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GOD DESIRES OBEDIENCE

It almost seems to be a universal law that "every privilege has associated responsibilities." If we are citizens of our country and can enjoy the privileges of this nation, then we are required to pay taxes, obey the laws and should get involved in community functions to make things even better. If we are a member of a social club or a fraternal organization, then we have to pay dues, carry out certain responsibilities and behave in such a way as is appropriate for the organization's members. If we want the benefits a job gives, then we all realize that we need to be at work, make a contribution, and follow the rules of the company. Most of us accept the truth of the relationship between privilege and responsibility and our society functions and flourishes to the extent of the acceptance and application of this universal law. We see evidence that certain people in every society will try to extract more "privilege" than the level of "responsibility" they accept. Our jails and prisons are full of such people. To one extent or another each one of us is guilty of trying to get an advantage for ourselves and somehow get around the universal law. The reason for this is that each of us is self-centered. We are looking out for No. 1 and that's "us." The extent to which the self-centeredness dominates a society is a cause and could be a measure of the level of dysfunctionality of that society. The same thing applies to individuals. The more self-centered we are, the more dysfunctional we are.

Fortunately, God has a provision for this problem. The problem (restated) is this: our self-centeredness makes us act contrary to the universal law of every privilege having associated responsibilities. God's provision is simply to refocus us from being self-centered to being God-center. For example, one of the greatest privileges a human has is to be included in the group known as God's people. The benefits are beyond description -- eye has

not seen and ear has not heard how great is it. What are the responsibilities of such benefit? God told the Children of Israel, "Obey Me and do everything I command you, and you will be My people and I will be your God." In fact, it appears that the benefit is a direct consequence of carrying out the responsibility. (Some may ask where God's grace fits in -- the fact that God would allow us to participate in such a provision is evidence of His grace. He could have said, "It is impossible for you to be My people.") God was working to bring about salvation for fallen mankind (to refocus all of us) and the nation of Israel was to be a part of that work.

EXODUS 19:4-6a God had entrusted the nation of Israel (which was just being formed) with His plan of salvation and they were to be the "vessel" through whom God would work in implementing His plan. They could see that God was working to bring something to pass. They saw what He did to the Egyptians and how He rescued them from their slavery. The benefit of being set free from slavery and become the people of God was to carry responsibility. They were to obey God's voice *indeed* and keep His covenant. The entire nation was to be involved in what God was doing. All of them were to be a peculiar (special) treasure to God. This speaks of the love relationship that God desires to establish with each person. It is because God treasures (loves) us that we find our esteem and our worth. So much has been written about the importance of "self-esteem" to a person's ability to function. It is NOT in our selves that we find our worth, it is in the fact that God loves us that gives us value.

They were to be **unto God** a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. Notice that the focus was away from themselves and toward God. This is the proper direction since God is sovereign. The sovereignty of God is hinted at in this passage when it mentions that all the earth is His. Well not only is all the earth His,

but all the universe. Additionally, He is all powerful and all knowing.

When God involves us in His work, He speaks to us and gives us instruction that are clear and understandable. We don't have to wonder if it is God Who is speaking to us and we don't have to wonder what He said. A good example of this methodology of God was shown when He gave the Ten Commandments.

EXODUS 20:2-11 Notice that God identified Himself in relationship to the experience the people had already had with Him. God had already acted in their behalf and next He took action to build a relationship with them starting from that experience. We come to know God through experiencing Him as we obey Him. The Children of Israel had experienced Him as *the God Who brought them out of Egypt*. If the Children of Israel had not left Egypt, then they would have never known God in this way.

In the Commandments God gave to them, He reveals information about Himself so that we can know Him. The First Commandment (You shall have no other gods before Me.) tells us that Jehovah God is above all else in the universe, seen and unseen. There is none any greater. The Second Commandment (No graven images) speaks of the invisible, spiritual nature of God. He cannot be adequately represented by anything we can see or build with our own hands. The Third Commandment (Not take the name of the Lord in vain) tells us of the holiness of God. He is to be revered and held in awe because of His greatness. The Fourth Commandment (Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy) instructs us regarding the Lordship of God in our lives. We are to set aside one day out of seven to recognize His ownership, to serve Him and to worship Him in a really focused way. The things we do on the Sabbath set the tone and direction for what we do during the other six days of a week.

The first four commandments speak to our relationship with God. This relationship is the key to everything we do. It is the basis for

our interaction with Him and our obedience of His commands. It is also the basis for our relationships with other people. The next six commandments address relationships with others.

EXODUS 20:12-17 Relationship with people hinge on the relationship we have with God. Without that basis we do not have a chance to build the proper kind of relationships with other. However, even with that basis, *how to handle relationships with others* is learned. The usual place for learning this is in the family unit. Our first human relationship is with our parents. Parents pass on important values to their children that will help them get along in life. If what is learned in one generation is not passed on to the next, then each generation is doomed to repeat the same mistakes of the past. There are two possible points of failure with this hand off. The first is that the parents could fail to do what is right and pass along nothing or the wrong information. The second point of failure is that the child could fail to heed what the parent says. Notice that the Fifth Commandment does not tell the parent to pass along the correct values to their children. It was not thought to be necessary since this is a natural (almost instinctive) thing to do.

The other commandments of not committing murder, not committing adultery, not stealing, not lying and not coveting what belongs to someone else are the bare minimum requirements of having an orderly society. For these commandments, the letter of the law is essentially "do no harm."

God's requirement for us to do all of the Ten Commandments has not changed for those who would be His people. The additional benefit we have on this side of the Cross is that we have been given the Spirit of God and He is ever present within us transforming us in to the image of Jesus Christ and creating a new heart in us so that we delight in doing His will.

When Moses brought the word to the people, they were sufficiently frightened by the lightning, the smoke, the sound of the trumpet

that they were backing away.

EXODUS 20:18-21 Deep down inside of every person there is a basic realization of what constitutes goodness and we know, in and of ourselves, that we don't have it. This realization is heightened when we come into the presence of God. We become as Isaiah when he encountered God in the temple. "Woe is me, for I am undone. I am a man of unclean lips and live in the midst of unclean people." Combine this basic lack of holiness with the demonstration of power that occurred on the mountain and you produce fear. This emotional reaction pushes us away from God and yet we are unsatisfied if we are not at one with Him.

The dilemma is partially resolved by the use of a mediator. The people pleaded with Moses to be their go-between. They feared for their lives when they were near God. Why? It has always been true and realized in the intuition that the wages of sin is death. Moses reassured the people that God had not come in judgment but in refining - "to prove you". The fact that the people were not pure and holy was evident to themselves. This realization is the starting point with God: to realize that we are in need of something or someone beyond ourselves. The fear that the people had was good if it lead them, not away from God, but away from the sin that caused the alienation from God.