

Lesson 23

- The bible is good news for everyone
- God also saves gentiles
- God wants our hearts

The bible is good news for everyone

Lesson 23a

The bible is good news for everyone

In the previous lessons we have seen that the apostles and their fellow workers made a start with the spreading of the gospel. Others have taken over their work and so the good news has reached a lot of people throughout the world. This means that the bible has had to be translated into as many languages as possible. In this lesson we will discuss something of the beautiful but sometimes very difficult job of bible translators.

Another time

When we read the bible today we should not forget that the bible is thousands of years old. It stems from a very different time, culture and mindset than ours. The bible was also written in other languages than what we speak. Some of the difficulties we encounter when we read the bible can be caused by these differences. In the lessons 10a and 15a we discussed the world of the Old and New Testaments. In this lesson we will first discuss the languages in which the bible has been written and the difficulties bible translators come across in their work. Obviously, it is never easy to translate an old book in such a way that the translation says the exact same thing as the original. Often translators do succeed but there are parts that are difficult to translate because they use images or comparisons that we no longer use or understand in our time and culture.

We will also look at the different translations of the bible in English. A good translation can make the bible much easier to understand.

The languages of the bible

The Old Testament has for the large part been written in Hebrew, the language the Israelites spoke at that time. A small part has been written in Aramaic, which is a variation of Hebrew. This language was spoken in Israel in the time of the New Testament.

The New Testament has been written in Greek. This Greek differs considerably from what is spoken in Greece today. In the time of the New Testament Greek was the universal language. Just as virtually everyone speaks English today, in that time most people were able to speak Greek.

Remarkably, the bible was not written in a formal style but it uses everyday language, the language of ordinary people. The gospel of Luke forms an interesting example of this. Luke was a well-educated man and capable of writing good, formal Greek. He starts his gospel with the following rather long and complex sentence:

Luke 1:1-4

'Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eye witnesses and servants of the word. Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.'

Luke shows here that he is able to express himself and to write in classical Greek.

However, after this introductory sentence he immediately changes to ordinary Greek. He wants to pass on the message of Jesus Christ in a way that is understandable to everyone.

Translating

The bible has originally been written in understandable language. However, because most people who heard about the gospel later did not understand Hebrew or Greek the bible had to be translated. At Pentecost Jesus Christ already gave the starting signal for this work. When the Holy Spirit came all the foreign visitors in Jerusalem could hear the apostles speak in their own language. They could hear in their mother tongue about the wonderful things that God had done.

Since then the bible has been translated in hundreds of different languages but even now it has not been translated in every single language. For that reason there are still people who occupy themselves with translating the bible. These people go to a country to study the language of a certain people or tribe in order to be able to translate the bible in that language. Every people or tribe has to be able to read the good news of the bible in their own language.

Difficulties

We said earlier that the bible was written in a world that was totally different from ours. The habits, the way of life, the climate, the landscape and the political circumstances were completely different from the situation in our time. This makes it difficult to translate the bible in a good way. Certain things that were obvious to everyone in the time of the bible create questions for readers in our time.

The bible uses the image of a shepherd to explain who God is. This was a familiar image for the Israelites. Every day they saw shepherds. They would immediately understand what was meant. However, the question is what such an image would mean to a person who has spent all his life in a city and has never seen a shepherd.

What should a translator do with such an image? Should he replace it with a contemporary image? Should he translate '*The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want*' with '*the LORD is my driver, He will guide me safely through the traffic*'? And if a translator works in a country where people keep pigs rather than sheep, should he say, '*The LORD is my swineherd*'?

John 6 presents another difficulty for a bible translator, where Jesus compares Himself with bread. In a country where people eat rice instead of bread, should a translator write, '*I am the rice of life*', instead of '*I am the bread of life*'?

The answer is no. If the bible is to be done justice, this is not right. In certain situations it can be very useful to use a contemporary image but in translating the bible it is important

to stay very close to the original text. A bible translator has to translate whatever it says in Hebrew or Greek, even if that means that it makes a certain passage very difficult to understand at first sight.

Obviously this does not mean that a reader of the bible should be left to fend for himself. The bible will have to be explained to him. And that is what happens. In some translations we find explanatory notes or the translator explains why a certain way to translate has been chosen over another. There are also books that explain the bible in a very simple and understandable manner. Besides, there are the church services. Every Sunday in church the bible is explained.

The best-known translations

We will now briefly comment on the best-known translations of the bible.

- *The Septuagint*

As early as the third century before Christ people started to translate the bible. The Old Testament was translated into Greek, which was spoken throughout the world at the time. This translation of the Old Testament is called the Septuagint, which means 'seventy' because apparently seventy scholars worked on it.

- *The Vulgate*

Around the year 400 AD the bible was translated into Latin, which by then had replaced Greek as the world language. This translation was done by Jerome, a bishop from Milan. It came to be called the Vulgate, which means common or ordinary. For centuries the Vulgate was the only bible translation in common use, even in a time when people no longer spoke Latin. The Roman Catholic church regarded the Vulgate as authentic and irreplaceable. It was the only translation that churches were allowed to use. However, this was not according to God's intention. God wants the good news to be brought to all people in their own language. A Latin translation

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is not more holy or better than an English translation. The translators of the bible are not inspired by the Holy Spirit. Their job is to translate what the writers of the bible have written with the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

- *The King James Version*

In the early seventh century parts of the bible were translated into English, however the first complete English translation was not produced until 1382 by the influence of John Wycliff. Later in the 16th century, seven more popular English versions were produced, beginning with William Tyndale's work in 1525. After Tyndale, several other translations of the bible were produced in the 16th century. Finally in 1604, in an effort to resolve a dispute between Englishmen over the different translations of the bible, King James I authorized the translation of another version that came to be called the King James Version.

The King James Version remains the most reliable translation of the bible in English. However, the English that is used can be difficult to understand for readers in our time and therefore like the Vulgate, the King James Version should by no means be regarded as a particularly holy translation.

- *The New International Version*

The New International Version was first published in 1978 in an effort to make the bible available in contemporary English. The translation was made by over a hundred scholars working directly from the best available Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek texts. Because the team of scholars was made up from the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand the translation can truly be called international. The NIV is the bible that is most commonly used in churches today. It is a good and accurate translation that is very suitable for bible study, which is why we have used this version throughout this course.

- *The Good News Bible*

Another translation that many Christians use is the Good News Bible. It is written in every day language. The aim of the translators was not only to translate the words written by the authors of the bible but also their intention. The translation wants to stimulate today's reader to have the same reaction to the words of the bible as the original reader would have had. The result is that the Good News Bible is easy to read. However, the danger of such a translation is that the translators might not always correctly interpret the intention of the writer in which case that will affect the translation. For this reason the Good News Bible is less reliable than the New International Version. However, it can be used as an addition to the NIV. Difficult passages can become much clearer to us when we reread them in the Good News Bible.

Questions

Below you will see John 1:1 in three different translations:

1. 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God.' (New International Version)
- 2a. What is the essential difference between 1, 2 and 3? What do you think has caused this difference?
- 2b. Explain the difference between 1 and 2. What translation do you prefer? Why?

Lesson 23b

God also saves gentiles

In the book of Acts we read how Jesus Christ works in people with the Holy Spirit to bring them to faith in Him, not only in Israel but also in the whole world. All people, whether they are Jew or gentile can be saved.

The people of God: believing Jews and gentiles

Until Pentecost the Jews were the people of God. However, after Pentecost God's people are no longer only the Jews but all people who believe in Jesus whether from Jewish descent or not. All these people and their children become part of God's people or in other words, the church.

For the Jewish Christians this is an enormous change. Before Pentecost they have seen gentiles come to faith in God, but every gentile who wanted to belong to God's people had to be circumcised. Being circumcised and in that way becoming Jewish, was the only way for someone to become part of the church.

Now that Jesus has died, circumcision is no longer necessary. After He has given his life, no more blood needs to flow. Whoever wants to belong to God's people need only be baptised in the name of Jesus. Everyone – Jew or gentile – who believes in Jesus and is baptised becomes part of God's people.

The Jewish Christians do not immediately realise this. Slowly they start to understand that also gentiles can become part of God's people and that they do not need to be circumcised and become Jewish first.

Peter and Cornelius

Read: Acts 10:1-23a

10:6 *tanner*: someone who makes animal skins in to leather

10:9 *the roof*: a flat roof that could be reached with stairs on the outside of the house

In Caesarea, an Israelite harbour where many Roman soldiers are stationed, lives a certain Cornelius. He is a Roman centurion. He is from a gentile family and therefore he has not been circumcised. Nevertheless, he and his family and his slaves believe in God. They express their faith by giving money to the poor and praying regularly to God.

One afternoon Cornelius has a vision. He sees an angel, who addresses him. He is terrified, but the angel comforts him. He tells him that God has seen that Cornelius serves Him. The angel tells him to send for a man called Simon, also known as Peter, who is in Joppa. This man Peter has a message for him that will save him and his whole family.

Cornelius immediately obeys the angel. He sends a few men to Joppa, a town about thirty miles away.

The next day, just before the men arrive at the place where he is staying, Peter has a vision. He sees a sheet full of all kinds of animals, clean and unclean together.

At the very beginning of history God forbade man to use unclean animals for sacrifices. Later He also forbade Jewish people to eat unclean animals. God's message was that because of sin all animals had become unclean, unholy, and that people who belong Him could only eat and sacrifice those animals that God would declare clean.

What was true for animals was also true for people. Because of sin all people have become unclean. Only people who have been declared clean by God can belong to Him. For centuries circumcision was a sign of the fact that God regarded a person as holy, as clean.

Peter hears a voice that tells him to kill one of the animals and eat it. Indignantly, Peter refuses. However, the voice says: 'What God has declared clean, you should not reject!' This way Jesus Christ points out to Peter that uncircumcised people no longer count as unclean to God. Just like unclean animals have now been declared clean, unclean, uncircumcised people have now been declared clean.

Peter does not understand this immediately. While he is still thinking about what he has seen and heard, the men sent by Cornelius arrive. The Holy Spirit lets Peter know that he has to go with them. Peter goes downstairs and sees the Roman men. Immediately he understands that it was because of them that he had the vision. He invites them, offers them food and a place to stay.

A day earlier this would have been unthinkable for Peter. No Jew would ever eat together with a gentile or offer him a place to stay. Neither would a Jew ever enter the house of a gentile because someone who is not circumcised is unclean. By entering such a person's house a Jew would be infected; he would become unclean. However, Peter now knows that he cannot call something unclean that God has called clean.

God does not make a distinction

Read: Acts 10:23b-48

Two days later, when he arrives at the house of Cornelius, Peter still does not know what it is that God wants him to do. The only thing he knows is that he does not need to worry about entering Cornelius' house.

It turns out a large group of people have gathered in the house of Cornelius. All his family and friends have come to hear what Peter has to say. Their expectations are high. They know Peter has something to tell that by which they can be saved. Cornelius says: 'We have gathered together in the presence of God to listen to what you have to tell us in the name of the Lord.'

Then Peter understands what is going on. The division between the Jews and the gentiles has disappeared. It is not important for God what people a person belongs to. God only wants to know if a person serves Him and if it is visible from his deeds.

Peter tells Cornelius and all the other people that are present about Jesus Christ. He tells them how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth, not with oil but with the Holy Spirit and with power.

That power showed when He healed people. Even then it was clear that Jesus had the power to defeat the devil. Peter tells them how Jesus died and how God raised Him from the dead. And then he brings the good news: everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins! Whoever believes in Jesus can live in a good relationship with God.

While Peter is still talking, it becomes clear that Cornelius and the other people in the house believe in Jesus. They are all filled with the Holy Spirit. Just like on the day of Pentecost people speak in foreign languages and praise God. However, in this case the Holy Spirit has not come on Jews but on gentiles. The Jewish Christians are astonished when they realise what has happened.

Peter speaks up. He says: 'Now that God has accepted these people and baptised them with the Holy Spirit, who can object to their baptism with water?'

Cornelius, his family, his children, his servants and his friends are all baptised in the name of Jesus. It is a visible sign of the fact that from now on they belong to Jesus Christ and have become members of the church, of God's people.

Peter stays for a few more days to teach the people who have been baptised more about God.

Peter has to defend himself

When Peter returns to Jerusalem, the threat of conflict awaits him. The Jewish Christians reproach him for having entered the house of uncircumcised people and having shared a meal with them. However, Peter explains what has happened to him.

He tells them everything from the vision he had to what happened after his speech when the Holy Spirit came down on uncircumcised people. 'How could I have stopped God?' he says. When the Jewish Christians have heard the whole story, they are no longer upset. What is more, they are happy and they thank and praise God. They say to one another: 'So that is God's plan, the gentiles too can come to repentance and receive eternal life!'

They also spoke to the Greeks

Read: Acts 11:19-30

11:19 *the message*: the good news about Jesus Christ

11:21 *the Lord's hand was with them*: the Lord helped them

11:30 *the elders*: the men who were leaders in the church

The Jewish Christians who have to flee Jerusalem end up to the north of Israel in Phoenicia, present-day Lebanon, on the island Cyprus and in Antioch, the capital of Syria. Everywhere they go they speak with other Jews about the good news of Jesus Christ. However, in the city of Antioch some Christians speak with the Greeks about Jesus who is Lord of heaven and earth. And the Lord causes many of these gentiles to come to faith in Him and to start a new life.

The Christians who have stayed behind in Jerusalem hear about this, amongst them the apostles. As members of the 'mother church', they feel responsible for what happens in other places. Even now that Cornelius, a gentile, has been baptised it is not clear to everyone how the Holy Spirit will now continue to work. Was Cornelius an exception or will all gentiles from now on be able to come to God? They send a man called Barnabas to Antioch to see what is happening. As soon as Barnabas has arrived in the metropolis of Antioch and has found the gentile Christians, he sees the grace of God. That means, he sees what God has given freely, without anyone deserving it: also the Greeks have been converted to Him. Barnabas sees how the Greeks and the Jews together form one church. This can only be the work of God!

He thanks God and encourages the new Christians. He urges them to remain faithful to their choice. And he does not leave it at that; he is a practical man. He notices the new converts need a lot of teaching and immediately he thinks of Saul of whom Jesus said: 'He will tell gentiles, kings and Israelites about Me.' Jesus Christ has a special task for Saul, to bring the gospel to Jews and to gentiles. If there is one person that can help the gentile Christians in Antioch, it is Saul. For that

reason Barnabas immediately goes to visit him in his hometown of Tarsus and convinces him to come and work in Antioch.

For a year Barnabas and Saul work together. Their work is fruitful: God causes many people to come to faith. The people who have converted to Jesus Christ stand out in Antioch. They are different from the way they used to be and their fellow citizens start to give them a special name: Christians. Even until today that name is given to people who belong to Jesus Christ.

When a prophet comes and tells the Christians that there will be a severe famine, the Christians show how much they want to do for one another. They organise an enormous collection for the Christians in Jerusalem, who are going through a hard time. In this passage the Christians are revered to as brothers. Because God is their Father, all believers are brothers and sisters to one another. Jews and Greeks, people who would never have mingled in the past, now regard one another as family. Members of one family help each other when one member is in need. The Christians in Antioch help the Christians in Jerusalem.

The first missionary journey

Barnabas and Saul bring the collection to the Christians in Jerusalem and then return to Antioch. They do not stay there for long. The Holy Spirit makes it clear to the leaders of the Christian church that they have to let Barnabas and Saul go. God has a special task for them: they need to tell the good news throughout the world to Jews and gentiles.

And so the church of Antioch sends Barnabas and Saul on a journey. From this point on in his book, Luke uses the Greek version of Saul's name, Paul. From now on we will therefore also refer to him as Paul.

In every town they visit, Paul and Barnabas first go to the Jewish synagogue. The Jews have the privilege of hearing the good news about Jesus the promised Saviour first.

Strangely, many Jews do not appreciate the news. Some of them are converted but many of them do not believe the words of Paul and Barnabas. When the Jews ignore their message, Paul and Barnabas turn to the gentiles. Many of them come to faith and everywhere new churches are started.

Luke describes three long journeys in Acts that Paul made to tell people all over the world about Jesus Christ. These journeys are called missionary journeys. He has even brought the good news to Europe. God blessed his work and everywhere people came to faith in Christ and churches were started.

In the next lesson we will discuss Paul's second and third journey.

Questions

- 1a. Which people belong to the people of God in the time before Pentecost?
- 1b. And in the time after Pentecost?
- 2a. What does Peter see in his vision? Read Acts 10:9-16.
- 2b. What does Jesus want to teach him? Read Acts 10:28.
- 3a. What is the first thing Saul and Barnabas do when they arrive in a new city on their journey? Read Acts 13:5, Acts 13:13-16, Acts 14:1.
- 3b. Why do they do that? Read Acts 3:25-26 (a speech of Peter to the Jews) and Romans 1:16.
Acts 3:26 *his servant*. Jesus Christ
- 3c. What does often happen when they do this? Read Acts 13:44-52 and Acts 14:1-2.

Lesson 23c

God wants our hearts

In this lesson we have come to the last two commandments of God's law. In these commandments God teaches us something about how we ought to treat our neighbours. We need to tell the truth and we should not set our hearts on another person's possessions. God also teaches us that it is not enough to outwardly keep his commandments. He wants our hearts.

The ninth commandment

'You shall not give false testimony against your neighbour.'

The ninth commandment is concerned with the speaking of justice. God forbids the Israelites to give an incorrect declaration in court.

In the time of the Old Testament the speaking of justice was organised differently from today. Every city had its own judges. They were the elders, the heads of the families. When someone from the city had done something that was forbidden according to God's law, then the person who had witnessed it would have to tell the elders. He would have to give a testimony.

In those days giving a testimony was a very powerful and serious thing to do. The fate of the accused would depend on it. A false testimony, a declaration that was made up about a crime, could result in death penalty for the accused. For that reason God explicitly forbade the Israelites to give a false testimony.

Despite this commandment there have always been people who were willing to give a false testimony about someone for money. God therefore decided that a judge could not convict a person on the basis of just one testimony. At least two people would have had to witness that the accused had committed the

crime. Only when there were two or three witnesses the elders were willing to research a case. When they thought the case was proved, the accused would be punished.

God had determined that certain serious crimes were deserving of death penalty. That death penalty would be executed by means of throwing stones. Whoever had initially made the accusation would have to throw the first stone. If it would turn out that the witnesses had given false testimony, they would be stoned themselves. God had determined it should be this way to stop people from giving false testimonies.

God had also determined that judges were not allowed to take bribes or gifts. They were not allowed to be bribed and so contribute to convicting an innocent person.

From the bible we know that despite these rules there would be cases where people would be punished innocently. In the time of the Old Testament we know for example of the Israelite Naboth. King Ahab wanted to possess a plot of land that belonged to Naboth. When Naboth refused to sell his land, Ahab's wife got rid of him. She persuaded two people to accuse him of insulting God and the king. Naboth had done no such thing but the elders believed the false witnesses and Naboth received death penalty.

We see the same criminal practices in the time of the New Testament. Numerous people came with a false testimony when Jesus was before the Sanhedrin and also when the people wanted to get rid of Stephen several men were prepared to give false testimony.

The ninth commandment in our time

What does the ninth commandment have to say in our time? First of all obviously that we are not to give false testimony in court. However, God asks more from us than just literal obedience, just as was the case with the other commandments. God only mentions the sin that can do most

harm to our neighbour, but He also forbids all other sins that are a result of the same bad attitude such as lying. Lying is the work of the devil. The first sin in the world was a lie. Satan lied to Eve that she would be like God if she would eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. You could say that ever since that moment lying is natural to mankind. People lie and cheat in order to save themselves, to get out of a dangerous situation and often at the expense of another person. Jesus Christ made an end to the power of Satan. He made it possible for us to be free. He does not want us to try and save ourselves with lies. He wants us to become reliable people that others can trust; people who are always after their neighbour's good, in everything they say.

Something else that God forbids in the ninth commandment is speaking badly of other people. God does not want us to be gossips – even if what we say is true. Why not? Because He does not want us to harm our neighbour. That means we should not always tell everything we know about another person. *'Love covers a multitude of sin'*, Peter says in one of his letters. A person who truly loves his neighbour will consciously not tell certain things about him to other people.

The tenth commandment

'You shall not covet your neighbour's house. You shall not covet your neighbour's wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbour.'

In the first nine commandments God forbids all sorts of concrete things: to make carved idols, to commit adultery, to steal, etc. When we discussed these commandments we saw that God is not only concerned about the actual act of adultery, theft, etc. He is as much concerned about what is behind those acts. It is not just wrong to commit adultery, it is also wrong to desire another man or woman.

In the tenth commandment God emphasises it again. He forbids us to set our hearts on anything that belongs to another person. God teaches us in the tenth commandment that it is wrong to want to possess something that is not ours or to want to do something that He has forbidden.

Coveting makes us restless

When the serpent lied to Eve and told her that she would be like God if she would eat the fruit of the tree, Eve's desire was awakened. Suddenly, she was no longer satisfied with her life and position. She allowed herself to be led by her desire and did what God had forbidden.

Throughout the bible we see how people after the Fall are under the power of what they covet. People covet power, money, another person's land or another person's wife. People are jealous of what others have. They think they cannot be happy until they have it. Coveting brings restlessness in a person's life.

We see an example in the life of king Ahab. He set his heart on a plot of land that belonged to Naboth. He was so overtaken by his desire that he felt miserable as long as he did not possess it. He thought it was perfect that his wife Jezebel got rid of Naboth because he had to have it his way.

In the life of David we also see what coveting can do to a person. Once he had seen Bathsheba, a married woman, he could think of nothing else but her. He had to possess her. He took her. When she got pregnant he had her husband killed so that he could take her as his wife and all this while he was already married.

These examples are extreme but jealousy can still take over a person's life. Discontent about what we have, the desire for more can also spoil our lives.

God wants us to be free

God has saved us from slavery. He does not want us to give up our freedom by allowing our lives to be ruled by our desires. God wants us to be satisfied with our own house even if that of our neighbour or colleague is more beautiful. He wants us to

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be happy with our own husband or wife, with our own profession and our own car. Even when other men may have a prettier wife, a more interesting or better paid job or a more expensive car. God wants the best for us. He wants us to have a peaceful life without a constant desire for more, better and bigger.

This does not mean that we cannot desire anything. If we are not married we can of course desire to have husband or wife. God Himself has put that desire in us. If we are married we can desire to have children. If we have a job we can do our best to be promoted. But in every case it is wrong when these desires start to rule over us.

If our desire for a certain thing starts to take the first place in our lives, God no longer has the first place. Desires that are good in themselves then become sinful. That is what God warns us about.

God wants our hearts

The tenth commandment does not only forbid us not to set our hearts on things that do not belong to us. God wants more from us; He wants our hearts. He wants us to put Him above everything. He wants us to no longer have the desire to break his rules. We should develop a dislike for everything that goes against God's will and a desire to do everything that He tells us to. Our bad desires should change into good desires.

The tenth commandment shows us the depth of God's law. God's law needs to rule every aspect of our lives even down to our personal thoughts and desires.

Someone who really understood this was the head of the Indonesian tribe of the Toradja. He said: 'I would rather have the 7777 commandments of the Toradjan law than the ten commandments of the Christians because the ten commandments demand the whole heart whereas the 7777 ancestral commandments still leave a lot of freedom.'

Can a Christian live like this?

Now that we have discussed all of the Ten Commandments, the question remains whether a Christian can keep them all. Can a Christian live the way God wants? Can he always give God the first place in every aspect of life and always love his neighbour as himself?

The answer to this question is no. There is no one who can fully live up to God's demands. Even a Christian will always be confronted with his sinfulness and how again and again he does things or wants to do things that are not according to God's law. He will realise over and over again how he falls short of loving God and his neighbour.

The law as a mirror

Why then has God given these commandments and do we hear them over and over in church? As we said in lesson 15c, the law is like a mirror that God holds up to us. Just like a mirror shows us what we look like, so whenever we hear the law we are reminded how bad we are in ourselves. In our own power we cannot keep the rules that God has given us. Precisely when we are reminded of how bad we are, we realise how much we need Jesus Christ. By giving us the law, God makes us turn to Jesus Christ. We cannot keep the law, but Jesus has done so, in our place. In our place He has been punished for all the times when we broke God's commands. When we trust in Him, God no longer looks at those times that we broke the law. He looks at what his Son has done and because of the work of his Son he regards us as righteous people.

The law as standard

The law is not only a mirror for us it is also the standard we should live up to. As people who have been liberated by God, we should increasingly live in a way that matches that liberation. We cannot do so in our own power. Every day we should ask God to give us the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit will help us. He will make us into new people.

In this life we will never achieve perfection. We will never completely lose our 'old self'. Again and again we will be confronted with our bad nature. Nevertheless, the Holy Spirit will help us to fight against our bad nature, our bad desires and thoughts. He will renew us more and more and help us to live like God's children. One day we will be perfect, when the new earth has come. Then we will do God's will in everything and reign over the whole of creation alongside God. Whoever believes, awaits a splendid future.

Questions

1. God forbids us in the ninth commandment to lie. What should we think of 'white lies' (lies we use in order to save another person)? Read for example Exodus 1:15-21 or Matthew 22:37-40.
2. The tenth commandment shows that God wants to give us peace and freedom. Explain.
3. 'God's law should not be read out in church every Sunday. Hearing the law only makes people despair.' What do you think of this statement? Explain.