was changeless, because man could be saved only through obedience to its precepts, that Jesus was lifted up on the cross. Yet the very means by which Christ established the law Satan represented as destroying it. Here will come the last conflict of the great controversy between Christ and Satan. (762-763)

Satan now brought forward the converse charge—that mercy set aside justice and that Jesus' death changed God's law. Once again, this only works in a forensic system because in that system the law is externally enforced by arbitrary punishment. Jesus' death therefore allows for a change in God's law because it fulfilled that punishment. By contrast, in the non-legal system of divine love, Jesus' death, as the pivotal experience, only *demonstrates* the truth about the way God's nature and government work and actually shows that to live out of harmony with divine love is death.⁴ In this construct, His death does not change anything except human hearts who are won back to God by seeing the truth

⁴ Keep in mind: "the presentation of these principles is the means to be used" (759).

about Him. Because Jesus' death showed that death is "the inevitable consequences of sin" (764), the law of love is vindicated and shown to be irrevocable and unchanging. But in a legal construct God struggles between justice and mercy and wrestles with whether sinners should be punished with death or forgiven. The atonement in this construct reconciles God's justice and mercy and thus effects a change in God's way of dealing with sinners. Though theologians do not state this necessarily, the atonement effects a change in God's character. And if God's character can be changed, surely so could His law.

That the law which was spoken by God's own voice is faulty, that some specification has been set aside, is the claim which Satan now puts forward. It is the last great deception that he will bring upon the world. He needs not to assail the whole law; if he can lead men to disregard one precept, his purpose is gained. For "whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all." James 2:10. By consenting to break one precept, men are brought under Satan's power. By substituting human law for God's law, Satan will seek to control the world. This work is foretold in prophecy. Of the great apostate power which is the representative of Satan, it is declared, "He shall speak great words against the Most High, and shall wear out the saints of the Most High, and think to change times and laws: and they shall be given into his hand." Dan. 7:25. (763)

"By consenting to break one precept, men are brought under Satan's power." Satan's power is that of force; so is sin. Sin is violation of who we were made to be and do and by sinning we do violence to ourselves and to others because we are going contrary to how we were made to be. Sin inevitably leads to death and thus it is completely alien to the ways and character of God. By choosing to annul one of the ten laws of love, sinners separate themselves from the God of love. "By substituting human law for God's law, Satan will seek to control the world." By substituting the legal paradigm for the moral (descriptive, cause-effect) paradigm, Satan will be able to control the world. Now we're back to

Compelling power is found only under Satan's government. The Lord's principles are not of this order. His authority rests upon goodness, mercy, and love, and the presentation of these principles is the means to be used. God's government is moral, and truth and love are to be the prevailing power. (758)

It is not surprising that the commandment Satan attacks is the one portion of the Decalogue that is the most descriptive in nature and forms its core because it contains the divine insignia of God as the Creator of all. The Sabbath clearly belongs to descriptive law because it is “wholly commemorative” (PP 48), and stands as a memorial in time of God’s work as Creator and Redeemer. Just as God created the natural world to operate on descriptive laws, so His very nature operates by such law, and natural law is but a limited illustration of God’s moral laws. Furthermore, the Sabbath commandment is, at its heart, a law of freedom and equal rights—something to be extended to all creation. Thus it is descriptive time, hailing these two principles as the foundation of God’s system of governance, and highlighting the fact that God is not a God of force.

By assailing the Sabbath, Satan attempted to entrench humanity in his legal system of governance. He first tried with the Chosen People to bind the Sabbath by arbitrary rules that subverted its descriptive nature and turned it into a legalistic burden. When Jesus rested in the tomb over the Sabbath, in commemoration of His vindication of God’s character at the cross, Satan schemed to further his hatred for Sabbath and its meaning. By persecuting the Jews, he persuaded early Christians to leave behind any Jewish identification, and thus the Sabbath. Then he turned the Christians toward the day that was tied to the sun. The Romans borrowed sun worship from the Babylonians, turning it into Sol Invictus. But the Babylonians had viewed the sun as the god of law and justice. On the stela of Hammurabi’s Laws is a picture of Shamash, the sun god handing to the king the insignia of justice from which he issued his laws. This distant legal tie would eventually be revisited when Constantine legislated a form of Sunday veneration.

At the end of time, as the Sabbath is proclaimed more fully, and “the knowledge of the Lord covers the earth as the waters cover the sea,” the two systems—the legal (Satan’s) and the moral (God’s)—will stand face to face in opposition with unparalleled clarity. Then the Sabbath will be vindicated as the day God set apart as holy to lift human beings out of the economic model that undergirds (historically and currently) all the legal systems of time. Those who keep the seventh-day Sabbath will do so not because of a legal command from God but despite the legal commands of human beings with power—just as Jesus withstood Satan’s attempts to break down His barriers to the use of force. The only way they will be able to remain firm is if they understandingly have the moral law with its constructs of freedom, love, and trust firmly engraved in their understanding.

*Men will surely set up their laws to **counterwork** the laws of God.*

*They will seek to **compel** the consciences of others, and in their zeal to **enforce** these laws they will **oppress** their fellow men. (763)*

Thus it will become clear that the legal model—with its imposed, arbitrary penalties—is a system of force. This was shown in the Middle Ages when, not long after Anselm of Canterbury wrote *Cur Deus Homo* (his satisfaction theory of the atonement that is one of the ancestors of the modern forensic model of atonement), the Inquisition was established to deal with heretics. In the Middle Ages people lacked a construct that would enable them to perceive fully the truth about God and the nature of His law and the consequences of sin. But since the Enlightenment, with the development of science, cause-effect relationships can be better understood as not manipulated or arbitrated by God. At the end of time, then, the Sabbath will become the banner for the picture of God outlined in this chapter. The two systems—legal and moral—will each bear its own fruit. The principles of force, arbitrariness, imposed externalism and penalty will stand in contrast to the principles of truth and love.

The warfare against God's law, which was begun in heaven, will be continued until the end of time. Every man will be tested. Obedience or disobedience is the question to be decided by the whole world. All will be called to choose between the law of God and the laws of men. Here the dividing line will be drawn. There will be but two classes. Every character will be fully developed; and all will show whether they have chosen the side of loyalty or that of rebellion. (763)

“Obedience or disobedience is the question to be decided by the whole world.” In light of the truth about God, the nature of His governance, what else could be the final test? The truth will be so clear about the kind of obedience God wants, and the opposition so fully ripe, that the nature of the two governments/systems will be fully clear. In terms of how we may see it, it will be the issue of obedience to God's freedom-giving, transforming truth and love versus obedience to an arbitrary man-made system devised by the master-mind of evil. A religion of fear leads to rebellion while those afraid force themselves to obey. The issue, then, is performance or compliance versus character development. “Every character will be fully developed.” This can only take place when the two systems—legal and moral—are fully realized at the end of their developments.

Then the end will come. God will vindicate His law and deliver His people. Satan and all who have joined him in rebellion will be cut off. Sin and sinners will perish, root and branch, (Mal. 4:1),--Satan the

root, and his followers the branches. The word will be fulfilled to the prince of evil, "Because thou hast set thine heart as the heart of God; . . . I will destroy thee, O covering cherub, from the midst of the stones of fire. . . . Thou shalt be a terror, and never shalt thou be any more." Then "the wicked shall not be: yea, thou shalt diligently consider his place, and it shall not be;" "they shall be as though they had not been." Ezek. 28:6-19; Ps. 37:10; Obadiah 16. (763)

Now Ellen White takes a flying leap over the second coming and the millennium to the very end of the great controversy. Her explanation of the death of the wicked will be the clinching point for her attempt to contrast the two sides in the conflict. It is obvious that she is about to clarify fully the issues at stake in her explanation of why Jesus had to die. She starts by using the verb "perish" to describe the death of the wicked instead of the word "destroy."⁵ Next she states:

This is not an act of arbitrary power on the part of God. The rejecters of His mercy reap that which they have sown. God is the fountain of life; and when one chooses the service of sin, he separates from God, and thus cuts himself off from life. He is "alienated from the life of God." Christ says, "All they that hate Me love death." Eph. 4:18; Prov. 8:36. God gives them existence for a time that they may develop their character and reveal their principles. This accomplished, they receive the results of their own choice. By a life of rebellion, Satan and all who unite with him place themselves so out of harmony with God that His very presence is to them a consuming fire. The glory of Him who is love will destroy them. (764)

Every word of this paragraph is significant to the issues at hand. They recall the paragraph on p. 759, where she describes Satan's government as one of "compelling power" and God's authority as resting "on goodness, mercy, and love." Obviously, God does not compel the wicked to die. "This is **not** an act of **arbitrary power** on the **part** of **God**. That is to say that the final destruction of the wicked is not part of Satan's methods of action, but is in harmony with God's principles of goodness, mercy, and love.

The perishing of the wicked is not an act of holding on to the wicked against their will. It will therefore not be seen by the wicked as an act of mercy that still holds out, longing for the return of the sinner. In fact, the wicked will see that

⁵ Cf. John 3:16 where "perish" is used. In the Greek, this verb has the middle voice and thus might better be translated, "destroy themselves." (I owe this reading to my father.) Hence John 3:16 would read, "that whoever trusts in Him might not destroy themselves but have eternal life."

“receiving the results of their own choice” is less merciful than dying by divine euthanasia. The perishing of the wicked will be divine wrath (equals giving them up to their choice; see Rom. 1:18-28) unmixed (Rev. 14:10), usually understood to be undiluted with mercy. Why? “The **rejecters of His mercy** reap that which they have sown.” They have rejected mercy, thus cutting themselves off from it. So God lets them have their own way. “They receive the **results** of their own choice.”

Were God to perform euthanasia and simply lay them to sleep, Satan would demand entrance into heaven because now God is really like Him—arbitrary and operating in a legal sphere of imposed penalty. Furthermore, if cause-effect relationships do not play out fully, then the very basis of security—the orderly way in which God runs the universe—is no longer in effect, nor is it valid. God would have abrogated the very foundation principle of His law and thus destroyed the foundation of His throne, justice (762). This is not arbitrary; running the universe on anything less than cause-effect relationships is arbitrariness. Furthermore, without the full unmitigated results of sin, how would the loyal universe ever really know what sin actually does to sinners? It is this in part that enables them eternally to loathe sin and to love the God who only seeks to save, not to destroy.

Ellen White goes on to describe how this works. “God is the fountain of life; and when one chooses the service of sin, he separates from God and thus **cuts himself off** from life.” This means that mercy is less cause-effect than justice because God in mercy has been keeping us alive by suspending cause-effect for many centuries. But mercy is not thereby arbitrary, because within moral cause-effect relationships, people who are deceived and can be undeceived, are to be given time to see the light (cf. p. 762). “God gives them existence for a time that they may develop their character and reveal their principles.” Each person in their life will reveal either the principles of force or the principles of truth and love. “This accomplished, they receive their own choice” (764). The word *results* says it all. It is a word that most naturally fits cause-effect relationships.

Sin is whatever is contrary to the principles of truth, goodness, mercy, and love. Love is life and anti-love is death. When God revealed to Moses His glory, He made all His *goodness* pass before him and proclaimed His name (His character) to be full of graciousness, mercy, goodness, and truth. Yes, He will be no means clear the guilty, but will allow them the consequences of their choice.⁶ Yet Moses could not see God’s face and live. In ancient Near Eastern perceptions, seeing someone face to face was equivalent to seeing their favor or mercy. Moses

⁶ The word “visit” in the Hebrew means many things, including to “administer, look at, see to something, pass in review, muster, instruct, command, call to account,” etc. Thus it is a word very open to the biases of readers.

could only endure seeing God's backside, His turning away, His wrath. Because sinners reject God's mercy, seeing God's merciful face results in death. "By a life of rebellion, Satan and all who unite with him place themselves so out of harmony with God that His very presence is to them a consuming fire. The glory of Him who is love will destroy them." Note that Ellen White puts love and glory together as a whole. Clearly she is speaking in terms of cause-and-effect. The variable in the formula is human, not divine. Sin is a problem with *us*, not with God. Sin itself is lethal, not God. We are the ones who leave Him, who cut ourselves off from Him, who place ourselves out of harmony with His glory. We are the ones who are hostile and afraid of Him. Yes, God hates sin—because sin destroys those whom He loves, because sin is alien to love and thus to His character.

At the beginning of the great controversy, the angels did not understand this. Had Satan and his host then been left to reap the full result of their sin, they would have perished; but it would not have been apparent to heavenly beings that this was the inevitable result of sin. A doubt of God's goodness would have remained in their minds as evil seed, to produce its deadly fruit of sin and woe. (764)

What didn't the angels understand at the beginning of the great controversy? "Had Satan and his host then been left to reap the full result of their sin [equals cause-effect], they would have perished," —not they would have been destroyed—"but it would not have been apparent to heavenly beings that this was the **inevitable result of sin.**" The question of sin—whether it leads to inevitable consequences or an imposed penalty by God—is the core problem in the great controversy. This is why Jesus had to die. The stronghold and core of the legal model, that makes it viable, is imposed penalty. This is partly what makes it "legal" as opposed to "moral" and "spiritual." In a legal system, law enforcement has to *enforce* the penalty arbitrarily and externally; in God's moral system, punishment is "the **inevitable result** of sin."

To put her statement in other words, had God chosen to let Satan and his followers suffer the "inevitable results" of their rebellion immediately, they would have suffered the final death then and there. But that death would have been seen by some throughout God's universe as divine execution, and thus as an imposed penalty. It would not have been clear to those watching that it was **inevitable** consequences. "A doubt of God's goodness would have remained in their minds as evil seed, to produce its deadly fruit of sin and woe." Because of Satan's charge—"You will not surely die"—God had to make it clear that *sin* leads to death. Thus Jesus had to die because only One perfectly innocent, who

was a created *mortal*, could make it clear. And everything depended on Jesus' words on the cross about what He was experiencing. If He cried out, "My God, my God, why are You killing me?" the great controversy would have been lost to Satan. This explains why Jesus struggled in His mind over God's character on the cross.

Upon Christ as our substitute and surety was laid the iniquity of us all. He was counted a transgressor, that He might redeem us from the condemnation of the law. The guilt of every descendant of Adam was pressing upon His heart. The wrath of God against sin, the terrible manifestation of His displeasure because of iniquity, filled the soul of His Son with consternation. All His life Christ had been publishing to a fallen world the good news of the Father's mercy and pardoning love. Salvation for the chief of sinners was His theme. But now with the terrible weight of guilt He bears, He cannot see the Father's reconciling face. The withdrawal of the divine countenance from the Saviour in this hour of supreme anguish pierced His heart with a sorrow that can never be fully understood by man. So great was this agony that His physical pain was hardly felt.

Satan with his fierce temptations wrung the heart of Jesus. The Saviour could not see through the portals of the tomb. Hope did not present to Him His coming forth from the grave a conqueror, or tell Him of the Father's acceptance of the sacrifice. He feared that sin was so offensive to God that Their separation was to be eternal. Christ felt the anguish which the sinner will feel when mercy shall no longer plead for the guilty race. It was the sense of sin, bringing the Father's wrath upon Him as man's substitute, that made the cup He drank so bitter, and broke the heart of the Son of God. (753)

Jesus' substitution was necessary to reveal the truth about the nature of sin and its results. It was "penal" substitution only in the moral sense, not in the legal sense. As sin bearer, He revealed the truth about what sin does to one wholly given over to it. He felt sin's weight, its guilt, and the wrath of God, which was "the withdrawal of the divine countenance" (753) and "the hiding of His Father's face" (ST April 14, 1898). Everyone's guilt was pressing on Him—the natural consequences of the full experience of sin. Satan used the opportunity to tempt Jesus to believe that God's wrath against sin was so terrible that Jesus would never see His reconciling face again. Jesus experienced the absence of love—all of the attributes of Satan. In this case, He must have had a strong sense of Satan's

portrayal of God — “divine” arbitrariness, force, malignancy, cruelty, anger, fury, condemnation, and compelling power. In the absence of His Father’s presence of love, He no doubt was tempted to believe that His administration was like Satan’s.

The hiding of the Father’s face is what sin does when God lets the wicked go to the “inevitable consequences” of their choice. Their sins are built on Satan’s lies about God, lies that uphold Satan’s character and administration *as* God’s own character and administration. Sin does not let them see God’s face of love. How does this align with the words, “the glory of Him who is love will destroy them”? Love in all its warmth and radiance either draws a person to it or hardens that person’s heart. For this reason, love can shine on that person but the person cannot see it; but it’s shining brings out the rebellion that destroys them.

Jesus “feared that sin was so offensive to God that Their separation was to be eternal.” From Satan’s standpoint, God was the variable and sin was only a problem because it was offensive to God — not because it was intrinsically evil. Jesus was tempted to believe Satan’s perspective and thus He feared never seeing His Father’s face again. This is clearer when we consider the basis of Jesus’ victory on the cross over Satan’s temptations.

*Amid the awful darkness, apparently forsaken of God, Christ had drained the last dregs in the cup of human woe. In those dreadful hours He had relied upon the evidence of His Father’s acceptance heretofore given Him. **He was acquainted with the character of His Father; He understood His justice, His mercy, and His great love. By faith He rested in Him whom it had ever been His joy to obey. And as in submission He committed Himself to God, the sense of the loss of His Father’s favor was withdrawn. By faith, Christ was victor.** (756)*

So Jesus not only experienced the second death of mental agony, He had to determine, analyze, and decide, while going through it, whether He was suffering because of God’s anger directed actively and arbitrarily against Him as sin-bearer or because of sin itself. This is why *only the God-man* could be our substitute and surety. Only He as God could fully reveal God; only He as a mortal could taste death for every human and *come through it* so that He could tell the universe, “This is what I experienced; this is what the second death is.” He understood that His Father’s displeasure against sin was the absence of His presence, the absence of His love. He understood that God only has to give sinners up to their choice to go to the absence of divine love, love which is life itself, to go to death. But Jesus experienced that absence emotionally, cognitively,

physically, and spiritually, yet without ever partaking of it by His own choice. Thus He never succumbed to the tyranny of Satan's system of force.

That death, the absence of love, is mental anguish because apart from love, our minds cannot cope with life. Apart from love, the wicked will self-destruct, not by suicide, but by the mental agony of letting go completely of divine love. Jesus understood all this. He understood that He was experiencing the absence of God, of love, of life. He understood that He was only *apparently* forsaken of God, that His Father was actually right there at the cross suffering with Him. He understood that sin, that hideous rejection of divine love, was hiding His Father's face from Him. His Father had not changed from being the kind of God Jesus had ever revealed Him to be. He was still of the same mind!

At the beginning of the great controversy, the angels did not understand this. Had Satan and his host then been left to reap the full result of their sin, they would have perished; but it would not have been apparent to heavenly beings that this was the inevitable result of sin. A doubt of God's goodness would have remained in their minds as evil seed, to produce its deadly fruit of sin and woe.

But not so when the great controversy shall be ended. Then, the plan of redemption having been completed, the character of God is revealed to all created intelligences. The precepts of His law are seen to be perfect and immutable. Then sin has made manifest its nature, Satan his character. Then the extermination of sin will vindicate God's love and establish His honor before a universe of beings who delight to do His will, and in whose heart is His law. (764)

What makes the universe secure against sin is the full knowledge of what sin leads to. If Jesus had not made the inevitability of sin clear to everyone, God would ultimately have lost the entire universe. It is this inevitability that establishes His law—the moral transcript of His character—and reveals it to be unchangeable. As a description of how love and truth work, the law rests upon principles that cannot change; to violate them leads directly (or inevitably) to self-destruction. If sin's inevitability—death—were not the result of "breaking" God's law, God's character and His law could be changed. A law built upon an externally imposed penalty to *enforce* it is a law that can be changed, because such a penalty is arbitrary, making the law arbitrary, too. Anything arbitrary can be changed. This is at the core of forensic understanding. The prominent scholars who espouse the forensic model of atonement believe that as a result of Jesus' death, a change or reconciliation took place in God's mind. If God actively

executed punishment upon Himself or His Son, then He could change His mind because He was appeased or appeased Himself. Thus the last conflict of the great controversy between Christ and Satan will center on a legal versus moral view of God, atonement, and salvation. As stated above, our current legal systems anciently have ties to Babylonian sun worship, the god of justice. It is only fitting, then, that the day originally dedicated to the Roman version of that deity, Sunday, should be imposed on humanity as legally the only day to worship the sovereign God. At that time, the seventh-day Sabbath, the divinely appointed sign of the bond between us and God (Ezekiel 20:12, 20) will be the day that those who stand with Jesus in testifying to the righteousness of God's loving, truth-filled ways will keep, even if necessarily defying the legal institutions of human beings.

The Sabbath as a sign of our bond with God need not be taken superficially. Anciently the difference between Sabbath rest and Babylonian rest centered around the creation versus appeasement. Sabbath represents God's creation order in which natural law prevailed, illustrating God's spiritual and moral laws, and in which human beings were created in God's image to govern the natural world. By contrast, in Babylonia, the gods could rest once they were appeased, and, according to the Babylonian Creation story, they were appeased when human beings were created to be their slaves. These human slaves could never rest; only gods were given that privilege in Babylonia. This stands in sharp distinction from the Bible Sabbath in which God invites all—even animals—to rest every seventh day. Thus the Sabbath in every way reveals that God's moral law is dynamic, descriptive, and relational—not legal. For genuine cessation from work and its result—rest—cannot really be commanded. The Sabbath, then, is an appropriate sign of that bond of relationship.

In Babylon, no such bond or tie existed between the people and their gods. There was not even such a bond between neighbor and neighbor. Everything had an economic and legal basis; every relationship had a kind of contractual setting whereby people could trust one another because they swore an oath before a god, or signed a legal contract, or attempted legal satisfaction when estranged. By contrast, the seventh-day Sabbath was a sign of a bond between Israel and God, a bond that in the prophets was not formed in a legal or economic sense. The mode the prophets chose was that of marriage; and not a marriage of legal ownership (signified by the Hebrew word *ba'al*), but one of a mutual relationship in friendship (Hosea 2:16, 17).

I've chosen to end this commentary on this notion of the Sabbath because I believe that as the time approaches for the coming of Jesus, these issues will be the center of discussion. Our only safety at that time is to so understand them, so partake of God's love and goodness, so develop an utter God-like abhorrence for

Satan's system of force that we will not be swayed by means of deception, fear, or force to give up the loving ways of God.

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