

The Greatest Command

Deuteronomy 6:1-9

INTRODUCTION

- A. Some laws are more important than others.
 - 1. Embezzlement is far more serious than speeding.
 - 2. Murder is far more serious than jaywalking.
- B. The same thing occurs with Scripture—certain commands are more important than others.
 - 1. Jesus accused the Pharisees of neglecting the weightier matters of the law (Mt. 23:23).
 - 2. A lawyer tempted Jesus by asking what was the greatest command (Mt. 22:36).
 - a. Jesus responded by quoting Deut. 6:5.
 - b. There are three parts of this command. This morning, we want to examine this command.

FEAR GOD, vv. 1-3

- A. Moses is telling the Israelites about the commandment of God, v. 1.
 - 1. Moses uses three different words for God's instructions.
 - a. "Commandment" refers to the conditions of God's covenant with the Israelites.
 - b. The root for the word "statutes" refers to cutting or engraving upon stone.
 - 1) The idea is that the commands have been written upon stone.
 - 2) In that day, many laws were written upon stone (e.g., When God ended speaking with Moses on Mt. Sinai, he gave Moses two tablets of the Testimony written with the finger of God--Ex. 31:18).
 - c. "Judgments" refers to the just claims of God--God is Lord and he has a right to expect obedience.
 - 2. God commanded Moses to teach these instructions.
 - a. Moses had no choice but to communicate God's will to the Israelites.
 - b. This is an example of man communicating God's will to others.
 - 1) From the time of Moses, God has used men to communicate his will to others.
 - a) During the Patriarchal Age, God communicated his will directly to men.
 - b) Beginning with Moses, God has used men to communicate his will to other men.
 - 2) God still uses men today to communicate his will to others.
 - a) The angel who told Philip to go to the Ethiopian eunuch could have taught the eunuch the Gospel, but the preaching of God's truth has been left to man, not angels.
 - b) "We have this treasure in earthen vessels" (2 Cor. 4:7).
 - 3. Moses taught these commands so that the Israelites could observe them in the Promised Land.
 - a. It would not do the Israelites any good to know the Law but not do it.
 - b. It does no good for us to know God's law and not to do it—"To him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin" (Js. 4:17).
 - 1) It does us no good to know to pray, yet never pray.
 - 2) It does us no good to know to speak to a friend about Jesus, yet never speak that word.
 - B. Moses taught these statutes so that the Israelites could fear God, v. 2.
 - 1. The idea of fearing God is honoring him, respecting him.
 - 2. Through their obedience to God's commands, the Israelites would show their respect for God.
 - 3. Fearing God involves obeying all his statutes and commandments.
 - a. The Israelites could not pick and choose which commands they obeyed; they were to obey all of God's commands.
 - b. It is not up to us to pick and choose which commands we keep.
 - 1) We need to keep all God's commands.
 - 2) Jesus told the apostles to instruct his disciples to "observe all things that I have commanded you" (Mt. 28:20).
 - 4. God's commands were to be passed on to successive generations--these commands were to be kept by their son and grandson.
 - 5. These commands were to be kept all the days of their life.
 - a. Individuals retire from work after many years of service.
 - b. We cannot retire from God's work--we are never to stop serving God.
 - 6. The keeping of God's commandments would prolong their days.
 - C. Moses taught these commandments so that Israel would be careful to observe them, v. 3.
 - 1. Israel could not be haphazard in obeying God's instructions--they were to be careful to observe them.

- a. We can be haphazard in our obedience to God.
 - 1) We can take the Lord's Supper, but not really concentrate on the meaning.
 - 2) We can come to worship once a week and think that we've fulfilled our Christian obligation.
- b. Although we can be haphazard, we need to be careful to obey God.
2. If the Israelites were careful to observe God's commands, it would go well with them.
 - a. As long as the Israelites kept God's instructions, they would occupy the Promised Land.
 - b. When the Israelites became unfaithful, God had them taken into captivity.
3. If the Israelites kept God's instructions, they would multiply greatly as God promised them.
 - a. God promised to make Abraham's descendants as numerous as the dust of the earth (Gen. 13:16).
 - b. God promised to make Abraham's descendants as numerous as the stars of heaven (Gen. 15:5).
 - c. God would fulfill this promise if God's people kept the covenant.
4. The Hebrews would inherit a land "flowing with milk and honey." This describes a land of plenty, a land of fertility.

LOVE GOD, vv. 4-5

- A. The LORD God of the Israelites is one God, v. 4.
 1. This stands in stark contrast to the polytheism of the nations around the Israelites.
 2. While the nations around Israel might have had a plethora of gods, the Israelites knew only one true God.
 3. Throughout Scripture, God emphasizes that he is one.
 - a. God told the Israelites, "You shall have no other gods before Me" (Ex. 20:3).
 - b. There is "one God and Father of all" (Eph. 4:6).
 - c. "There is one God" (1 Tim. 2:5).
 - d. There is only one true God.
- B. The Israelites were to love God with all their heart, soul, and strength, v. 5.
 1. The Israelites were to love God with their entire being.
 - a. We are to love God with all our heart; the heart is the seat of emotions.
 - 1) This command to love God with all the heart excludes all half-heartedness, all division of affection.
 - 2) Some individuals try to love God half-heartedly.
 - a) They do what God says just because they have to.
 - i. They sing hymns of praise without any emotion.
 - ii. They worship only because they have to--they really don't want to come worship--they do so because they think such will get them into heaven.
 - b) Are you sewing God half-heartedly?
 - b. We are to love God with all our soul.
 - 1) The soul depicts the center of personality in man.
 - 2) This shows love pervading the entire self-consciousness.
 - c. We are to love God with all our strength.
 - 1) The word strength actually means "exceedingly, much, force, abundance."
 - 2) This command is to love God exceedingly.
 2. This commandment means that we are to love God with our entire being--this means that God should be first in our lives.
 - a. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, "No one can serve two masters" (Mt. 6:24)—We cannot have divided loyalty.
 - b. God must be first in our lives.
 - 1) "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you" (Mt. 6:33).
 - 2) "If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple" (Lk. 14:26).

TEACH GOD, vv. 6-9

- A. The words Moses instructed the Israelites were to be in their hearts, v. 6.
 1. "Heart" here stands for the mind, the thinking ability of man.
 2. God's word was to be in the heart of the Israelites--it was to become part of their being.
 3. God's word needs to be in our hearts.
 - a. "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly" (Col. 3: 16).
 - b. Notice that God does not force his word on us--we must "let," allow his word to be in our hearts.
- B. God's commands are to be taught diligently to our children, v. 7.
 1. From what scholars can determine, "diligently" comes from a word meaning "repeat."
 - a. The idea is that God's Word is to be repeated over and over to our children.

- b. We learn much from repetition--we learned our multiplication tables by going over them time and time again.
- 2. The Israelites were to teach their children when they were at home, when they were walking, when they would lie down, and when they would rise up.
 - a. Parents are to instill God's word in their children.
 - b. Notice that God's word was to be taught during the course of common activities.
 - 1) Parents have many wonderful opportunities to speak to their children about God.
 - 2) God expects parents to take these opportunities.
 - c. Parents have no greater responsibility than raising their children to know God.
 - 1) Fathers are to raise their children "in the training and admonition of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4).
 - 2) Timothy's faith first dwelt in his grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice (2 Tim. 1:5).
- C. The Israelites were to bind God's word upon their hands and between their eyes, v. 8.
 - 1. God did not literally mean that the Israelites were to bind God's laws to the hands and eyes. However, the Pharisees understood this passage that way.
 - 2. God meant that his command should be in front of the people all the time.
- D. The Israelites were to write God's laws on their doorposts and on their gates, v. 9. Again, God is stressing how important it is to have his laws in front of the people.