

The Law and the Christian

Deuteronomy 6:6-19

The law and the Christian—that’s a pretty odd title for a sermon from Deuteronomy 6. After all, this book is in the Old Testament. We’re studying the history of the nation of Israel getting ready to take possession of the promised land of Canaan, and God is speaking to his people out of the fire and smoke of a mountain. That doesn’t seem to have much to do with Christians today, does it?

Yet, of course it does! These words from Deuteronomy speak directly to the New Testament Christian, to us. Remember what we studied last week,

v.5 “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.”

That’s the verse Jesus quoted when he was asked what was the greatest law in the Old Testament. That’s the summary of the whole law, isn’t it, the focal point. And that law is most certainly for the Christian.

Mat. 22:37 “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ 38 This is the first and great commandment.”

So let’s keep going through this great chapter in Deuteronomy, realizing these words are, very much, words for us today. I wasn’t quite sure how to outline these verses, though, in a way that would be the most helpful for our study today. So I will just use a simple and broad heading for my first point.

I. THE PRACTICAL USES OF THE LAW.

The law should always be practical, that is, applicable to your own daily lives. I will focus on three straightforward observations

from our text. First, the need for,

A. Heart-felt obedience.

v.6

This is a simple point, a simple idea. But it is one that I don’t want to go without saying. The law is a matter of the heart. Even as we studied the command to love last week, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart.” The point is, obedience to the law can never be reduced to some outward action. Obedience can never be restricted to what you see with your eyes, because obedience must include the motives and desires of your heart. It must include your intent, your objective, your thoughts, your motivation, your purpose.

So, as Jesus would put it,

Mat. 5:28 “But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”

Mat. 5:22 “But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, Raca!’ shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, ‘You fool!’ shall be in danger of hell fire.”

Anger in the heart is a violation of the sixth commandment. Lust in the heart is a violation of the seventh commandment. The law of God always addresses our hearts! And so does the definition of love.

v.6 “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.”

The law is always a matter of the heart. And the obedience which pleases the Lord is that which comes from the depth of your heart, as a matter of willing and eager delight. Not just external conformity.

Secondly, and somewhat familiarly with everyone who has raised children, the law is used as a crucial element in,

B. The nurture of our children.

v.7

We've seen this before, and I'll emphasize it again here briefly, that the whole nature of God's relationship to his people is generational. That is to say, it is covenantal, as the covenant promise of God is always extended to our children. The promise is for you and for your children, and that generational idea is emphasized in both the Old Testament and the New. God promises to be our God, and we claim that promise for our children. That is the biblical foundation for our practice of baptizing our children in infancy.

But we don't just claim God's promise. We teach our children. Diligently.

Deut. 4:9 "Only take heed to yourself, and diligently keep yourself, lest you forget the things your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. And teach them to your children and your grandchildren, 10 especially concerning the day you stood before the Lord your God in Horeb, when the Lord said to me, 'Gather the people to Me, and I will let them hear My words, that they may learn to fear Me all the days they live on the earth, and that they may teach their children.'"

In the New Testament, that same idea comes out this way,

Eph. 6:4 "And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord."

So we teach our children. From infancy. We teach them God's law. We teach them God's promises. We teach them

about Jesus. We teach them about the Bible. With this encouragement,

Prov. 22:6 "Train up a child in the way he should go, And when he is old he will not depart from it."

Certainly there are some children who rebel, and it's not a magical formula that we follow in raising our children, but this is the promise, and the hope. Thus the work of parents is so very crucial in the building of God's kingdom.

v.6 "And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. 7 You shall teach them diligently to your children."

And then, as the verse continues,

v.7b "...and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. 8 You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. 9 You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates."

The point of all that, as I would express it, is,

C. Comprehensive consistency.

In other words, this Christian life, as we might call it, is a matter that affects every part of your life. You don't talk about God and the Bible just in church, or just on certain occasions. But always, on every occasion. In every situation. In the morning, when you get up. At night, when you go to bed. When you go about all of your regular, ordinary, daily business.

I'm not sure about writing them on your hand, but maybe a note on the refrigerator. Or on your cellphone. And the frontlets between your eyes were, in Hebrew tradition, strips of paper on which the law of God would be written, for reminders. A notepad maybe, for us. Or some reminder app that you put on your

phone. The idea, again, is that there would be a repetitive, constant reminder of the word of God. The intent, I expect, was a metaphor, though highly self-disciplined Jews were known to fulfill this obligation literally. In the gospels, we read of phylacteries worn by the Pharisees. Ironically, and sadly, for them it was for a show. It was the exact opposite of what Moses is imploring the Israelites, in terms of sincerity. For the Pharisees, it became a badge of righteousness, and pure hypocrisy.

Mat. 23:1 “Then Jesus spoke to the multitudes and to His disciples, 2 saying: “The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat. 3 Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do, but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do. 4 For they bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men’s shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers. 5 But all their works they do to be seen by men. They make their phylacteries broad and enlarge the borders of their garments. 6 They love the best places at feasts, the best seats in the synagogues, 7 greetings in the marketplaces, and to be called by men, ‘Rabbi, Rabbi.’ 8 But you, do not be called ‘Rabbi’; for One is your Teacher, the Christ, and you are all brethren.”

So please let the word of God be practical for you, in your life. Let the law of God be very, very practical as you seek to live out your life in a way that pleases God. Realizing, of course, every step of the way, that what you do outwardly, the obedience you perform outwardly, is motivated by a heart that wants nothing less than to love God.

So love God consistently. With comprehensive consistency. 24/7 as we say so often today. All day, every day.

Now, going on, let’s look at,
v.10-12

Whether it is immediately clear to you or not, I want to stress here a familiar theme, a familiar emphasis that is consistent in both the Old and New Testaments. Namely, the emphasis on the relationship between,

II. THE LAW AND THE GOSPEL.

And if you think immediately, where is that in this passage, let me make it evident to you.

v.10

That’s just the first half of the sentence, and it provides the foundation to the exhortation to obey the law. And it is a foundation that we simply cannot skip over. It puts this whole passage into the right context, and enables you to see and to understand the unity and consistency between the law and the gospel.

When it comes to the way in which you are saved, the law has no part. When it comes to justification, how you, a sinner, can be forgiven your sins and accepted as righteous before God, the law has no part. But this passage is all about the law, a “caution against disobedience” as the heading goes in my English Bible translation. But who is being cautioned? That’s really the key question. And what was their identity, what was their standing before God as they received the law?

And the simple answer, they were already the covenant people of God. So here’s the important point.

A. The law belongs to God’s covenant people.

It belongs to those who are already God’s covenant people. In Deuteronomy 6, the law belongs to a people who were about to enter the land of Canaan. They were about to defeat all the nations that lived there and take possession of the land God had

promised them. And that is the point. They were already God's covenant people.

v.10a "So it shall be, when the Lord your God brings you into the land of which He swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob..."

Thus, the law was NEVER the means by which they became the people of God. The law was never the means by which the people would be redeemed from slavery and come to be identified as the nation which belonged to God. They became God's covenant people, by his grace, and only as the object of his grace, did they receive the law.

B. The law belongs to the objects of God's grace.

God had promised the land to them. They were the recipients of a promise. They were the recipients of a gift. They were the objects of God's grace. And our text makes that so abundantly clear. Just look at the words.

v.10b "...to give you large and beautiful cities which you did not build, 11 houses full of all good things, which you did not fill, hewn-out wells which you did not dig, vineyards and olive trees which you did not plant..."

Each one of those things emphasizes the grace of God. Cities you did not build. And the point is, God gave them those large and beautiful cities. Houses you did not fill. God gave them all the good things that filled those houses. They had wells they didn't dig. Trees and vines they didn't plant. They had all of those wonderful blessings, and they had done nothing to earn or deserve them. God gave it all to them!

In other words, they were the objects of God's grace. They were the recipients of God's grace. They had received a gift for which they had not worked. And as the recipients of that gift of

grace, God gave them his law. And so,

C. The law defines our response to redemption.

That's what this passage is all about. Responding to grace. Having been reminded of the riches of that grace, we continue to read,

v.11b "...when you have eaten and are full— 12 then beware, lest you forget the Lord who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage."

People of God, that's the relationship between the law and the gospel. The promise of the gospel comes first. And when you receive that promise, when you believe that it is yours, by faith, then you receive the law as the definition of how you should respond to his grace.

And that is when it is appropriate to talk about,

III. APPLICATIONS OF THE LAW.

Beginning with fear. Reverence. Honor.

A. We give to God fear and honor.

v.13

These things should all fit together in your mind. To fear God in this sense is to give him the honor that is due his name. To give him the respect, the worship, that he deserves, because he is God. It is such a familiar theme. For example,

Deut. 13:4 "You shall walk after the Lord your God and fear Him, and keep His commandments and obey His voice; you shall serve Him and hold fast to Him."

And to bring that same idea into the context and language of the New Testament, remember Jesus' third and final temptation at

the hands of Satan,

Mat. 4:8 “Again, the devil took Him up on an exceedingly high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. 9 And he said to Him, “All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me.” 10 Then Jesus said to him, “Away with you, Satan! For it is written, You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve.”

So the application for us is plain. “You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve.” That’s our calling. That’s our responsibility. That’s our response to the grace of God. We worship him. And him alone.

B. We give to God our loyalty and faithfulness.

With good reason. God is jealous to protect and preserve our faithfulness.

v.14-15

The image is of a husband and a wife. The image is the unique sanctity of a marriage relationship. “You shall not go after other gods.

And yet we do, don’t we? We give honor and worship to false gods, gods of this world. Gods of our own making, gods of our own pleasure, gods of our own delight. It is always healthy and beneficial for you to think about what those gods might be in your life. What pleasure do you pursue, above and beyond to the exclusion of God? What goals do you seek to accomplish, above and beyond your commitment to worship and honor God?

Which comes first? Which is most important? Where is your chief and primary loyalty? And if you would consider yourself married to God, have you indeed been a faithful bride, faithful to him alone above all others, every day of your life?

Of course none of us can claim such perfect purity, and we need to seek his forgiveness regularly, often, even daily. And he promises to forgive. And to cleanse us from our sins. But as the recipients of God’s grace, we are called in the law to honor God in these ways. And, finally,

C. We give to God our trust and obedience.

That’s hard. People today are often conscious of the difficulty of trusting, especially when you’ve been hurt or betrayed. We are called to trust God nonetheless, not to tempt him by our rebellion.

v.16-19

Don’t put the Lord to the test. Instead, humbly receive his word as it is. And don’t grumble—that was the chief sin of the people at Massah. Rest your hope and confidence in God, in the truthfulness of his word and the faithfulness with which he loves us. And doing that, having the law, “diligently keep the commandments of the Lord your God, His testimonies, and His statutes which He has commanded you.”

So, the law and the Christian. The law and the gospel. The law and the people of God. We are about to enter the promised land of heaven, as the goal of our earthly existence. That’s the promise. We are about to enter a land flowing with milk and honey, and it will be an everlasting inheritance. That’s the gospel.

And as you look forward to your inheritance in that promised land, listen carefully to this law of God that you might carefully and diligently keep the commandments of the Lord Your God. And this is the first and greatest of those commandments,

v.5 “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. 6 “And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart.”