

Sermon 117, The Two Authors, Exodus 34:27-28

Proposition: This ambiguous reference to the Author of Scripture perfectly captures the dual authorship of God's written word.

- I. The Words Are God's Words, v. 27
- II. God Commands that the Human Author Write them Down, v. 27
- III. The Words Define the Covenant, v. 27
 - A. These Words, v. 27
 - B. The Ten Commandments, v. 28
- IV. The Text Deliberately Conflates God's Writing with Moses', v. 28 with v. 1
- V. The Point: All Scripture Is Fully Divine and Fully Human
 - A. It Says
 - B. Scripture Says
 - C. God Says

Introduction

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, our text this evening perfectly captures the dual authorship of God's written word. In this command to write down the words of God, we see an effortless gliding from Moses' writing to God's writing — an ambiguity that perfectly captures Scripture's nature as the divine-human book.

I. The Words Are God's Words, v. 27

The text emphasizes first of all that the words are God's words: "Write down these words," says Yahweh. What words? The words that the LORD has been speaking for most of the previous 16 verses. The words are straight from the mouth of God; Moses is merely the scribe.

II. God Commands that the Human Author Write them Down, v. 27

A similar command to write appears earlier: "Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Write this in a book as a memorial, and recite it to Joshua, that I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven'" (Exo 17:14 NAS). In both cases, Moses is writing down words that God spoke to him. God speaks words, but does not personally write them down. He is the author but not the penman.

III. The Words Define the Covenant, v. 27

Well, our verse contains another key point: the words define the covenant. The covenant is summed up by the words; the covenant is according to the tenor of the words. One cannot say "Well, God and I had an agreement, but it wasn't very clear what exactly it was." No. The covenant is summed up by the Ten Commandments, by the book of the covenant, and now by this abridged restatement of the book of the covenant.

A. These Words, v. 27

Some people have wondered why there is no covenant re-ratification ceremony paralleling the one in Exodus 24. After all, with the smashing of the tablets, wasn't the whole covenant all off?

Apparently not, because God reissues the same commands, has them written down again, and then the relationship moves forward without Israel needing to accept the covenant (“All that the Lord has spoken we will do!”) a second time.

Thus, this abridged version of the book of the covenant does not supersede the original. It is simply a reminder of the fuller text in the original. As we posited last week, the Almighty has highlighted the commands that deal with the trouble spots.

B. The Ten Commandments, v. 28

Now, did God tell Moses to write down the book of the covenant, the Ten Commandments, or both? What is going on here? I would say that God commanded that all the words be written down, and that included the Ten Commandments but was not limited to them. Just as the Pentateuch today includes two copies of the Ten Commandments, but also has a large amount of additional material from God, so this command was ultimately kept by the work of writing all of the five books of Moses. Presumably at the time Moses was keeping notes, including a page with all of the Ten Commandments listed. But God’s command to write them down was not fully obeyed simply by taking notes; he completed his obedience to that command by finishing the composition of the Pentateuch.

All of that said, the Ten Commandments have a very special place within the Mosaic Covenant and within the moral demands of the Bible down to this day. God’s binding relationship with His people is summarized in these ten moral strictures. The one who keeps these ten has mastered the spiritual life; the one who breaks them is not walking with the Lord like he should.

You need to know the Ten Commandments. I believe that every Christian should be able to recite all Ten Commandments, in order, word-perfect. There is almost no more important passage of Scripture for decision-making, for understanding your time and calling, and for doing what pleases the Lord. Your relationship with God is not defined by how close you felt in prayer, or by how many minutes you spent reading the Bible, or even by how many texts you can quote (yes, including Ex. 20). It is defined by whether you are doing what God said to do: “If you love me, keep my commandments.” That’s why the Ten Commandments are placed in parallel with the words of the covenant here. That’s why we spent over six months looking at the Ten Commandments in this series on Exodus.

The most basic distinction in ethics is the distinction between right and wrong. The Ten Words draw that distinction, draw it clearly, and insist upon it. Indeed, as we will talk about next week, they insist upon it so strongly that they can fairly be called the ministry of death and the ministry of condemnation.

Now, in the New Covenant, we are freed from the law as an agent of justification (as indeed Israel was). That didn’t happen by shunting the commandments to one side and saying “All right, these ten are no longer important.” It happened by God’s Son taking the full penalty of the broken law upon His own shoulders, and by Him perfectly keeping the law in every domain of life. Jesus is the ultimate covenant-keeper; Jesus is the one who frees us from the

demands of the law saying “Do this and live.” In fact, though, He does not stop saying “Do this.” He simply reverses it: “Live, and do this.”

We are alive in Christ. We are in covenant with God. And that covenant is still according to the Ten Commandments. You don’t enter the covenant by keeping the law, or stay in by keeping it — but if you are in, you keep the law.

Well, the Ten Commandments are God’s word to you, written down by Moses.

IV. The Text Deliberately Conflates God’s Writing with Moses’, v. 28 with v. 1

As you can see, the text deliberately conflates the two. As the verse reads, it sure sounds like Moses continues to be the subject all the way through, and that Moses is the one who wrote on the tablets the ten commandments. Verse 1 says the opposite, though. There God says “I will write on the tablets.” Now v. 27 seems to say that Moses wrote on the tablets, though the Hebrew is ambiguous enough to be read as if the “he” points back to the LORD instead of Moses as the one who wrote on the tablets. Based on the clear testimony of v. 1, I believe that God Himself carved the letters on stone with His finger, just as He did with the original set of tablets.

Be that as it may, though, there is a larger theological point here.

V. The Point: All Scripture Is Fully Divine and Fully Human

Scripture is completely written by God and completely written by man. There are two authors of every word in the Bible — the human penman, who wrote it down, and the Holy Spirit, who breathed it out.

A. It Says

B. Scripture Says

C. God Says

The phrases “It says, scripture says, God says” are used interchangeably through the NT. But this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: ‘And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God’” (Act 2:16-17 NKJ). Did you hear that? Joel said it, and God said it — just as Moses said the words of Exodus 24, but God said them too.

So what do we do? Listen! Learn the word. Listen to the word. Heed the word. Pay attention to the word. What Moses wrote is God’s word to you. It should define your loves, order your life, decide what you think, teach you to pray and work and raise your children in the fear of God. Moses wrote part of it, David wrote part of it, Isaiah wrote part of it, Paul wrote part of it — but God wrote all of it. Listen to Him. Amen.