

## **Incline Our Hearts to Fear You**

*Deuteronomy 5:22-33*

### **Introduction**

Why is it a good thing for you to obey God?

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Deuteronomy 5:22-33

<sup>22</sup> These are the commandments the LORD proclaimed in a loud voice to your whole assembly there on the mountain from out of the fire, the cloud and the deep darkness; and he added nothing more. Then he wrote them on two stone tablets and gave them to me.

<sup>23</sup> When you heard the voice out of the darkness, while the mountain was ablaze with fire, all the leaders of your tribes and your elders came to me. <sup>24</sup> And you said, “The LORD our God has shown us his glory and his majesty, and we have heard his voice from the fire. Today we have seen that a person can live even if God speaks with them. <sup>25</sup> But now, why should we die? This great fire will consume us, and we will die if we hear the voice of the LORD our God any longer. <sup>26</sup> For what mortal has ever heard the voice of the living God speaking out of fire, as we have, and survived? <sup>27</sup> Go near and listen to all that the LORD our God says. Then tell us whatever the LORD our God tells you. We will listen and obey.”

<sup>28</sup> The LORD heard you when you spoke to me, and the LORD said to me, “I have heard what this people said to you. Everything they said was good. <sup>29</sup> Oh, that their hearts would be inclined to fear me and keep all my commands always, so that it might go well with them and their children forever!

<sup>30</sup> “Go, tell them to return to their tents. <sup>31</sup> But you stay here with me so that I may give you all the commands, decrees and laws you are to teach them to follow in the land I am giving them to possess.”

<sup>32</sup> So be careful to do what the LORD your God has commanded you; do not turn aside to the right or to the left. <sup>33</sup> Walk in obedience to all that the LORD your God has commanded you, so that you may live and prosper and prolong your days in the land that you will possess.

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### **Exposition**

Verse 22 functions like a conclusion to the restatement of the Ten Commandments for the Israelites who are preparing to enter the promised land. It is important to note what verse 22 says about the LORD’s role in giving the Ten Commandments. We are told that the LORD spoke these commands then recorded them on two tablets of stone for Moses. These are God’s Words for God’s people. They were important. They were not telling the Israelites how to become God’s people, but instead, they were telling the Israelites how to live as God’s people. The commandments were not the source of the people’s salvation, but rather, the guide for a life of flourishing for those whom God had already delivered by His grace.

As the people heard the voice of the LORD, they were filled with fear, awe, and wonder. If you think for a moment about the way that the passage describes the scene, you can understand why the people would have responded with fear, awe, and wonder. It was “a voice out of darkness” from a “mountain ablaze with fire.” And it was not any voice, it was the “voice of the LORD.”

Can you imagine what the voice of the LORD must have sounded like? I know that in 1 Kings 19:12, the LORD speaks to Elijah in a “gentle whisper” and in 1 Samuel 3, the LORD speaks in a seemingly ordinary voice, but here in Deuteronomy 5, it is quite a spectacle. Can you picture this scene? How would you respond? Well, the Israelites responded with surprise that they were still alive after hearing the LORD’s voice. In verse 24, they state, “Today we have seen that a person can live even if God speaks with them.”

After making this observation, instead of longing to hear more of God's voice, they indicate their preference to allow Moses to serve as a mediator. The people promise that they will listen to the Word of the LORD and obey it. The LORD declares their comments on this matter to "be good" and appoints Moses to stand before Him to receive the rest of His instruction for the people.

And then the LORD makes a striking comment about the people in that moment. Verse 29 records the LORD's response to the people's request: "Oh, that their hearts would be inclined to fear me and keep all my commands always, so that it might go well with them and their children forever!" This verse reveals God's heart for the hearts of His people. He desires that His people would believe and obey Him always. That instead of fearing other things in the world, they would fear Him alone, revering and loving Him as supreme. And, as the verse concludes, God's heart for the hearts of His people is grounded in His concern for their good.

It is vital for us to note at this point that when God calls His people to obedience, He is doing so for His glory and their good. When God calls you away from idolatry, away from lust, away from anger, away from dishonesty and lying, away from greed and envy, He is doing so for His glory and your good. He knows where the roads of sin always lead. Sin always leads to death and devastation. So, when God declares, "Thou shalt not" do something, it is because He loves you and intends good for you. God's divine law is not aimed at depriving us of good things. Instead, it is safeguarding us from the life that forfeit and threatens the good things that He freely blesses us with as His people.

Having reminded the people that God has given them His law for their good, our passage comes to an end in verses 32-33, where we find Moses applying the lesson: So be careful to do what the LORD your God has commanded you; do not turn aside to the right or to the left. Walk in obedience to all that the LORD your God has commanded you, so that you may live and prosper and prolong your days in the land that you will possess.

### **Conclusion**

We began our time by asking the question: Why is it a good thing to obey God? Deuteronomy 5:22-33 demonstrates that it is good thing to obey God because God intends for obedience to His Word for our good and His glory.

God's law is good for God's people. You are going to be tempted to reject this. Like the Israelites that got comfort, once they settled in the land, you and I are going to be inclined not to fear God, but to fear the gods of your neighbors, whether those "gods" be money, success, pleasure, and a whole host of others. Just like the Israelites, once things start to get comfortable in the promised land, we all are going to tend toward slacking off and not taking God's Word seriously.

Deuteronomy 5:22-33 warns us to live carefully, paying attention to God's Word, remembering what God has commanded and walking in obedience as God's people.

We should receive this passage as instruction for how we should live as God's people. God has not instructed us in order to deprive us of joy and satisfaction in this life, but to protect and preserve our joy in the context of submission and obedience to Him as the Lord over our lives.

## Implications

### 1) **We are called to be Hearers and Doers of God's Word.**

In James 1:22-25, we read, "Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do."

This means that we need to not only go to great lengths to hear and receive God's Word, but we must also obey what we have heard. Like the Israelites who surrounded the mountain and heard God's voice, we also have heard God's voice in Scripture and are obligated as children of God to obey the voice of our good and gracious heavenly Father.

On the other hand, this passage points out that it is possible to be keen on hearing God's Word, but not equally concerned with obeying God's Word. What have you gained if you know God's Word but you do not obey it?

I'm reminded of a story that I heard about a group of Christians that gathered together and listened to a man on stage quote the Bible extensively from memory. Everyone in attendance was impressed by the man's recall and assumed that he must have had a deep life of devotion to God. After the event, the man took questions from the audience. The audience was shocked to hear that man who had just held them spellbound with his recitation of Scripture from the stage was not even a Christian. If my memory serves me correct, the man did not even believe in God.

Now, I ask you, what benefit did all that knowledge of God provide for the man who did not fear and believe in God? None whatsoever. Why? Because knowledge of God with our intellect without an affectional, experiential knowledge of God in our heart is meaningless. The demons know plenty about God, and even shudder when they think about it, yet, the demons do not truly know Him.

So, again, I ask what does it matter if you are full of Bible knowledge but lack true affection toward God expressed through obedience to His Word?

But you may say, "Yes, but I'm under grace, not under the law. Which means I do not have to obey God and that God will just forgive me because that is his job." Now, to be sure, it is true that Christians are under grace and not law, but this phrase is prone to misunderstand and abuse if we do not situate it in its proper context. In Romans 6:14, when Paul speaks of being under grace and not under law, he is dealing with people who believed that they could establish and maintain their relationship with God on the basis of their obedience. Paul was correcting this misunderstanding of the law by showing them that any who attempts to establish and maintain their relationship with God on the basis of obedience was doomed to fail, because, in and of ourselves, we cannot keep the law. Our flesh is powerless to please God. So, when Paul used the phrase "under grace not law," He was not saying that obedience was not important to the Christian life, but rather that the grace of God has set us free from trying to establish and maintain our relationship with God. Our relationship with God comes by grace, not by law.

But what does that mean for obedience? In Romans 6:15-18, Paul addresses this question, writing,

<sup>15</sup> What then? Shall we sin because we are not under the law but under grace? By no means! <sup>16</sup> Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one you obey—whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? <sup>17</sup> But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you have come to obey from your heart the pattern of teaching that has now claimed your allegiance. <sup>18</sup> You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.

In other words, the Christian life is not a lawless life of sin because we know we will be forgiven by God. But instead, it is a life concerned with righteousness, where we are obeying from the heart. Thus, what we must see is that while we have been saved by grace, a proper understanding of God's gracious salvation will not lead us to disregard the need to pursue holiness, to fear God in reverence and awe.

This is what the Old Testament and the New Testament teach us about God's people. They have been called to be hearers and doers of the God's Word.

### **T.S. - But what do I do WHEN I fail as a hearer and a doer of God's Word?**

#### **2) God has provided a better mediator for us through Jesus Christ.**

Just as the LORD approved a mediator between Himself and the people of Israel in the form of Moses, in a much greater way, God has approved and provided a mediator for us through Jesus Christ.

In 1 Timothy 2:1-6, the apostle Paul wrote, "I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people—for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all people. This has now been witnessed to at the proper time."

In other words, to be saved, we needed a mediator between God and us. We cannot save ourselves. In our flesh, we could not approach God. For He dwells in unapproachable light (1 Timothy 6:16). He is holy, and we are not. Thus, we need a go-between. We need someone to not only represent God to us but also represent us to God. God has provided us with this go-between in Himself, Jesus Christ, God in the flesh. The book of Hebrews contrasts the work of Jesus as mediator with the work of Moses as mediator, stating that His ministry is superior to Moses' ministry because the promises that Jesus mediates are better than the promises that Moses mediated. (Hebrews 8:3-5; 9:11-15)

How are Jesus' promises better? Unlike the promises that Moses mediated, which provided animal sacrifices to cleanse the people in a ceremonial way, Jesus provided the sacrifice of Himself to cleanse the people's guilty conscience from sin so that might live for God. Will you try to make yourself right before God through your own efforts? Or will you trust God and what He has provided through Jesus, the only mediator between God and mankind?