

April 8, 2018
Sunday Evening Service
Series: Deuteronomy
Community Baptist Church
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To Ponder . . .

Questions to ponder as you prepare to hear from Deuteronomy 5:1-21.

1. Why is it better to hear God's Word than to see evidence of lesser gods?
2. How is it possible for someone to hear but not obey God's Word? (cf. the Seed and the Sower)
3. How is our hearing and obeying God connected with the covenant He made with us?
4. How do we deal with the fact that God calls everyone to be obedient to His law but it is not within human nature to accomplish it?
5. How are the Ten Commands divided?

TEN STATEMENTS THAT REVEAL GOD'S CHARACTER Deuteronomy 5:1-21

In the last few verses of the previous chapter, we read beginning with verse forty-four, *This is the law that Moses set before the people of Israel. These are the testimonies, the statutes, and the rules, which Moses spoke to the people of Israel when they came out of Egypt, beyond the Jordan in the valley opposite Beth-peor (4:44-46a)*. This restating and explaining of the law makes up the bulk of

Deuteronomy. It is Moses's second long speech to the children of the original nation God delivered from Egypt (4:44-11:32).

We should gather from this that the "statutes and rules," as Moses referred to them in 5:1, are rather important. Here was the second generation of Israelites on the verge of crossing the Jordan River to take possession of the bulk of the Promised Land. Before they proceeded to do what God commanded them to do (i.e. take possession of His provision), they needed to hear His rules, testimonies, and statutes again.

We who live in the age of grace might conclude that all this information is irrelevant to modern Christians. Why should we care about the warnings against idolatry, the sabbatical year, the Passover, the forbidden forms of worship, God's plan for taking care of the priests and so much more? In fact, sometimes those old Mosaic Laws, as we call them, don't even make sense in this modern era. All of these conclusions are true to a point. However, the rules and statutes that God revealed to His people go a long way in identifying God's character. He requires what He requires because He is what He is. If we would know God, we will need to know His rules.

That principle is no truer than when it comes to the Ten Commands. This simple statement of ten rules has been the basis of laws in most civilized cultures throughout history. They are the expression of God's plan for people working together in unity and created beings living in fellowship with their Creator. When individuals relegate these rules to the bin of historical antiquities, they will discover conflict with others and conflict with God.

The prime example of this resulting conflict is glaring at us from our own culture. A couple of generations ago, the enlightened leaders of our nation decided that God was old fashioned, His rules too restrictive, and His religion biased. Therefore, they threw these very commands out of school and out of the courtrooms. Now it is necessary to have armed guards in schools to maintain order, and our court system from the Supreme court to the local magistrate is so confused it is difficult for victims and perpetrators alike to predict how any particular judge might rule.

These ten commands provide a window into the character of our Creator. He established these rules based on His righteousness. No one will ever become righteous by keeping these rules. But every

person whom God has justified and, therefore, made righteous will govern their lives by these rules. We will peruse these commands and make brief application knowing full well that a serious study of the commands should require ten sermons.

Review of the Circumstances Behind the Ten Commands (vv.1-5).

The first verse of our text is a summons to hear and do. *And Moses summoned all Israel and said to them, "Hear, O Israel, the statutes and the rules that I speak in your hearing today, and you shall learn them and be careful to do them" (v.1).* Here the leader of God's people summoned them to hear the statutes and the rules. In this case, Moses was not so much the lawgiver as the law reviewer. Instead of looking like a judge, he is more like a pastor/teacher who stated the law God had already given and then tries to inspire God's people to know it and do it. What he taught was the law he received from God, not even his ideas about how to worship and obey God.

Moses understood the importance of hearing God's word. The phrase "Hear, O Israel" shows up 5 times in Deuteronomy, always introducing important commands or instruction (5:1; 6:4; 9:1; 20:3; 27:9). In a broader sense, the call to hear the word of God is found 23 times in Deuteronomy. Hearing what God says is critical for His people.

I watched a video the other day about the debate regarding the date of the exodus of Israel from Egypt. For the past several years, liberal Bible scholars have proposed that the exodus occurred under the reign of Pharaoh Rameses in about 1220 B.C. But there is no archeological evidence to verify that date, which has led agnostics and critics to conclude that the exodus, like so many other grand events recorded in the Bible, never happened. They propose that people should believe the exodus story simply as a motif to encourage thoughts of freedom.

On the other hand, there is a clear statement in 1 Kings 6:1 that Solomon began to build the temple in the fourth year of his reign which was 480 years after the exodus. We know that Solomon began to reign in 960 BC. Add 480 years to that and we arrive at 1440 BC as the date for the exodus. And lo and behold, there is archeological evidence of astonishing events happening in Egypt during the reign

of Amenhotep II. The lesson is clear. Hear the word of the LORD first. Then look for visual evidence based on what God says.

"Hear O Israel" is a wonderful reminder that the true God cannot be seen, but He can be heard. That is why He desires to keep His people from the lifeless idols that can be seen but never heard.

The leader of God's people expected them to learn and do the rules. There is much difference between simply hearing truth and putting it into practice. God calls His people to hear Him with the purpose of obeying what we hear. To that end, life demonstrates the reality of Jesus's parable of the sower and the seed. The "packed down hard" soil kind of people never really heard the Word. Yes, the sound of the word lands in their ears, but they never give serious consideration to the truth. Then there are the "stony and weedy" soil kind of people who heard the word with great joy, but they don't act accordingly in the long run. In contrast, God's people are supposed to be the tilled up fertile soil kind who hear the word and by responding in obedience produce fruit for His glory.

That is the kind of hearing expected in regard to God's law. God desires for us to do more than hear sounds and even more than to hear academically. The Hebrew verb and form used in this sentence requires hearing that results in a changed life.

Why? Because the LORD's covenant reveals His character. Notice that Moses told the people that God made a covenant with "us." *The LORD our God made a covenant with us in Horeb. Not with our fathers did the LORD make this covenant, but with us, who are all of us here alive today (v.2,3).* These two verses present a bit of a difficulty for interpretation. To whom was God speaking?

Consider the words of Moses in the context. "I speak in your hearing today" (v.1) has to be addressed to the second generation people. "God made a covenant with us in Horeb" (v.2) would have to reference the first generation. "Not with our fathers . . ." (v.2). God didn't make the covenant with the first generation? "But with us who are all of us here alive today" (v.2). God made the covenant with the second generation? Most of these people were not even born in that day 40 years earlier.

This matter is not so confusing when we understand that it is the expression of an important principle that flows like this: God made the covenant affirmed by these ten commands with the fathers

at Mt. Horeb. But the covenant really had no effect on that generation as was evidenced by the Golden Calf and other rebellion. Therefore, God clearly rejected that generation and laid the covenant on the table for their children. Therefore also, Moses is presenting God's covenant to them with the question, "How will the second generation respond?"

As the second generation considered God's covenant, they needed to remember that God had spoken face-to-face in great power. *The LORD spoke with you face to face at the mountain, out of the midst of the fire (v.4)*. That God "spoke with you face-to-face"(v.4) is not true of either the forefathers or this generation. But that was true regarding God's relationship with Moses (Exodus 33:11), except even Moses never saw God's face! So what does this verse mean?

This is a rhetorical device to highlight corporate identity. Face-to-face speaks of intimate relationship. God gave the covenant, validated by the ten commands, in order for His people – of all ages– to have a relationship with Him. We view much of the Bible that way. We conclude that what is true for one group of God's people is often applied to us as God's people as well. Isn't that what we are doing right now with Deuteronomy by learning the lessons God taught those people, but applying them to ourselves? Isn't that what we mean when we believe Jesus died for our sins?

Moses reminded the people that when God spoke to His people at Mount Sinai, He caused fear. *While I stood between the LORD and you at that time, to declare to you the word of the LORD. For you were afraid because of the fire, and you did not go up into the mountain (v.5)*.

God gave the covenant accompanied with fearsome signs in order to help the people understand His omnipotence. He showed that He is powerful enough to do whatever He chooses to do. Fear of this God helps us understand why we need to believe His commands and seek to keep them.

But there is a very important truth here. While God reveals His character in His commands, He also reveals over time that no one is able to keep them. Therefore, we cannot enjoy intimate fellowship with our Creator, because His commands (and therefore character) are beyond us. We need something or Someone to bring us into the circle of fellowship with God. If we could be made righteous by some other

means than keeping commands, we could then have an inborn desire to keep God's commands and work toward becoming like Him. That is the work of Jesus Christ providing the means, through His sacrifice, of making us righteous.

Ten Commands From Our Creator (vv.6-21).

An overview of the Ten Commandments reveals that four of the commands address our relationship with our Creator and six of the commands address our relationship with fellow humans.

Verses six through fifteen contain four commands about our relationship with our Creator. First is the command that forbids any gods before the LORD. *"I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me" (vv.6-7)*. The command simply requires that God's people must not allow anything or anyone to come before Him. God's people in Egypt were very familiar with worshiping the sun, the moon, the Pharaoh, and a whole entourage of man-made gods. God's people throughout the period of the judges and kings struggled with putting lesser gods before the true God.

And it is true that we who are God's people in the twenty-first century also struggle with this same thing. Our culture offers a myriad of gods like pleasure, popularity, and possessions to take our time, energy, and resources. Ultimately, as it has been throughout human history, the creation of and worship of false gods is merely expressions of our desire to worship ourselves as God. The reason imputed righteousness requires us to die to self is because self constantly rises up to replace God.

Serving other gods, lesser gods is abject foolishness because we did not deliver ourselves from bondage! In verse seven Moses reminded the people that it was the one true God who powerfully and miraculously delivered them from the slavery in Egypt. The first generation was eyewitness to the astonishing power by which God virtually destroyed the nation of Egypt. How could they conclude that the golden calf represented their God? It is good for us to regularly focus on the miracle God wrought in delivering us from sin and self.

The second command prohibits the making of images to worship. The command is found in verses eight and the first part of

nine. *“You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them” (vv.8-9a).*

The essential nature of all idolatry for centuries was expressed in figures, images, the creation of human hands. That same idea is expressed in the creations of our hands or minds. Consider a particular application of the law. Is a video game that takes precedence over God (time, energy, money) a likeness of things on earth or heaven or water or within the earth? The tragedy is that a person who God made in His image makes something in the image of created things that God did not make in His image. Then the image of God bows down and shows obeisance to the image of a lesser thing. It is a picture of respect for sovereign authority standing on its head. Satan always attempts to stand God’s order on its head.

God gave us a very good reason for this prohibition. *“For I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments” (vv.9b-10).* God is zealous for His glory. His glory is perfectly righteous and deserves to be worshiped exclusively.

God’s glory is the essence of His person, which He must protect and preserve. To breach that protection and lower God’s glory to the level of creatures is to show rejection of God’s person.

To reject God in favor of lesser things is tantamount to hatred for God. God promises to punish, both now and for eternity, all people who reject His glory. Conversely, God shows steadfast love to those who show they love Him by keeping His commands. The love for God comes first. It is the evidence that He has made us righteous through faith. We desire to keep His commands because He has first showed us unchanging love rooted in His faithfulness to His promises.

Third, God forbids disrespect of the LORD’s name. *“You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain” (v.11).* This command requires that God’s people must never attach His name to anything valueless. We must never use His name flippantly, as a

meaningless expression like “O God” which is so popular and of which “Gosh” is simply a variant. Most definitely we must never use His name to curse or as a response of anger.

The fourth command regarding our relationship with God is that we show no disrespect of the Sabbath day. The command requires us to, *“Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy, as the LORD your God commanded you” (v.12).* The word Sabbath is a reference to the seventh day of the week. God intended for His people to recognize Him, but making one day out of every seven special.

In case there was any doubt about what “keep it holy” meant, God went on to explain. *“Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter or your male servant or your female servant, or your ox or your donkey or any of your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates, that your male servant and your female servant may rest as well as you” (vv.13-14).*

Here God required His people to work six days and then rest one day as an expression of worship to the *LORD your God*. The distinction of the day was highlighted by complete lack of normal duties undertaken the other six days of the week. At the very least this seventh day was to be different. Why?

The reason for remembering the Sabbath is, *“You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day” (v.15).* As slaves, God’s people had to work seven days a week to please their master. And modern people of God become slaves to pleasure, slaves to acceptability, slaves to experience and must spend seven days a week trying to please their task masters. As our culture has eliminated and resemblance of this command, God’s people have drifted further from Him and become very much like Satan’s world system. God’s people need to get back to holding one day in every seven as unique and special unto God.

That brings us to the six commands about our relationship with others (vv.16-21). First is the command to honor parents. *“Honor your father and your mother, as the LORD your God commanded you, that your days may be long, and that it may go well with you in*

the land that the LORD your God is giving you” (v.16). To honor is to hold in esteem, to respond to the person as special. It usually involves obedience but not necessarily. When a non-Christian parent pressures a adult Christian child to disobey God, the child must obey God. It is possible to obey God over a parent and still hold the parent in a position of honor.

Second, command number six, forbids God’s people from murdering. *“You shall not murder” (v.17).* Most people have no problem keeping this command as it appears on the surface. The problem comes when we consider Jesus’s explanation of the command. He taught, *“You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’ But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be liable to the hell of fire” (Matthew 5:21-22).* Now getting angry with people unnecessarily is quite easy to do. It’s tantamount to murder. Stop it.

Third, the seventh command forbids committing adultery. The command is clear enough: *“And you shall not commit adultery” (v.18).* The further a culture moves away from God’s standard of righteousness, the more this becomes a problem for God’s people. That is especially true in light of Jesus’s explanation of the command. He taught, *“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Matthew 5:27-28).* Looking at pornography is tantamount to breaking this command. Lusting over a woman even at church is to commit adultery. And it works both ways. A woman can also lust for a man.

Fourth, and the eighth command, is *“You shall not steal” (v.19).* Obviously, to steal is to take what does not belong to you. But serious consideration of this sin reveals how easy it is to do it regularly.

Fifth, the ninth command forbids lying. *“And you shall not bear false witness against your neighbor” (v.20).* To bear false witness is to say something that is not true. This command specifically forbids saying something untrue about your neighbor. Therefore, gossip and too many “prayer request” are forbidden.

Finally God told His people not to covet. *“And you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife. And you shall not desire your neighbor’s house, his field, or his male servant, or his female servant, his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor’s” (v.21).* The Hebrew word for covet means to take pleasure in, desire, want for self. The issue is an object or person that belongs to someone else. The key is to be satisfied with what God has given me.

These commands, these rules and statutes are so practical, so sensible, that they provide the foundation for any culture, any family, any business, any church or school to function with workable interpersonal relationships. They are the essential expressions of God’s character and, therefore, give a glimpse into His righteousness. We do not become righteous by keeping these commands but, because God has made us righteous when He made us His people through the covenant of Christ’s blood, we have a longing in our hearts to obey them.