

March 17, 2019
Sunday Evening Service
Series: Deuteronomy
Community Baptist Church
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Greer, SC 29650
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ALL THE PEOPLE ANSWER, AMEN
Deuteronomy 27

We have all heard that love is proven by action. It's true. The Bible says so. It is highly likely that some of you have been on the negative end of that principle. By that I mean, someone has said that they love you, but then they virtually ignore you and have certainly never expressed any interest in doing something "extra" for you. Worse is that most of us have failed to prove our love to the very people we say we love.

Therefore, husbands, don't tell your wife you love her unless you are going to do some random acts of kindness out of a heart of love for her. Wives, don't tell your husband you love him if you don't also plan to do some unexpected act of love to prove it. Let's withhold telling each other that we love each other if we are not willing to make a sacrifice, no matter how small, to prove our affirmations. In fact, I wonder if it would be better for us to do the random act of kindness out of a heart of love first. And then when the recipient of our small sacrifice responds with joy and thanksgiving, we can say, "I did that because I love you."

Actions speak louder than words. If we do not plan to put actions to our affirmations, maybe we should not make the affirmations. This is why our church covenant lists expectation after expectation about interpersonal relationships among the members of this body of believers. When we commit to being a part of this assembly, we stand before this gathered group and in the presence of God, affirming that we are going to do certain things because we are making a commitment to each other. If, in time, you don't uphold your end of the bargain, we are going to assume that you are not

really committed and will not be surprised when you walk out of the commitment.

God held these kinds of expectations for His people. He gave them His law because He loved them and wanted His people to know Him. It doesn't sound very pleasant, but by giving His incredibly detailed law to His people God spilled His guts to them so that they would know Him. His law forbid His people from certain actions and required certain actions because God knows where all those actions lead. God longed to keep His people from lifestyles that would destroy them both spiritually and physically. God desired for His people to pursue lifestyles that would fit them to receive His incredible blessings.

Therefore, God not only gave His commands to the people, but He also asked them to write them down in a permanent fashion. And as He put them in the land He had promised, He required His people to hear His commands again, and to affirm that they would obey them.

God knows that actions speak louder than words. We learn in our text how the people would go into the Promised Land, hold a special ceremony in which they heard God's commands read aloud, and in response would affirm their intent to do by saying "Amen."

All we need to do is read the book of Judges to realize how much like us the people of Israel were. Like us, they affirmed their love for God. Like us, they said with all sincerity that they really care about God. Like us, they acknowledged that God did a lot of nice things for them. Like us, they promised to obey. And like us, when God gave them the opportunity to prove their love, they absolutely blew it. Why? Maybe like us, words about commitment come easily but a sacrifice that proves commitment asks too much. Like us, the Israelites were committed to God slightly.

Prepare to Affirm the Covenant (vv.1-10).

In preparation for special events after the people entered the Promised Land, God told them to make a record of the commands. *1 Now Moses and the elders of Israel commanded the people, saying, "Keep the whole commandment that I command you today. 2 And on the day you cross over the Jordan to the land that the LORD your*

God is giving you, you shall set up large stones and plaster them with plaster. 3 And you shall write on them all the words of this law, when you cross over to enter the land that the LORD your God is giving you, a land flowing with milk and honey, as the LORD, the God of your fathers, has promised you. 4 And when you have crossed over the Jordan, you shall set up these stones, concerning which I command you today, on Mount Ebal, and you shall plaster them with plaster. 5 And there you shall build an altar to the LORD your God, an altar of stones. You shall wield no iron tool on them; 6 you shall build an altar to the LORD your God of uncut stones. And you shall offer burnt offerings on it to the LORD your God, 7 and you shall sacrifice peace offerings and shall eat there, and you shall rejoice before the LORD your God. 8 And you shall write on the stones all the words of this law very plainly” (vv.1-8).

God revealed His love for His people through His commands. God did not give commands to His beloved, specially chosen people in order to make life miserable for them. Each prohibition was intended to keep His people from becoming enslaved to sins that would make life miserable for them. If they disobeyed God and embraced the sins of their pagan neighbors, the people would break fellowship with God, which is to lose peace with God, lose His blessings. Ultimately, if they ignored God’s prohibitions, they would die in their sins and spend eternity in hell.

On the other hand, if the people would know and follow closely the commands God required them to do, they would enjoy fellowship with Him. Fellowship not only promised peace with God but opened the way for His blessings. Also, pursuing God’s commands would cause His people to take on His holy character.

God required His people to write down His commands to prove they were aware of them. According to His plan, God instructed His people to build an altar of large stones. Such stone altars were not uncommon in the ancient Middle East. Most nations built similar monuments. Typically though, the other nations did not build these monuments as altars on which to offer sacrifices.

God’s purpose is conveyed in the details of the plan. He instructed His people to cover the stones with plaster and inscribe the major statements of the law in them. This would have been similar to how God Himself inscribed the Law on tablets of stones when God

gave the Ten Statements to His people through Moses. But the record of God’s commands etched in the plaster in this case would be more extensive (especially as we consider the blessings in chapter 28).

Having built the altar and having etched God’s law in the plaster covering, God required His people to then offer a sacrifice which served as the affirmation of the covenant between God and His people. God had promised to give the land flowing with milk and honey to His people. Now God was keeping His end of the agreement He authored. The sacrifice the people offered was their affirmation that they would keep their end of the agreement that God authored, which was the keeping of His commands.

That all sounds well and good to us just like it did to the people of Israel. We, too, have incredible promises from God. He wrote them all down in His love letters to us. We have them recorded in 670 languages; 1,521 languages of the New Testament. God has graciously allowed us to have a written record of how much He loves us and how He desires for us to show reciprocal love. We can read these truths and know how we should respond. But do we respond to His revealed love for us?

God challenged His people to record His commands. Then He challenged His people to obey the commands (vv.9-10). Of all the people in the world, the Israelites should have jumped at the opportunity to obey because they were God’s special people. Like God’s chosen people in every age, it is always a privilege to be God’s people. *Then Moses and the Levitical priests said to all Israel, “Keep silence and hear, O Israel: this day you have become the people of the LORD your God” (v.9).*

The command to keep silence and hear is a general requirement for all people all the time. Some of us tend to think that we have a solution to all problems. Some of us are just arrogant enough to think that if we have a plan, it is the best plan and maybe the only suitable plan. Some of us think that we have the corner on truth and every interpretation and application of God’s commands. Some of us need to keep silent and hear. Hear God’s commands. Carefully listen to His formula for blessings and curses. Listen perceptively so that we will not forfeit blessings unnecessarily.

Listen to how significant it is to become God’s people. The nation of Israel had become God’s people all the way back to when

God promised to make a great nation out of Abraham. They continued becoming God's people through the twelve sons of Jacob. God grew them into a nation of people who belonged to Him for 400 years in Egypt. God was even making His people more intensely His own during forty years of testing in the wilderness. Now as they stood on the precipice of receiving the long-promised Land, they were experiencing a deeper relationship as God's people than ever before.

It is a picture of our sanctification. Being sanctified is a matter of listening very carefully to what God is teaching you from His Word. It means we must stop planning and scheming and hear what God is doing as He brings the truths of His Word to pass in your life. We are God's people, and we are becoming God's people. That is what some of the most basic description of the Church sounds like as Paul wrote it. *Until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ (Ephesians 4:13-15).*

John described the end of the process. *Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is (1 John 3:2).*

If indeed they were God's people, we should expect that they would obey His voice—like us, right? *You shall therefore obey the voice of the LORD your God, keeping his commandments and his statutes, which I command you today (v.10).*

The concept of obedience is quite simple. God has authored His commandments and statutes. We know them. All He requires is that we "keep" them. The idea behind the English word "keep" is to observe or guard as you would guard something precious. The Hebrew word used here gives the sense of making something, doing something, carrying out a deed. We know God's commands—so do them!

Doing obedience is much harder than understanding what obedience requires. It is as though our authority has given us the responsibility to move an object from point "A" to point "B." The

command is clear enough. However, as we attempt to carry it out, we discover that we do not have the strength. No matter how hard we try, we keep falling short. However, at the outset we are confident like the Old Testament Israelites and like Peter getting out of the boat to follow Jesus.

Affirmation (vv.11-26).

Once the people were in the land and had built the altar according to God's instruction, He desired for them to hold a ceremony for affirmation. This would take place at the beginning of possessing God's promise. *That day Moses charged the people, saying, "When you have crossed over the Jordan" (vv.11-12a).* God's plan was for His people to cross over the Jordan, which they would certainly do because that was the next step in fulfilling God's will. Unlike their parents' generation, they would cross over the Jordan because they would trust God to keep His promise and deliver the land to them. And as we follow Christ's commands, depending on Him, trusting Him to make us like Him, we will cross a lot of "Jordans" in our lives.

Then God's will was for His people to go to the twin mountains of Gerizim and Ebal which would be a setting of blessing. Moses instructed that *these shall stand on Mount Gerizim to bless the people: Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Joseph, and Benjamin. And these shall stand on Mount Ebal for the curse: Reuben, Gad, Asher, Zebulun, Dan, and Naphtali (vv.12b-13).*

Notice that God sent His people to a particular place. The twin mountains of Mt. Gerizim and Mt. Ebal sat on either side of Shechem where Abraham's sons had soiled his reputation. Half of the tribes and families of the nation were to gather on Mt. Ebal and half were to gather on Mt. Gerizim. As they carried out this plan from God, the Ark of the Covenant sat in the valley between the groups of people gathered on the mount (Joshua 8:33). The Ark represented the presence of God. The Ark contained the written law of the covenant. God and His law were witnesses to the people's affirmation that they knew God's commands and intended to keep God's commands.

In that setting, God's plan required the Levitical priests to declare God's law to the people and affirm the commands (vv.14-26).

In this way, everyone would be reminded of God's desire in the same place at the same time. *And the Levites shall declare to all the men of Israel in a loud voice (v.14)*. This is a perfect picture of God's plan for corporate worship and instruction. When we gather together to hear from God's Word, we are all hearing the same thing at the same time. God has chosen to use these events to build up, edify, and make His people more like Himself.

And having heard God's law declared, all the people shall affirm their plan to obey. First, no images of a god or The God were permitted. *“Cursed be the man who makes a carved or cast metal image, an abomination to the LORD, a thing made by the hands of a craftsman, and sets it up in secret.” And all the people shall answer and say, “Amen” (v.15)*.

This is command number two which flows out of command number one of the Ten Commands. It requires “No other gods.” This is not a prohibition against art or carvings of a general nature. The implication is that the carving would be a representation of a false god, or the imagination of what the true God was like. That is precisely what the parents of these people did at Mt. Sinai forty years earlier. Moses explained, *They have turned aside quickly out of the way that I commanded them. They have made for themselves a golden calf and have worshiped it and sacrificed to it and said, “These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!” (Exodus 32:8)*.

And all the people heard this promised prohibition and attached curse and said, (literally) “Very truly. So be it.” Or in our vernacular they might have said, “That is exactly right! We are all in.”

Second, God's law requires no dishonoring of parents. *“Cursed be anyone who dishonors his father or his mother.” And all the people shall say, “Amen” (v.16)*. This is the same as command number five. We know from both the Old and New Testament that keeping this command promised length of days. Breaking the command brought God's judgment. And everyone said, “That's right! We get it.”

Third, God's law prohibited dishonesty which would be clearly demonstrated by moving landmarks. *“Cursed be anyone who moves his neighbor's landmark.” And all the people shall say, “Amen” (v.17)*. This is similar to but not exactly the same as command

number eight, “Don't steal.” It might also be like, “Don't lie.” With this third curse we see that all of the areas of relationships mentioned in the Ten Commands are now covered: 1) Relationship to God; 2) Relationship to people; 3) Relationship to property.

Fourth, there could be no malice, such as that demonstrated by misleading a blind person, among God's people. *“Cursed be anyone who misleads a blind man on the road.” And all the people shall say, “Amen” (v.18)*. This was a matter of right relationship with the needy, less capable people. These people required special treatment. They still do.

In a similar way, the fifth curse prohibited subversion of justice toward the defenseless. *“Cursed be anyone who perverts the justice due to the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow.” And all the people shall say, “Amen” (v.19)*. These three groups are regularly mentioned as people who deserve special attention from God's people. Especially in ancient cultures the vulnerable people were exploited. God requires special acts of kindness out of a heart of love from His people toward these people groups.

Obviously, as in command number seven, God allows no perverted sex. *20 “Cursed be anyone who lies with his father's wife, because he has uncovered his father's nakedness.” And all the people shall say, “Amen.” 21 “Cursed be anyone who lies with any kind of animal.” And all the people shall say, “Amen.” 22 “Cursed be anyone who lies with his sister, whether the daughter of his father or the daughter of his mother.” And all the people shall say, “Amen.” “Cursed be anyone who lies with his mother-in-law.” And all the people shall say, “Amen” (vv.20-23)*. These statements offer a broad covering of command #7 “No adultery.” God's plan for intimate relations is simple and narrow: “One husband with one wife.” EVERYTHING else is out of bounds.

The tenth and eleventh curse was connected with murder. Premeditated murder was strictly forbidden. *“Cursed be anyone who strikes down his neighbor in secret.” And all the people shall say, “Amen” (v.24)*. Along with premeditated murder, murder for hire was also forbidden. *“Cursed be anyone who takes a bribe to shed innocent blood.” And all the people shall say, “Amen” (v.25)*. Obviously both of these ideas are an application of command #6 “Don't murder.”

Finally in the twelfth curse, we find an overall general requirement that applies to all the previous statements. There must be no slighting of God's law. "*Cursed be anyone who does not confirm the words of this law by doing them.*" And all the people shall say, "*Amen*" (v.26). This is the umbrella command. Rule #12 then is "Keep all the other rules." And God's people kept saying, "Right on! We're in." But a quick review of the book of Judges reveals that in subsequent generations, God's people didn't give much evidence that they really loved Him or understood His love for them.

And too often I am not much better than the would-be affirmers of God's love. I know that God really loves me. He tells me over and over in His Word that He loves me and cares for me. Then He continually does kind things to me, like random acts of kindness out of His heart of love for me. I know all this very well. In response, I say, "Amen! So be it. It is true." But when God gives me the opportunity to show Him that I love Him by simply meeting one of His expectations, I blow it. It's like I cruise through life knowing there is a God who loves me, but in reality living like He is a long way away and not even aware of what I think, do, and say. Let's not say "Amen" if we are not going to live out the "Amen."