

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS
Commentary by Michael Sigler
July 5, 2009

God Calls People to Covenant

Deuteronomy 5:1-9, 11-13, 16-21

Key verse: Hear, O Israel, the statutes and ordinances that I am addressing to you today; you shall learn them and observe them diligently (Deuteronomy 5:1).

The Book of Deuteronomy tells about Moses preparing the people of Israel to live faithfully for God in the Promised Land that they are about to enter. In Deuteronomy 5, Moses reminds the people of the Ten Commandments, which were an indispensable part of the covenant made between God and Israel. But what about people today? Does the Christian have an obligation to keep the Ten Commandments? What is the relationship between the Old Testament commandments and the New Testament gospel of *grace*?

Jesus said that He did not come to abolish the Old Testament Law, but to fulfill it. "Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:17-19).

The New Testament teaches that salvation is not obtained by keeping the Old Testament commandments. "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast" (Ephesians 2:8). We are saved by grace, received through faith in Christ and his atoning work on the cross.

Salvation by grace is not a license to sin. "What then are we to say? Should we continue in sin in order that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin go on living in it?...Therefore, do not let sin exercise dominion in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions. No longer present your members to sin as instruments of wickedness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and present your members to God as instruments of righteousness. For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace" (Romans 6:1-2, 12-15).

The Christian's motivation for living a holy life (defined in part by the Ten Commandments), is the love of Christ. F. B. Meyer tells about going to visit a man who loved the Lord with all his heart. On that morning of Meyer's visit, he found the man pouring over the Scriptures. Meyer asked, "What are you doing?"

The man answered, "Well, I am just finding out whether or not I love the Lord. You see, I read where Jesus said, 'If you love me, you will keep my commandments' (John 14:15). I have just been going over the commandments to find out whether or not I really love Him."

Knowing the Ten Commandments doesn't give us the power to keep them. Only grace, given to us by the Holy Spirit, can do that! "Live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature" (Galatians 5:16).

Someone has said, "The Law says 'Do this and live.' It commands but gives us neither hands nor feet. Grace asks us to fly—and gives us wings!"

The Ten Commandments, then, are God's guidelines for right living. They set parameters that help us live life to its fullest and avoid the painful consequences of an immoral, godless lifestyle. The Ten Commandments teach us how to love God and love other people.

Now that Christ has come, following the law of Moses—including the Ten Commandments—is not the means of salvation. We are saved by grace through faith in Christ. When we receive Christ, and as we grow in His grace, the Holy Spirit "writes on our heart" the Lord's commandments—and increasingly gives us the power to keep them. Thanks be to God!

(Contact Michael at michaelsigler@cox.net)