

May 13, 2018
Sunday Evening Service
Series: Deuteronomy
Community Baptist Church
643 S. Suber Road
Greer, SC 29650
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THE GREAT COMMAND Deuteronomy 6

The second generation of God's people, His nation who He had brought out of Egypt, were gathered around Moses as he gave them final instruction before they entered the Promised Land to possess God's blessing.

In a way, the people could look across the Jordan River and view a small portion of God's promise. But scattered all through that land were the inhabitants God had spoken about from the outset. When God called Moses to lead His people out of the bondage of Egypt, He promised, *"I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt to the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, a land flowing with milk and honey"* (Exodus 3:17). Deliverance from bondage in Egypt sounded real good. Being placed in a land flowing with milk and honey sounded even better. But what about all those "ites" who already lived in the land?

God's plan was not for His people to move in next door and share the cul-de-sac with these folks. God's plan was for His people to march in like a mighty army, uproot those long-established nations, and destroy every vestige of them. That certainly doesn't sound neighborly. Why was the God of love so adamant about annihilating those ancient tribes?

That question is answered by Moses's speech in Deuteronomy six. The central focus of this speech is the statement in verses four and five. *"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might"* (vv.4-5). The truth that "the LORD is one" stands in vivid contrast with the practice of the various "ites"

who occupied the Promised Land. The truth is that the true God is unique, exclusive, one. There are not really several true God's. The God who created all things and disposes of all things according to His sovereign will is ONE not many.

The Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites and all their pagan peers were notorious for serving multiple gods. This was God's warning to His people not to buy into the idolatry, the practice of adding lesser and false gods to their worship of Him. This was a warning about how easy it is to fall into the acceptable habits of life that virtually replace the ONE God with many lesser gods.

Therefore, God's command to all generations of His people is simple. Keep your heart singly focused on Him and teach your children how to do the same. The only way for us to stay focused on God alone is to maintain the right respect for Him. Right respect flows out into right association with Him. Right association with Him results in right living. Right living results in enjoying His blessings. And right living is more likely when we understand the importance of the LORD's commands generally, when we grasp the requirement of the great command, and when we respond to His word as the LORD expects us to.

The Reason for the LORD's Commands (vv.1-3).

God's plan is for His people to do what He commands. Why? So that His people may respect Him and live. *Now this is the commandment, the statutes and the rules that the LORD your God commanded me to teach you, that you may do them in the land to which you are going over, to possess it (v.1)*. There are three words found in this verse that all refer to the overall covenant God made with His people Israel. The commandment, statutes, and rules are all references to the instruction God gave to Moses on Mt. Sinai. It is the law of God, the word of God, the oracles of God. God's word is the basis for His covenant with Israel.

God's word is also the basis for His covenant with us also. God's promises to forgive our sins and give us eternal life is based on His promises in the work and person of Christ. That is what Paul meant when he wrote, *For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for*

his glory. And it is God who establishes us with you in Christ, and has anointed us, and who has also put his seal on us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee (2 Corinthians 1:20-22). Therefore, we are assured of God's promises. We know of what we are assured because we know God's word. His commands, statutes, and rules are plainly stated in the Bible and His people seek to live accordingly. That is how the covenant, the agreement, works.

But as we attempt to keep God's commands, there is an important ramification taking place. We keep the rules in order to show respect to God. Moses told the people to keep God's commands, *that you may fear the LORD your God, you and your son and your son's son, by keeping all his statutes and his commandments, which I command you, all the days of your life, and that your days may be long (v.2).*

These statements to the people about their obligation to God's rules are almost a restatement of the end of chapter five where we read that Moses gathered the people (at least the leaders) around to hear this important instruction. In that text we heard Moses say, *But you, stand here by me, and I will tell you the whole commandment and the statutes and the rules that you shall teach them, that they may do them in the land that I am giving them to possess. You shall be careful therefore to do as the LORD your God has commanded you. You shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left. You shall walk in all the way that the LORD your God has commanded you, that you may live, and that it may go well with you, and that you may live long in the land that you shall possess (Deuteronomy 5:31-33).*

Here, in our current text, the expected response to God's commandments, statutes, and rules is to show *fear* for the Lord by keeping them. "Fear the Lord" is not a very popular challenge these days. But, the command to "Fear the LORD" shows up thirteen times in Deuteronomy. It must have been important to ancient Israelites. Contrary to modern opinions, the command to fear the Lord does not mean to quake and tremble before the LORD all the time. Think about it. Fear is an emotion caused by objective reality (or what appears to be reality). For example, the objective reality is a grizzly bear raised up on his hind legs as he is roaring about 20 feet in front of you on the path in the wilderness. The emotion you experience at the moment is fear. Or it can be illustrated by the experience of God's

people. The objective reality is the LORD descending on Mt. Sinai with a loud trumpet sound, smoke, lightening, fire, and earthquake. The emotion the people felt was fear.

Now notice that the description of fearing the LORD in 5:32 was, *You shall be careful therefore to do as the LORD your God has commanded you. You shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left.* Again in verse thirty-three, we read a very similar result when the people who fear the LORD *walk in all the way that the LORD your God has commanded you.* That is the same lesson God taught through the prophet Zephaniah. I said, "Surely you will fear me; you will accept correction [or instruction] . . ." (Zephaniah 3:7). The principle is found in this: The objective reality is the Bible (God's Word). The response to that reality is awesome respect (fear). And the amazing truth is that if we truly fear the Lord, we hunger and thirst for the instruction of righteousness we find in His Word. To what end?

Why would God desire for His people to practice awesome respect for Him and His Word? That you may enjoy God's promises fulfilled (v.3). Quite simply, the LORD's plan is, "Hear and do in order that it may go well." *Hear therefore, O Israel, and be careful to do them, that it may go well with you, and that you may multiply greatly (v.3a).* The call, "Hear O Israel" is found six times in Deuteronomy. Obviously, God requires us to listen to Him just like He required Israel to listen. But God didn't speak to the nation audibly. He spoke through Moses as Moses wrote and spoke God's Word, serving as the prophet.

God doesn't speak audibly to us. He has spoken through the men the Holy Spirit carried along as they wrote God's Word. Now we read the Bible and God speaks. The Bible is not just a book that you and I can read if we get the notion to do so and the time is convenient. No. As people of God, it is our responsibility to hear and do His Word. If we don't listen to God speak through His Word, it is because we don't fear Him. If we don't fear Him, we have no relationship with Him. If we have forfeited our relationship with God, we have forfeited His promised blessings.

That is an obvious sequence in larger Christendom today. It was a perennial problem about which God warned continually through the prophets before He destroyed the nation of His people. It was the problem Moses was trying to prevent at this spot.

Moses expressed the important conclusion that obedience by the LORD's people results in the LORD fulfilling His promise to them. God's plan was for the people to hear and do His commands so that it would go well with them . . . *as the LORD, the God of your fathers, has promised you, in a land flowing with milk and honey (v.3b)*. The LORD had promised from the outset that He was delivering His people from the bondage of Egypt to deliver them to this special land of blessings. The first generation did not believe God, did not obey Him, and forfeited the blessings. The same principle still applies as God blesses His people with love, joy, peace, goodness, gentleness, etc. as we know His truth and live accordingly.

The Great Command (vv.4-16).

The Great Command is a simple requirement. *Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might (vv.4-5)*. This well-known statement is called by the Jews "the Shema." It is the great declaration that the LORD our God is one. We need to consider that truth against the backdrop of Israel's pagan neighbors who had many gods. They were ignorant of the one true God. This statement gives a concise description of the LORD and a simple required response from His people. The LORD God is the only God, the one God, there is no other. At the same time, the LORD God is one God in three persons: the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit.

The command requires the LORD's people to love Him with singleness of heart, soul, and might. Because the LORD is uniquely one, His people's devotion must be uniquely single. Love for God is not a matter of depth of emotion. It is all encompassing of the person. We are to love God with every aspect of our being. The heart is the seat of the intellect, the will, and the emotions. The soul is our eternal part, the real being who lives forever either with God or in hell. Strength speaks of the physical, outward aspect. Strength is what we do and how we do it because of what we decide in the heart.

This is the essential response the LORD requires of us toward the Ten Commands which constitute the expression of the LORD's person and character. This singleness of love does not preclude love for spouse, children, fellow Christians and even enemies – all of which

Scripture commands. Rather our love for God is first, supreme, which will temper all love for other people and things.

God not only desires that we will love Him in light of who He is, but He also desires that His people will establish this command in their hearts. This is particularly important for the parents. *And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart (v.6)*. God's people must make God's commands, statutes, and rules part of their essential being. How does that work? How can we keep God's words and commands on our hearts? This is the result of feeding on the Word of God. If we are what we eat physically, it is even more true that we are what we eat spiritually. When we hunger and thirst for righteousness, the Bible satisfies us and we begin to take on Bible characteristics. When we feed on the Living Word, we will begin to look like Him. When we are nourished on the milk and then the meat of the Bible, it will be obvious in how we live.

Again this is especially important for parents because God's plan is for the parent to teach the words to their children. We are to do this systematically. *You shall teach them diligently to your children (v.7a)*. The word translated *diligently* gives us the idea of consistency and with great effort. The Hebrew word actually speaks of sharpness and comes from the word for teeth. It gives us the idea of teaching the truths of God's Word with precision, sharpness, accuracy, with the goal of making the truth stick.

We are to teach the LORD's words, His commands, naturally. *And shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise (v.7b)*. Life is full of teaching moments. We begin by sitting down with our families at some point every day in order to teach God's truths. This will require opening the Bible and reading the commands, statutes, and rules. Then as we go about living real life, there are multiplied opportunities for Mom or Dad to say, "See, here is an example of what the Bible teaches."

This is such an easy application. All you need to do is listen to your children talk about their interactions with friends, and you will have many teaching moments. Or listen to the news together and you will find all kinds of teaching moments.

Third, God expects us to teach His Word to our children demonstratively. *You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and*

they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates (vv.8-9). God intends for His commands, statutes, and rules to be illustrated in real life. God never intended that it would be sufficient for His people to wear the law wrapped up in phylacteries or stuffed away in mezuzah fastened to a door frame. God intends for His truths to be our guide, our protection, our fence for life and practice.

Before the parent ever takes on that task, it will be necessary for us to take care to consistently submit to the command ourselves (vv.10-16). That means we must pay attention to God's words in good times and in bad times. Moses pointed out specifically how the people needed to take care in the midst of blessings. *And when the LORD your God brings you into the land that he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give you – with great and good cities that you did not build, and houses full of all good things that you did not fill, and cisterns that you did not dig, and vineyards and olive trees that you did not plant – and when you eat and are full, then take care lest you forget the LORD, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery (vv.10-12).*

Some of the most difficult times to stay focused on God's principles is while we are enjoying His blessings. Physical, material blessing is almost always distracting. We get so focused on the gift that we neglect the Giver of the gift. Generally, it is easier to think about and submit to God's rules when we are quite sure the enemy is over the next hill. This explains God's cycle in the book of Judges. The people enjoyed peace and blessing and forsook God. God brought the enemy in to chastise His people, which made them very sensitive to God's rules, which brought repentance and restored blessing.

We often find the same principle carried out in the lives of Christians as they experience the loving Heavenly Father's chastening to bring us into conformity to His rules. Why is the LORD so concerned that we pay attention to Him and His truths? In a word, the LORD your God is jealous. Here is the rule: *It is the LORD your God you shall fear. Him you shall serve and by his name you shall swear. You shall not go after other gods, the gods of the peoples who are around you.*

The simple version of the rule is: "Fear the LORD your God and show that you fear Him by serving Him." Jesus quoted verse thirteen to rebuff Satan's temptation to worship him. That is still the issue. That has always been the issue. When people bow down to other gods or allow lesser gods to be their focus, they are ultimately bowing down to Satan. Paul pointed out this very important truth to the Corinthian believers, *No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be participants with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons. Shall we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he? (1 Corinthians 10:20-22).*

That horrible reality stands in contrast to the fact that *the LORD your God in your midst is a jealous God, lest the anger of the LORD your God be kindled against you, and he destroy you from off the face of the earth. "You shall not put the LORD your God to the test, as you tested him at Massah" (vv.13-16).* God is intensely, righteously jealous for His glory. God is glorified by His grace and mercy He displays in benefit for His people. When His people rebuff His benefits and attribute His glory to lesser gods, our One True God will level judgment. He will not share His glory.

The Expected Response to God's Commands (vv.17-25).

Our gracious God simply desires for us to do right so that we can enjoy His blessings. It seems quite sensible to conclude that to keep the LORD's commands is to do right. *You shall diligently keep the commandments of the LORD your God, and his testimonies and his statutes, which he has commanded you. And you shall do what is right and good in the sight of the LORD (vv.17-18a).*

Keeping the LORD's commands is not just a matter of making a list, checking it twice, being bound and determined to be nice. We do not keep rules to be acceptable to people, to receive their praise, to be exalted. We know the LORD's commands, testimonies, and statutes because we make them a part of our life every day. Therefore, we do what is right and good in the LORD's sight.

What is right and good in the Lord's sight is becoming less right, less good, and less acceptable in our pagan culture's sight.

Right now various states are considering the passage of SOSI laws. Those are laws that establish rights for people regarding Sexual Orientation and Sexual Identification. If these laws pass (and eventually they will), we could be charged with hate crimes for speaking out against what the LORD's commands, testimonies, and statutes forbid and identify as sins. Will you still do what is right and good in the LORD's sight?

But God desires for us to do right in order to possess His blessing. The last part over verses eighteen and nineteen read: *That it may go well with you, and that you may go in and take possession of the good land that the LORD swore to give to your fathers by thrusting out all your enemies from before you, as the LORD has promised (vv.18b-19)*. Living according to God's rules and regulations always makes for a peaceful society. Living in opposition to God's rules creates the chaos and near anarchy we call life in America. God's special promise to Israel was that their obedience to His law would result in His blessing of removing the enemy from the properties He promised to give them. And our obedience to the Lord's rules will result in Him removing the enemy of sin from our lives.

In the process of knowing God, knowing His commands, doing His commands, and receiving His blessings, lessons are learned and taught. One lesson we and the ancient people learned is that the LORD delivers (vv.20-23). Moses told them, *When your son asks you in time to come, "What is the meaning of the testimonies and the statutes and the rules that the LORD our God has commanded you?" then you shall say to your son, "We were Pharaoh's slaves in Egypt. And the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand. And the LORD showed signs and wonders, great and grievous, against Egypt and against Pharaoh and all his household, before our eyes. And he brought us out from there, that he might bring us in and give us the land that he swore to give to our fathers" (vv.20-23)*.

We can apply the lesson to our circumstances by asking this question: "What do you say when someone asks why you live like a legalist?" The correct answer could be, "I was a slave to sin and God came to me in grace and mercy, did the miracle of regeneration in my life, and delivered me from bondage to sin. Therefore, I respond in obedience to the LORD's commands" (vv.24-25). *And the LORD*

commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the LORD our God, for our good always, that he might preserve us alive, as we are this day. And it will be righteousness for us, if we are careful to do all this commandment before the LORD our God, as he has commanded us (vv.24-25).

We live according to what we read in the Bible for the glory of the LORD our God. We live out the righteousness that God gave us at salvation by doing His commands. The true and moral law of our God is not a burdensome thing. We do not try to keep rules in order to convince God to save us. God already saved us from bondage to our sin and clothed us in the righteousness of Jesus Christ. We keep the LORD's commands, statutes, and testimonies because that is what the righteousness we have looks like. We are just being what we are.