

It could be fruitful to read Deuteronomy 6-11 at one sitting.

Perhaps it would take a little too long for a Sunday morning –

but Deuteronomy 6-11 is Moses’ exposition of the first commandment.

Moses expounds the first commandment in a way that shows how all other commands are rooted in this one.

If you turn to Deuteronomy 7,

I will read portions of the whole passage to give you a feel for the whole.

Read:

7:6-19

8:11-20

9:4-12 (and then after recounting the story of the golden calf and the new tablets)

10:12-22

Introduction: The Three Temptations in the Wilderness

There are three temptations that Moses warns about in this sermon.

(7:17) Do not say in your heart, “these nations are greater than I” –
but remember the LORD and his mighty deeds against Egypt!

(8:17) Do not say in your heart, “My power and the might of my hand
have gotten me this wealth” –

but remember that the LORD is the one who gave you the land!

(9:4) And do not say in your heart, “It is because of my righteousness
that the LORD has brought me in to possess the land” –

it is not your righteousness,

but God’s faithfulness to his covenant with your fathers!

Let’s think for a moment about these three temptations.

First – “the nations are greater than I”

This is the temptation to think that it’s all up to us.

When I look at my enemies, I realize that I can’t win.

What do you *do* when you *know* that you can’t win?

You resort to strategy and compromise.

Sometimes that’s a good idea.

But God said to take possession of the land.

Israel looks at their enemies and says,

“Well, that’s not going to happen!

So, how can we do the next best thing?”

Moses says, Woah! don’t forget who God is!

It’s not about us!

If God says that he’s going to give us the land,

then we need to believe God –
no matter what your enemies may look like!
Do not fear earthly power!
Fear God.

The Second temptation – “my power has gotten me this wealth”
This is the temptation of materialism.
You may think that you have built your own little empire –
it's easy to be proud of what you have accomplished!
“I'm good at what I do.”

Paul Miller (in *The Praying Life*) suggests that if there is anything in your life
that you don't pray about –
that means that you don't think you need God's help in that area!
“I'm doing fine at this, why should I need God...?”
Remember that it is God who gives all good gifts.
If you think that you can do it without God,
don't be surprised if God takes it away!
Do not trust in earthly wealth.
Trust God.

The third temptation – “it is because of my righteousness” that God gave me the land.
This is the temptation of moralism.
God said that if we obey him then he will bless us –
therefore if we have been blessed,
it must be because of our righteousness!
Now it is true that God says that if his people obey him, then he will bless them.
But that doesn't mean that he will bless them *because* of their obedience!
He will bless them *because* of his promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob!
If you start making reward and blessing dependent on your obedience,
then (as Moses points out) you are going to be in trouble –
because you are a stiff-necked and rebellious generation!
Do not hope in your own performance.
Hope in God!

Also notice that God's answer to all three temptations is to remember that *grace* precedes law.
It is by grace that Israel will enter the land.
It is by grace that Israel will take possession of the land.
And it is by grace that Israel will remain in the land.

Israel's obedience to the Law is absolutely necessary to their possession of the land.
But Israel's obedience is never the *reason* for their possession of the land.

This same attitude is found all through Psalm 119 – we sing verses 17-24 in 119C

Sing Psalm 119C
Read Matthew 4:1-17

Do you see how the three temptations in the wilderness
bear a striking resemblance to the three temptations in the gospels?
The devil tempted Jesus to turn stones into bread.
The devil tempted Jesus to throw himself off the pinnacle of the temple.
The devil tempted Jesus by offering him all the kingdoms of the world –
if Jesus would only worship him.

In other words, Satan was offering Jesus the same temptations that Israel fell for.
Trust in your own power – trust in your own righteousness – you can't defeat me, join me!
And, interestingly enough, Jesus understood exactly where these temptations came from,
because all three times he quotes Deuteronomy 6-9 in answer:
“Man shall live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.”
“You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.”
“You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.”

Jesus is the Israel who is tempted in the wilderness –
and where Israel had failed, Jesus succeeds!

Jesus did not fear earthly power.
Jesus did not trust earthly wealth.
And – oddly enough –
the one man in all of human history who *could have* trusted in his own performance –
didn't.

As 1 Peter 2:23 says,
“When he was reviled, he did not revile in return;
when he suffered, he did not threaten,
but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.”

Because Jesus understood what the law was for!
The law is not about how to get into the kingdom.
If the law could produce righteousness, then there was no need for Jesus!

The law is about how to live and love as the redeemed people of God.

Last time we looked at Deuteronomy 6,
where Moses taught us *the* commandment.
There is *one* commandment that covers *everything*!
If you keep this one command, you will keep all the others!

Love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your strength.

1. Do not fear earthly power – the nations *are* greater than the people of God!

Do not fear earthly power – but also, do not trust in your own power!
And most importantly, “Don’t underestimate the power of God”
7:17-21

When exhorting the people of God to faith and good deeds,
Moses reminds them of what God has already done.
God is fully able to destroy the nations.
And in the resurrection of Jesus Christ,
the powers have all been subdued.

This is true for the church,
it is no less true for us as individuals.
The desire for power is one of those basic human drives.
We were created with it.
We were designed to have dominion over the creatures –
to rule over the earth and exercise God’s stewardship.

But this proper use of power has become twisted.
Rather than use power so that we might serve our Creator,
we now lust for power so that we might dominate our fellow creatures.

You are a people holy to the LORD.
God has chosen you as his own treasured possession.
It is very easy for us to use power for our own selfish ends.
It is very easy to say that God has chosen me for this purpose,
because I am uniquely gifted to accomplish what he wants!
Which *really* means, “I’m going to get what I want!”
This is nothing more than a power trip.

But for others, you aren’t tempted by power—at least not in that way.
You have the opposite problem.
You see the obstacles.
You see how large and how numerous your enemies are.
You are tempted to say, “These nations are greater than I. How can I dispossess them?”

Neither spiritual pride nor spiritual cowardice are acceptable.
In the end, they both have the same problem:
they both look to the self as the source of power.

The solution for both is to forsake self.
If you struggle with spiritual pride—
remember that you do not have the power to defeat your enemies.
Beware lest God leave you to find that out the hard way!
And you who struggle with spiritual cowardice—

Christ does have the power to defeat your enemies.

Do not remain enslaved to your fears!

The solution for all of us is to believe in the power of God that raised Jesus from the dead,
and exalted him above every principality and power.

2. Do not trust in earthly wealth – it cannot protect you.

In Deuteronomy 8,

Moses urges Israel to remember that man does not live by bread alone,
but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.

And Moses describes the land as a land of plenty –

a good land – a fruitful land – a land of olive trees and honey.

But Moses warns that they will face a temptation:

when they have eaten and are full – they will be tempted to forget the LORD,
the one who brought them out of the land of Egypt.

Isn't that often the case?

When everything is good – when we have all that we need –
it is easy to say in our hearts, "I did this!"

At the beginning of chapter 8, Moses reminds them that this is the land
"that the LORD swore to give to your fathers."

In other words, law-keeping is not the way to *enter* covenant with God–
you can never win God's favor through your own works–
but rather obeying the law is the way that we live in covenant with God.

In Genesis 12 God called Abraham to go to the promised land.

In Genesis 15 God established his covenant with Abraham.

Abraham did nothing to enter that covenant.

God alone promised by himself that he would fulfill his covenant.

But then in Genesis 17, God speaks to Abraham and says,

"I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless,
that I may make my covenant between me and you,
and may multiply you greatly." (17:1-2)

What does he mean, "walk before me and be blameless,
that I may make my covenant between me and you"?

God is saying that there are two parts to the covenant.

In the first part the covenant is unilateral–unconditional.

God makes the covenant–and God promises that he will keep it.

You do not decide to enter covenant with God.

God sovereignly establishes his covenant.

But there is another sense in which the covenant is bilateral–conditional.

God calls those who are in covenant with him to obey him.

Go back to Genesis 1!

In the beginning God called Adam to obey him.

But before he called him to obey,
he blessed him (Genesis 1:28).

Even that first covenant began with the gracious condescension of God.

Adam did not need a redeemer,
but the call to obedience was rooted
in who God is and what God had done for Adam.

And likewise, in Genesis 17,

having already established his covenant with Abraham,

God says that his covenant with Abraham calls him to walk before God blameless.

That same pattern is at work here in Deuteronomy.

In Genesis 17 God gave the sign of circumcision as the sign of the covenant.

Every male child was to be circumcised on the eighth day,
as a sign of the covenant.

Through circumcision, the child entered God's covenant.

Neither Abraham nor Isaac chose to be in covenant with God.

God sovereignly chose them.

He *elected* them.

And also Moses speaks of how the LORD "set his heart in love on your fathers
and chose their offspring after them."

He refers back to circumcision in chapter 10, verse 16.

"Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart."

Simply having the outward sign of the covenant

does not guarantee the blessing of the covenant.

You must love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul.

You must walk in his ways.

Why?

Because of what he has done for you.

Christian obedience springs from a heart of gratitude.

You do not obey God in order to be saved.

Rather, you obey God because he has delivered you from sin and death.

Because he has brought you into the land – because he has done what he promised –
therefore *remember* the LORD – and love him!

3. Do not hope in your own performance – because only God can save!

And then in chapter 9, Moses warns Israel not to think that it is *their* righteousness
that brought them into the land.

He plays off the same theme of remembering that God brought them into the land – because of his word to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.

And then he reminds them of their stubbornness and their rebellion!

Don't trust in your own righteousness.

Don't think that your righteousness is what brings you into the land – for that matter, don't think that your righteousness is what *keeps* you in the land!

But then – what do you do with what Jesus says in Matthew 5?

Turn over to Matthew 5:17-20

¹⁷ *“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. ¹⁸ For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. ¹⁹ Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. ²⁰ For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.*

What does it mean that your righteousness must exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees?

Well, first, how righteous were the scribes and Pharisees?

Jesus goes on to contrast their "righteousness" with true righteousness:

vv21-26--they taught that "you shall not murder"

 simply meant literal killing

 Jesus shows that the Law includes the heart

 Jesus says that the 6th Commandment forbids anger

vv27-32--they taught that "you shall not commit adultery"

 simply meant literal adultery

 Jesus shows that the Law includes the heart

 Jesus says that the 7th commandment forbids lust.

In vv33-37, Jesus teaches that the Pharisees

 have misunderstood the Law's teaching on oaths,

vv38-48 that the Pharisees have misunderstood the law of Love (Lev. 19:18),

Jesus is not making up a new Law here.

 He explicitly had said that he did not come to abolish the Law and the Prophets.

Jesus shows that the Pharisees were leading them astray.

 The Pharisees were not righteous;

 they were hypocrites.

 They claimed that they kept the Law,

 but in reality, they broke the Law constantly.

In Matthew 15:3, Jesus charges that the Pharisees

 break the commandments of God for the sake of following their own traditions.

The Pharisees **claimed** to be righteous, but Jesus shows them up for a bunch of frauds.

So what does it mean that your righteousness must exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees?

Read 5:19

¹⁹ Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus is not talking about perfection.

He is talking about the character or disposition of our lives.

Are we the sort of people who love God's law?

Are we the sort of people who repent when we fail?

Are we the sort of people who seek to obey his commandments?

Are we the sort of people who trust in Christ for the grace to obey?

The Pharisees weren't.

That is why our righteousness must exceed theirs.

If we live our lives like the Pharisees,

then we will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

The relationship between grace and law must never be confused.

Grace always comes first.

The reason why you obey God is *always* because of who he is and what he has done for you.

That is why we sang the Ten Commandments *after* the declaration of pardon today.

After hearing of the great redemption that is ours in Christ Jesus, we sang in response of our desire to walk in his ways.

And – we need to teach our children exactly the same way!

There is a danger that we will be moralistic with our children.

“Do this because God says so!”

Now it's true.

God does say so.

But is that how God speaks to you?

No, God says “do this because I have loved you.”

“Do this because I have redeemed you.”

“Do this because I have bought you with the blood of my only Son.

You are mine.”

Teach *this* to your children.

Teach them that obedience flows not from guilt, but from gratitude.

If you always discipline your children for every infraction, they will never learn grace.

But when you have mercy on them, and do not deal with them as they deserve, teach them!

If you just “let it slide” because you’re tired and grouchy,
that will not teach them grace!
Rather, tell them: what you did was wrong – and it *deserves* judgment –
but God does not deal with us as our sins deserve,
and so I will show mercy to you as God has shown mercy to me!

Do not fear earthly power – the nations *are* greater than the people of God!
Do not trust in earthly wealth – it cannot protect you.
Do not hope in your own performance – because only God can save!

Conclusion: What are the Ten Commandments for?

In Dt 10, Moses tells us that the Ten Commandments were written on tablets of stone,
and placed in the ark of the covenant. (10:1-2)

The ark is called the ark of the covenant, or ark of the testimony,
because the Ten Commandments are placed inside it.

As we heard from Matthew 4 –
Jesus uses Deuteronomy 7-9 to answer Satan’s temptations –
and then in Matthew 5,
Jesus says that he did not come to abolish the law, but to fulfill the law.

In other words, Jesus finishes the job which the Ten Commandments began.
This is why we can never read the Ten Commandments apart from Christ.
He does not abolish them,
but he fulfills them,
he gives them their true meaning and purpose,
because he is the covenant mediator
who is not merely a servant in the house, but the Son over the house,
who is not merely a subject of the king, but the King himself.

So the Ten Commandments are grounded in God's grace;
they point us to Christ through
teaching us kingdom righteousness,
revealing the character of God,
and offering kingdom blessings.

The Ten Commandments start with three commandments about our relationship to God;
then gives us a transitional commandment--the Sabbath--
which includes our relationships both with God and others;
and then gives us five commandments about our relationships with others,
before concluding with a commandment that focuses on the heart.

You might say that the Commandments start in the Holy of Holies (no other gods),

and then moves through the tabernacle--insisting that our worship be pure--
then it moves to how we think about time and authority,
how we relate to our neighbors,
and finally down to the heart.

The Law of God relates to every aspect of life.