

"Is the heavenly Father equal to the law or above it? Why or why not?"

I think I know what is meant here but the question itself is framed a bit awkwardly to me. It would be like me asking this:

The problem here is that the expression "equal to" implies that the two objects in question can correctly be equated but we really need to clarify this because they are two very different things. And the more dissimilar the two things are the more we need to clarify exactly what we mean when asking this question. So we would have to clarify the question.

"Is the heavenly Father under (or subject to) the law or above it? Why or why not?"

Or perhaps:

"Does our heavenly Father consider the law of equal value with Himself? Why or why not?"

You see the heavenly Father is a Person but His law is a system of rules designed to regulate the behavior of those subject to it. It is a standard of right and wrong. Thus there can be no "equal to" here in a complete sense and even in almost every sense because we are considering two very different subjects. Therefore we need to clarify exactly what aspect of equality we are speaking about.

If we leave the question as it was originally given then the clear, unequivocal answer (if I have understood the intent of the question correctly) is that God the Father is actually superior to His law. He is a living Being with the ability to consciously interact with others. His law is not a conscious entity. God the Father possesses the law but it cannot possess Him, He framed it, it did not frame Him, etc, etc,....So, again, when considering the original question God the Father is clearly above the law. Evidence for this will be given below as we consider the question posed with some added precision.

"There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy: who art though that judgest another? (James 4:12)

"God is a moral governor as well as a Father. He is the Lawgiver. He makes and executes His laws (Ms5-1876.13)

Here again we see the superiority of the heavenly Father in comparison to His law. He is the law's originator, its institutor and the executor thereof. Perhaps an illustration is in order here.

A parent might make a law for the household that forbids the children from hitting each other. Yet upon violation of this law that same parent might actually spank the guilty child! Thus the parent is superior to the law because he or she instituted it and enforces it, even in a way that, arguably, might appear in the child's eyes as contrary to the law itself. While certainly the law

expresses the will of the parent for the child's behavior, and thus speaks to the parent's character, it does not actually restrict the parent's behavior by making it impossible or wrong for the parent to execute disciplinary action. In a similar sense God has a law that forbids us from acting a certain way towards one another yet God Himself, in executing the penalty of His law, might act in a way that might seem contrary, in our fallible estimation, to the very precept itself. As EGW explains:

“God does not work on the plan of man. He can do infinite justice that man has no right to do before his fellow man. Noah would have displeased God to have drowned one of the scoffers and mockers that harassed him, but God drowned the vast world. Lot would have had no right to inflict punishment on his sons-in-law, but God would do it in strict justice. {Ms5-1876.14}

Let's move on and consider an alternative expression of the question.

“Does our heavenly Father consider the law of equal value with Himself? Why or why not?”

Would anyone like to answer this one? If not, I'll give it my best shot. I would say “yes” in one sense and “no” in another. The “yes” answer is based upon the fact that the law is a transcript of God's character. As sister White asserts:

“The living God has given in His holy law a transcript of His character... {CT 365.2}

And since God's character is immutable the result is that the law He has given must also be immutable. Again inspiration informs us that “The Lord is unchangeable, therefore His law is immutable.... {EW 65.1}. Here we see a sense of equivalence. God's character is who He is, it is what makes Him who He is. So there is an equivalence of immutability here between the Person of God and the law of God. Neither one can be altered.

Yet at the very same time I would also say that the law, as the transcript of His character (a transcript means a duplicate presented through another medium) is not the full expression of God's character. So here I would say “no” in terms of equality. The law is a limited medium and lacks the ability to convey Him perfectly; i.e. God can save yet his law lacks that power, the law is an inanimate thing. The only perfect medium that conveys the character of God in fullness is His begotten Son. Let us remember what He is.

“A complete offering has been made; for “God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son,”—not a son by creation, as were the angels, nor a son by adoption, as is the forgiven sinner, BUT A SON BEGOTTEN IN THE EXPRESS IMAGE OF THE FATHERS PERSON, AND IN ALL THE BRIGHTNESS OF HIS MAJESTY AND GLORY, ONE EQUAL WITH GOD in AUTHORITY, DIGNITY, AND DIVINE PERFECTION. In him dwelt ALL THE FULLNESS OF THE GODHEAD BODILY. {ST May 30, 1895, par. 3}

“God is love.” His matchless love for fallen man, expressed in the gift of his beloved Son, amazed the holy angels. Christ was the heir of all things, by whom also the worlds were made. HE WAS THE BRIGHTNESS OF THE FATHER’S GLORY, AND THE “EXPRESS IMAGE OF HIS PERSON.” He upheld “all things by the word of his power.” In himself he possessed divine excellence and greatness; FOR IT PLEASSED THE FATHER THAT IN HIM ALL FULLNESS SHOULD DWELL. And Christ “thought it not robbery to be equal with God.” YET he “made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men. And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.” {BEcho January 1, 1887, par. 2}

“The Son of God was next in authority to the great Lawgiver. He knew that his life alone could be sufficient to ransom fallen man. He was of as much more value than man as his noble, spotless character, and exalted office as commander of all the heavenly host, were above the work of man. HE WAS IN THE EXPRESS IMAGE OF HIS FATHER, NOT IN FEATURES ALONE, BUT IN PERFECTION OF CHARACTER. {2SP 9.1}

When we understand the truth that God begot a Son in His express image, in ALL the brightness of His majesty and glory, one equal with Him in authority, dignity and perfection; When we comprehend that "it pleased the Father that in His Son all fullness should dwell"; When we realize that before He came to this earth He was the Father's express image in both His "features" and "perfection of character" then we can see why the angels could look at Him and see "a perfect representation of God."

“Christ is the express image of His Father’s person, and the angels could see in the Son a perfect representation of God...{Lt55-1903.15}

And even when the only begotten Son laid aside the physical glory that was His in His pre-incarnate existence; when He was born into this world via the virgin Mary, He yet retained His perfection of character. While He certainly could not have been begotten in ALL the brightness of His Father's majesty and glory in His features (to do so would have actually have killed sinful humanity), He most certainly did come to reveal the Divine brightness in terms of His perfection of character. He came to personify the Father as only He could.

The incarnated Son of God was “the personification of the only true God.” He “possessed goodness, mercy, and untiring love, whose heart was ever touched with human woe,... {RH January 30, 1900, Art. A, par. 6}. Thus to see Him, the incarnated Son of God, is to see the heavenly Father in terms of character. ***Here we see the equal of God***, even while cloaked with the lower created nature of man. In Christ Jesus we see the only One of sufficient value to atone for mankind’s transgression of God’s law. And we thank both God the Father and His Son for what They have wrought. And yes, the Spirit too!

“We have only one perfect photograph of God, and this is Jesus Christ (Ms 70, 1899)

Let's try to be semantic here

"For God is love, and LOVE IS LIFE... {COL 258.3}

So if I wanted to be a semantic legalist I could say that "**love IS life**" but is that really conveying the meaning of what love and life are appropriately? I don't think so. I believe we need to understand the point of inspiration. We need to interpret the statement in context otherwise we could end up creating a misleading equation.

When we say that "God is love" what do we mean by that? While I cannot speak for other men my understanding is that this is a statement about God's chief attribute, it is a revelation of His immutable character. It is a statement of what He is like. Everyone seems to understand this everywhere else. For example in the statement "God is merciful" (Psalm 116:5). This means that mercy is a component of His character. And all of the attributes that make up His character reveal who He is. Or the statement "God is light" (1 John 1:5) we do not make Him into our scientific understanding of what light is (at least I hope not). We need to read in context because it is talking about Him in a moral sense (light vs. darkness).

Now if I take the statement "God is love, and His law is love" what does this mean?

God = Love

Law = Love

God = Law

I believe it to be wrong to create an $A = B$ and $B = C$ therefore $A = C$ equation here.

You would end up with "God is law." This is not correct. God has a law but He is not His law. It is an expression of His character but He is not the law. That's what I see when I look at her immediate and greater literary contexts. So when we read "His law is love" we should understand that the law is an expression of God's love. It is a revelation of the behavior of love in relationship to God and fellow man.

"THE LAW was ordained unto life, and IS AN EXPRESSION OF THE LOVE OF GOD TO MAN... {ST July 24, 1884, par. 7}

"He (Christ) showed that THE LAW IS A LAW OF LOVE, AN EXPRESSION OF THE DIVINE GOODNESS... {Ed 76.3}

"THE LAW OF GOD is as sacred as God Himself. It is A REVELATION of His will, a transcript of His character, THE EXPRESSION OF DIVINE LOVE AND WISDOM... {PP 52.3}

“Does our heavenly Father consider the law of equal value with Himself? Why or why not?”

My answer to that inquiry is "yes" in one sense. I explained that this equality "is based upon the fact that the law is a transcript of God's character.

“The living God has given in His holy law a transcript of His character... {CT 365.2}

In another sense the law is not equal to him because it is not capable of doing what God can do else we would be required to worship the law as we worship God and His Son

And since God's character is immutable the result is that the law He has given must also be immutable. Again inspiration informs us that “The Lord is unchangeable, therefore His law is immutable.... {EW 65.1}. Here we see a sense of equivalence. God's character is who He is, it is what makes Him who He is. So there is an equivalence of immutability here between the Person of God and the law of God. Neither one can be altered.

That is where we see the equality. And I have no objection to the law being as enduring as God Himself.

There are two kinds of law, legal law and natural law. They are both referred to as "law," because they both require a set pattern of behavior. Legal law (eg the ten commandments), requires education, a governing authority, and is usually a way of bolstering or supporting some underlying natural laws. This is especially true of the ten commandments which are an expression of God's nature, but far from being an exact reproduction of it. They are simply the principles of God's character applied to human existence.