

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS
Commentary by Michael Sigler
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God Calls for Obedience

Deuteronomy 6:1-9, 20-24

Key verses: “Hear, O Israel: the Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart” (Deuteronomy 6:4-6).

After 40 years of wilderness wandering, the Israelites are about to move into the Promised Land of Canaan. It is a good land, a land “flowing with milk and honey.” But Canaan is also a land full of threats to Israel’s faith. The Canaanite religion practices idol worship and a fertility cult that, in effect, “baptizes” sexual depravity.

It is no wonder, then, that Moses urges the people to faithfully obey God’s law (vv. 1-2) and teach God’s ways to the next generation (vv. 6-7). Throughout this text, the benefits of faithful obedience are lifted up. Obeying God, says Moses, will result in the following: They will *enjoy long life* (v.2), things will *go well* for them (v. 3), and God will help them *prosper* (v. 24).

Verses 6-9 speak to us today about the importance of passing the baton of faith to the next generation. These verses demonstrate the importance of parents both speaking about God to their children and demonstrating by their lives what obeying God looks like. “...Talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise” (v. 7). In other words, it takes a 24/7 lifestyle—living for God in front of our children and spending enough time with them so that “teachable moments” can be seized to share about the Lord and His ways.

At the heart of this call for obedience is the *Shema* (Hebrew for “hear”), which became the Jewish confession of faith, recited daily: “Hear, O Israel: the Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might” (vv. 4-5).

Not only were parents to teach God’s ways to the next generation, God’s commandments were to be continually remembered in this way: “Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates....” (vv. 8-9).

Still today, orthodox Jews wear *phylacteries*, boxes containing the Shema and other Scripture verses, on their foreheads and arms. Orthodox Jews also attach *mezuzot*, small wooden or metal containers in which Scripture verses are placed, to

the doorframes of their houses. Although this literal response to the instructions of vv. 8-9 surely has its benefits, for Christians today the key is found in verse 6: “Keep these words that I am commanding you today *in your heart*” (italics mine).

To understand that the Shema stands at the center of God’s call for obedience is to recognize that *obedience to the Lord is a matter of the heart!* Motivation to obey the Lord is found through loving the Lord with one’s whole *heart, soul, and strength*.

Jesus said: “If you love me, you will keep my commandments” (John 14:15).

Henri Nouwen put it this way: “I cannot continuously say no to this or no to that, unless there is something ten times more attractive to choose. Saying no to my lust, my greed, my needs, and the world’s powers takes an enormous amount of energy. The only hope is to find something so obviously real and attractive that I can devote all my energies to saying yes” (“Hearing God’s Voice and Obeying His Word” by Terry Muck, *Leadership Journal*, Winter 1982).

The call for obedience can be for us drudgery or it can be a delight. When we fall in love with Jesus, that relationship becomes so “real and attractive” that we become energized to say “yes” to Him. The praise chorus says it well....

*Turn your eyes upon Jesus.
Look full in His wonderful face.
And the things of earth
will grow strangely dim
in the light of His glory and grace!*

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