

THE WORD OF GOD

FOR THE

PEOPLE OF GOD

THE SERMONS IN DEUTERONOMY



Lesson 4: How to Love God

Deuteronomy 5:1-15

Lesson Summary and Objectives

Summary

Moses tells a new generation of people what God expects of them.

Learning Outcomes

- Participants can explain the covenant between God and his people.
- Participants can explain the relationship between love/fait h/obedience.
- Participants can evaluate the importance of individual vs. communal responsibility to God.
- Participants can discuss with clarity what it means to be the people of God.

Teaching Outline

Invite

Select one of the following questions:

- (For married people): have you renewed your vows at any point? What was it like? Why did you do it? (For younger adults/unmarried adults): Did your parents ever renew their vows? What was it like? Why did they do it?
- Did your family have a set of rules growing up – especially rules that were specific to your family? What were they? How did they function?

Inform

Deuteronomy chapter 5 marks the beginning of Moses' second sermon to the Israelites. After a review of the past in chapters 1-4, including God's faithfulness and the people's wavering faithfulness/unfaithfulness, Moses turns now to the core of the covenant between God and the people of Israel.

We originally find these commands in Exodus 20, where God officially seals his covenant with Israel. Now, with a new generation who did not participate in the ceremony at Sinai, and with a new land ahead, it seems appropriate for Moses to give these same words to this new group. This is not just a re-telling of those commands that were given to those people years ago; these are contemporary and are just as much for this new generation as for the old.

Read Deuteronomy 5:1-15

- Moses gathers the people to hear the “decrees and laws.” They are not just to learn them but they must follow them (1).
- This is an important beginning, because it is a formal summons to obedience. But why should they listen to or obey this God Moses has been talking about?
- Here’s why: God made a covenant with the people at Horeb/Sinai (2). This is a longstanding agreement. Notice that Moses says the covenant was made with “us” (even though it was a generation ago), and not “them.”
- Now Moses makes his startling assertion clearer and bolder: the covenant actually wasn’t with the ancestors but with those listening to Moses right now (3).
- Moses continues this line of thought: God spoke with you (not your ancestors) out of the fire on the mountain.
 - This could be Moses saying *you* and not *those ancestors*, or Moses could be lumping the *you* with the *ancestors* to emphasize the continuity of Israel and the continuing existence of God’s people. These people here in Deuteronomy are not as separated from their ancestors a generation ago as they might have thought.
- Moses reminds them of his role in mediating the covenant between God and the people (5).
- Now Moses begins restating the commands. We’ll look at the first four in today’s lesson.
- First, the prologue: These commands are given by the God who brought the people out of slavery in Egypt (6).
- Command #1: The people may not have other gods before Yahweh (the God of Israel) (7).
- Command #2: The people must not make in image of anything in the three realms (things above the earth, the earth itself, things below the earth) with the goal of worshipping it (8-10). These are the realms of the *created*, and the people are only to worship the *creator*, who is jealous and will not forget their infidelity.
- Command #3: The people must not misuse God’s name (11).
 - This is less about phrases that use the word “God” and more about misusing God’s authority and approval to rubber-stamp our human agendas. (Plus, God’s name is not “God.” It’s “Yahweh.”)
- Command #4: The people are to observe Sabbath (12-15). They can work six days but must rest on the seventh.
 - Note that in Exodus, the Sabbath command is rooted in *creation*. (God worked six days and then rested on the seventh.) In Deuteronomy, the command is rooted in the *deliverance from Egypt*. God is not a pharaoh! He does not desire continual, backbreaking work.
 - This is the only significant difference between the Exodus and Deuteronomy versions of the Ten Commandments.

Investigate

- Reflect on Moses’ first word to the people in this section: “listen/hear.” How is that word pivotal for all that follows?
- What do you make of Moses’ assertion that the covenant wasn’t made with the people at Sinai, but with the people here in Deuteronomy about to enter the Promised Land?
- What kind of people is God trying to fashion by giving these particular commands?
- By following these commandments, how would God’s people have been different from those around them?
- Are the Ten Commandments intended to be universal? In other words, did God intend for *all* people to live this way, or just *his* people? Respond

to this quote by Hauerwas and Willimon: "The commandments are not guidelines for humanity in general. They are a countercultural way of life for those who know who they are and whose they are."²

- Are the commandments to be obeyed alone or as part of the community of God's people?

Illustrate

- What do these four commandments teach us about our loving relationship with God?
By having no other gods?
By not making images?
By honoring the name?
By keeping the Sabbath?
- How are love and obedience at work together in these commands?
- Read Isaiah 40:18-31. How do you love a God like this?

New Testament Ties

- How does Jesus help us better love God by his following these four commandments?

Inspire

Ideas for closing:

- Read the following passages to the class, asking them just to listen (and not be flipping from passage to passage): John 1:1-3; Col 1:9-14; 1 John 2:15-17, 3:1-2
- Say John 3:16 together.

For next week, read Deut 5 again, focusing on verses 16-22. Consider how these commandments teach us to love *others*.

² Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, *The Truth About God: The Ten Commandments in Christian Life* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999), 18.