

BE PASSIONATE

Deuteronomy 6:4-15; 7:6-9

Why did God give us the Ten Commandments? Simple answer: That we might do them. Why does God want us to do them? Does it do anything for God? It is not for God's good, but for our own good that He wants us to carry out His statutes and judgments. It may come as a surprise to people that God really cares about their good. Why would He care? Because He loves us. If God did not love us, then He could simply let us learn everything the hard way. **We** wouldn't do that with **our** children. We would not let them learn the truth that they should not play in the street by letting them experience being hit by a car. Why? Because we love them! We want what is best for them. Protecting our children and doing what is best for them are things that most parents are passionate about.

We can see this same caring in that God knew that if the Children of Israel were going to be able to continually abide in the land and to live long lives as individuals, then that was going to depend on their doing what He said. There was a good chance that they did not always see the reason for certain commandments. Moses appealed to the people to obey out of reverence and awe of the power of God. Little children may not understand why they should not play in the street, nevertheless, we still require them to obey and they do because of respect for their parents and not because they reasoned it out. The understanding comes later on their lives.

God also promised them prosperity to go along with the long life if they would hear and do what He said. And what God said when He gave the Ten Commandments started with a relationship with Him. He requires a Number One position and priority in our lives. We need to have a passion for having the Lord as the top priority in our lives.

Love That Shows Priority – 6:4-9

⁴“Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! ⁵“You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. ⁶“These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. ⁷“You shall teach them diligently to your sons 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 up. ⁸“You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. ⁹“You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. Deuteronomy 6:4-9 (NASB95)

Verses four through nine are probably the most significant verses for all of Israel. This passage is referred to as the *shema* which is the Hebrew word for "hear." The fourth verse [“Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God is one Lord.”] possibly has more than one meaning. It has been variously interpreted to mean that the God of Israel was different from the gods of the Canaanites in that they worshiped multiple deities. Another meaning is that the God of Israel is the **ONLY** true God. Verse four would then read “Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God is *the* one *and only* Lord.” This interpretation fits nicely with the first of the Ten Commandments in which they were to have no other gods before Jehovah God. The consequences of there being only one true God is that our devotion must be focused first and foremost on Him. We know that the Bible is about relationships and the importance of relationships. It doesn't take a lot of thought to conclude that our relationship with God must be the ultimate relationship and being rightly related to God is the key to success.

Making that relationship work requires that we hear what God says to us in His word. We hear so that we can incorporate the message and the meaning into the milieu of our lives. God's word is to be the background and foundation for all of life and we will want to have it that way if we really love the Lord.

The formula for success could be stated as “Hear and heed what God says and know Who God is.” We find in the shema a statement about the character of God. He is One. Another possibility for this characterization is that He is at one with Himself. He is not divided nor schizophrenic. He is consistent and is the perfect example of the meaning of “integrity.” We know from other Scriptures that we are to be like God in our character. We are to relate to Him in oneness in all of our being - body, soul, and spirit. We cannot be as He is - ONE - if we divide ourselves so that our relationship to God affects only the spiritual aspects of life and not our intellect, emotions and will. We should not stop short of bringing the physical part of ourselves under the Lordship of Jesus.

The “heart” is the essence of our being – it is who we are. If the commandments of the Lord are “upon our heart,” then they will be a natural part of us rather than something we have to think about almost as an afterthought. If we are to love God with all our being, then that love has to find expression. How do we express our love to God? Jesus told His disciples, “If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.” How can we keep His commandments if we don't know what they are? To just have a copy of the Ten Commandments or even to memorize them is not enough. We can own several copies of the Bible and we may have memorized many verses; but, if we are going to be what God expects of us, then we must put His commands into our hearts. That is, they are to become an integral part of who we are. To accomplish this objective, people need to have the knowledge of God and His commands interwoven into their lives. Everything we do is to be influenced by our knowledge of God and what He expects.

Whether it is teaching our children, preparing a meal, taking a trip or anything else, we are to incorporate the word of God into those activities. The way we dress and the appearance of our homes should also be testimony to our relationship with God and a reminder to ourselves of who we are.

We are not to consider just ourselves but need to pass along God's ways and His values to our children. Moses' advice was to diligently teach them to their children. The NIV says “impress them on your children.” Children are impressionable and the earlier we start teaching the truth to them the easier it is for them to learn. If they see that God's word makes a difference in our lives then that will make a significant impression on them rather than just telling what the Bible says.

If the way of God is the way we walk, then we will imprint our children with this way. It will be what we talk about, it will be the thing to which we relate and interpret everything we encounter in business or in pleasure and in the daily routineness of life. Everything we see will be symbolic of the wisdom, grace and love of God. We will see Him in things we do (our hands), in what we think about (foreheads), and where we go (door frames and gates). In everything we will relate the word of God to the situation – we will bind them on our hand and write them on the door frames. In this way, we will know only God. When everything we do and think and everywhere we go is directed and related to God, then we will **know** Him.

Devotion That Never Forgets – 6:10-15

¹⁰ “Then it shall come about when the LORD your God brings you into the land which He swore to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to give you, great and splendid cities which you did not build, ¹¹ and houses full of all good things which you did not fill, and hewn cisterns which you did not dig, vineyards and olive trees which you did not plant, and you eat and are satisfied, ¹² then watch yourself, that you do not forget the LORD who brought you from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. ¹³ “You shall fear *only* the LORD your God; and you shall worship Him and swear by His name. ¹⁴ “You shall not follow other gods, any of the gods of the peoples who surround you, ¹⁵ for the LORD your God in the midst of you is a jealous God; otherwise the anger of the LORD your God will be kindled against you, and He will wipe you off the face of the earth. Deuteronomy 6:10-15 (NASB95)

We sometimes tend to think that **grace** is just a New Testament concept. Here (in verses 10 and 11) we see grace in action. They were going to go in and take over the operation of cities that were already built, live in houses that were already built, harvest crops that were already planted and drink water from wells that were already dug. All this was just given to them and there was a concern that they would take it all for granted and not appreciate what God had given them. They were cautioned to not “forget” or ignore that it was God who was the Source of all that they were and all that they had. Worse still, they might come to think that the heathen gods of the Canaanites had provided the abundance they would have in the new land.

We can fall into the same trap of thinking we have been responsible for our success and we tend to forget it was the love and grace of God that saved us and still seeks to bring us into a proper relationship with Him. It is distressing for many of us to witness the “forgetting” or “ignoring” and the plain hostility toward God that has developed in our nation in the past several decades. The benefits and successes and blessings we have enjoyed throughout the history of our nation will not continue if we abandon the Source of our success.

Just as God’s saving grace carries with it an expectation of devotion and obedience (not as a precondition but) as a proper response (see Ephesians 2:8-10), the gifts of the cities, houses, crops, and water wells were accompanied by a requirement of faithfulness to God as defined in the commandments He had given them. In the *New Bible Commentary*, D. A. Carson observed that in the account of the re-giving of the law in Deuteronomy that “the basic promise always keeps close company with the basic command.”

The definition of remembering and the consequences of not remembering the Lord (ignoring His ways) are found in what is essentially a restatement summary of the first three of the Ten Commandments. We see this in verses 13 through 15. We tend to state the first three commandments as “no other gods, no graven images, and no vain use of God’s name.” While there is no direct mention of “graven images” in the verse 13 and 14, the prohibition against following or serving other gods (which was what the second commandment was really about) is restated. So many times we hear people relating “not taking the Lord’s name in vain” to the use of the word “God” in conjunction with some element of coarse language. We see in this account that the real issue was related to taking an oath (testifying as to the truth of a matter or a promise to do something) in God’s name and failing to be truthful or reneging on the promise. That failure is taking His name in vain. We also see a little different twist to this commandment in that taking an oath in the name of God is part of showing awe or reverence for God. Such reverence must not be shown to any false gods.

God was totally committed to the Children of Israel and He wanted their total and exclusive commitment to Him. The “jealousy” aspect of God character is simply an indication of his determination to not permit rivals. The consequences of ignoring this exclusiveness are very serious and result in being eliminated or passing out of existence. We could make the case that any nation or group of people who “forget” the principles of godly living will lose their cohesiveness and will fall apart from internal collapse. This has happened in many cases throughout the history of the world. Nations that used to be significantly important are no longer in existence. The beginning of the end starts when sound principles are abandoned and if the trend is not reversed then the deterioration will continue.

It is important to keep in mind that all that happened to this group of people was a result

of initiative that God took with Abraham and all that resulted from that point on.

Grace That Is Undeserved – 7:6-9

⁶“For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. ⁷“The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any of the peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples, ⁸ but because the LORD loved you and kept the oath which He swore to your forefathers, the LORD brought you out by a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. ⁹“Know therefore that the LORD your God, He is God, the faithful God, who keeps His covenant and His lovingkindness to a thousandth generation with those who love Him and keep His commandments; Deuteronomy 7:6-9 (NASB95)

To say that grace is undeserved is bordering on being redundant. We see that grace is inextricably tied to the sovereignty of God and does not depend on “preconditioned merit.” God chose Abram when he was a worshiper of false gods. God initiated the relationship and entrusted Abraham with His plan of salvation. Under the *Abrahamic trusteeship*, the right of the firstborn to receive the trust was time after time contravened by choices that God made. This speaks of God’s sovereignty (he made choices) and His grace (those who were chosen were unborn in some cases). We find that Ishmael was rejected and Isaac was chosen. Even before they were born, God chose Jacob over Esau. So we see that the descendants of Jacob (Israel) found themselves in a position of being a set-apart (holy) group of people. When it all started (back with Abraham), they were not a people at all. Nevertheless, God kept His promises to Abraham and the result was that His descendants through Jacob had become a large powerful nation. The total lapsed time was about 600 years from the time of the call of Abraham. This is a fulfillment of the truth that God’s blessings extend to many generations to those who are faithful to Him. Those blessings extended even beyond the time they first occupied the Promised Land.

The other side of the coin was that the blessings they actually experienced were influenced by their obedience or lack of obedience. Their behavior did not change the fact that they were a people whom God had set-apart for His purposes. They were still “the Chosen People.” If they were faithful to God and His principles, then they experienced benefits as the people of God. When they were unfaithful, then they experienced chastisement as the people of God.

What can we learn from this experience of Israel that would apply to us today as God’s people? What happens to our nation when we forget (ignore) God? We can find the answer in the news of the day. We can see a trend of ever increasing problems that results from people abandoning the values that were a part of what defined the “goodness” of who we were as a nation. Can we survive as a nation, if the current trend is not reversed? If we apply these same questions to the local church, families or to ourselves as individuals, then the same cause and effect relationship applies. When we lose our passion (devotion) for being who we are in Christ, then we cannot expect to benefit from the blessings that He has promised to those who love Him.