

Exodus 19:1-20:17

God Desires Obedience

What is a covenant? It is a binding agreement between two or more individuals to do or not do a specific thing. Examples of secular covenants may include purchase contracts, service contracts, wedding vows, and wills. What happens when an individual disobeys the terms of a secular contract? They are often subject to civil lawsuits, and may suffer significant damages. Therefore, what is required to avoid breaking a secular covenant? Strict obedience to its terms.

What kind of covenants has God made with Man? There are basically two types. One is typified by specific statements made by God which are either if-then statements, or direct commandments. This is the basis of the Law under the Old Covenant, or Old Testament, and is effective in exposing the sin of the lost person and guiding the saved into understanding.

The second type of covenant is effected by the sealing of the individual with the Holy Spirit upon acceptance of Christ in Faith. The written law no longer has condemnation power over the saved. The Christian is given the Holy Spirit who reveals what is right and wrong in every situation the person encounters. As a Christian grows in the faith and becomes more knowledgeable of His word and more sensitive to the Holy Spirit, it is not as necessary to be turning to the Bible as a "Rule Book" used to determine right and wrong. A Christian who relies on the written Law instead of the guidance of the Holy Spirit is referred to as a legalist.

Exodus 19:1-6. *In the third month, when the children of Israel were gone forth out of the land of Egypt, the same day came they into the wilderness of Sinai. ²For they were departed from Rephidim, and were come to the desert of Sinai, and had pitched in the wilderness; and there Israel camped before the mount. ³And Moses went up unto God, and the LORD called unto him out of the mountain, saying, Thus shalt thou say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel; ⁴Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself. ⁵Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a*

***peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine:
6And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation.
These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of
Israel.***

As we are probably aware, the Israelites have been led out of bondage in Egypt by God and have been following the Pillar of Fire, the Shekinah Glory, in the wilderness. God has been revealing himself to His people through miraculous provision of freedom, water, food, etc. He is now revealing His purpose for that redemption. Ex. 19:5-6 reveals that purpose. What is it? That His people will be a kingdom of priests and a Holy Nation. God's plan for Israel would be that they would love Him, and as priests, act as an intermediary between Himself and the other people of the world. He chose them not to be the sole beneficiaries of His love, but as the ministers of that love to the rest of the world.

How does that purpose relate to the Christian? Check out:

1 Peter 2:9. But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

Therefore, what is God's purpose for the Christian? It is the same: His people will be a kingdom of priests and a Holy Nation, not replacing, but fulfilling or adding to that same call upon the children of Israel. If we are to be priests, and an Holy Nation what are we to do to prepare? How does God feel towards those in His family who are obedient? Note in verse 5 Christians are referred to as His special treasure. The Hebrew word, *cegullah*, refers to the King's special treasure. Though everything in a Kingdom is literally owned by the King, the *cegullah* is that treasure that the King keeps for himself. That is, of all of creation, God cherishes his chosen people, Jew and now Christians, both Gentile and Jew, as His personal treasure above all else.

Exodus 19:7-8. And Moses came and called for the elders of the people, and laid before their faces all these words which the LORD commanded him. 8And all the people answered together, and said, All that the LORD hath spoken we will do. And Moses returned the words of the people unto the LORD.

Here we see the typical church monthly business meeting. The moderator, Moses, calls the meeting of the church and proceeds to state to them what God has revealed for them. After he does this, how do the people respond? They stated, probably sincerely, "We will do everything..." That was a difficult promise to keep. Actually, it was quite impossible. No person can live up to God's perfection as described in the Law.

Consider their literal answer, "We will do it." When someone is referring to "We" they are referring to the group; everyone else but "me." The word, "We" is impersonal. If you replace it with the word "I", the statement means much more. It might be good for us to remember that when commitments are made, it is best to avoid the word "We" and use the word, "I". If we cannot do the latter, then no commitment is made anyway.

Furthermore, the people did not know the import of what they were promising. They desired to do God's will, but that desire was soon overtaken by their desires for the world. Without the Holy Spirit dwelling in the hearts of every one of them, they were defeated before they started. Likewise, without the Spirit of Christ, no person can be obedient to God's call.

Exodus 19:9-15. *And the LORD said unto Moses, Lo, I come unto thee in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with thee, and believe thee for ever. And Moses told the words of the people unto the LORD. ¹⁰And the LORD said unto Moses, Go unto the people, and sanctify them to day and to morrow, and let them wash their clothes, ¹¹And be ready against the third day: for the third day the LORD will come down in the sight of all the people upon mount Sinai. ¹²And thou shalt set bounds unto the people round about, saying, Take heed to yourselves, that ye go not up into the mount, or touch the border of it: whosoever toucheth the mount shall be surely put to death: ¹³There shall not an hand touch it, but he shall surely be stoned, or shot through; whether it be beast or man, it shall not live: when the trumpet soundeth long, they shall come up to the mount. ¹⁴And Moses went down from the mount unto the people, and sanctified the people; and they washed their clothes. ¹⁵And he said*

unto the people, Be ready against the third day: come not at your wives.

Up until this time, God had been revealing Himself to Moses, and was about to reveal Himself to the people. Why did God specify limits concerning coming too close to the Mountain? God must always be understood as infinitely Holy, separated from evil. Access to God is limited by His Holiness to those who are also Holy. God is not our “buddy” or our peer, as some try to teach. He is the creator of all things, and the One who loves His creation. Our access to him is as to a loving Father. Christians have access to God in the same way that Moses had access to God. This access is illustrated in the book of Esther, where she approaches King Ahasuerus with her plea. She does not have this access, even as a wife of the King, and states, "If I die, I die" knowing full well that the King may kill her for coming to him without his bidding. Likewise God has every right to destroy us when we approach Him with the wrong motives or attitude. What would happen if He did?

Because of His love for us, God has given His people access to Him without fear. What did the Hebrews in the Old Testament do to obtain access? They had to be "cleansed" through obedience to ritual sacrifices. What was God teaching in this? God is Holy, and to approach Him, we must also be Holy. What was the consequence of disobedience? The consequence of disobedience was, and still is, death.¹

So, How do we become Holy? A good definition for “holy” is “separated out for God’s purpose,” and this is done through obedience to God. The first step in obedience is to acknowledge Who God is: sovereign, and deserving of all authority in our lives. We are to accept Him as our God, our Savior and Lord. This means that it is Him we obey rather than ourselves.

Without God, we sit on the throne of our own lives. All around us our lives are in turmoil, and we do our best to get it in some kind of order, searching for peace. Ultimately, if we die we will be eternally separated from God regardless of how much we do to get our lives in order. In being obedient to God, we have placed God on the throne of our lives. We leave the management of our lives up to Him. This does not mean that we take our hands away: it means that we

¹ Romans 3:23

seek His will and ways in those decisions we make, so that it is led by God's authority instead of our own. Ultimately when we die we will spend eternity with Him, rather than separated from Him.

Exodus 19:16-25. *And it came to pass on the third day in the morning, that there were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mount, and the voice of the trumpet exceeding loud; so that all the people that was in the camp trembled. ¹⁷And Moses brought forth the people out of the camp to meet with God; and they stood at the nether part of the mount. ¹⁸And mount Sinai was altogether on a smoke, because the LORD descended upon it in fire: and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly. ¹⁹And when the voice of the trumpet sounded long, and waxed louder and louder, Moses spake, and God answered him by a voice. ²⁰And the LORD came down upon mount Sinai, on the top of the mount: and the LORD called Moses up to the top of the mount; and Moses went up. ²¹And the LORD said unto Moses, Go down, charge the people, lest they break through unto the LORD to gaze, and many of them perish. ²²And let the priests also, which come near to the LORD, sanctify themselves, lest the LORD break forth upon them. ²³And Moses said unto the LORD, The people cannot come up to mount Sinai: for thou chargedst us, saying, Set bounds about the mount, and sanctify it. ²⁴And the LORD said unto him, Away, get thee down, and thou shalt come up, thou, and Aaron with thee: but let not the priests and the people break through to come up unto the LORD, lest he break forth upon them. ²⁵So Moses went down unto the people, and spake unto them.*

Here we see that God revealed himself by thunder, clouds and fire, as well as by voice. In verse 19, the voice of God answered Moses as he was at the base of the mountain with the people. He called Moses to come to the top of the mountain. God also allowed Moses bring Aaron, who accompanied Moses before the Pharaoh. Again, if anyone approached the mountain without proper preparation, they would die. The judgment against the people in this occurrence is identical to that at the final judgment. Those who approach the throne without proper preparation will be eternally separated from God.²

² Revelation 20.

Exodus 20:1-3. *And God spake all these words, saying, ²I am the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. ³Thou shalt have no other gods before me.*

After Moses went down from the mountain, he spoke to the people revealing specific instruction he received from God. God referred to himself as YAHWEH, or Jehovah, who brought them out of bondage. He then gave some specific commandments. The ten commandments are organized in two primary groups, the first four refer to our relationship with God, and the last six concern our relationship with people. To illustrate obedience to the Holy Spirit, observe each of the commandments in terms of the perspective of the lost and the born-again believer.

The first commandment is “You shall have no other Gods.” The lost person has to be commanded to do this. To the saved person, no such commandment is necessary. If we are obedient to the prompting of the Holy Spirit, we will have no desire for any authority other than God. We demonstrate disobedience when we give authority to other things in our lives.

Some of the gods that tempt modern man today may include materialism, power, acceptance by people, and anything else that we give authority to. Look at those things in your life that you know that you should be doing that you are not. Also look at those things that you are not doing, but you know you should. Whatever is standing between you and God, between you and obedience, is a god that you have given authority to.

Exodus 20:4-6. *Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: ⁵Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; ⁶And showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments.*

The KJV refers to the idols as "any graven image". We are not to make anything of our own hands and give it authority over us. A large part of the lost world worships idols. This may be a strange concept to us, since we know that nothing made of man has any authority.

An American serving as a missionary in Africa purchased a large carved alligator, thinking it was unique. He kept it in his living room so that he could share this intriguing object with others. The natives would give it special attention when they visited. Soon they started bring gifts to the missionary, but instead of giving them to him, they gave them to the alligator. He then realized that the people were worshipping his god, the alligator. He got rid of the alligator.

What does the Holy Spirit reveal to us concerning the worshipping of idols? What are some of the idols which distract us from truly worshipping God? Often we create these distractions within the church, and are kept from worship because of the distraction.

A shallow misunderstanding of this verse led to a teaching that the command is to refrain from creating any pictures or artwork. Certainly, there is no picture that can capture the glory of God, and we have no artwork that accurately depicts the appearance of Jesus. Such a teaching misses the whole point that it is not that we are commanded not to create artwork (an image), we are commanded not to create any object that we give authority or inordinate value to in a way that detracts from the truth and the glory of God. Such an object is a graven image.

Exodus 20:7. *Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.*

What does it mean to "misuse the name of God"? It is much more than simply misusing the literal name of Lord, God, Jehovah, etc. Certainly misusing the literal name is improper, and that is obvious. Jesus states this plainly in the sermon on the mount:

Matthew 5:34 – 37. (KJV). *But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne: ³⁵Nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King. ³⁶Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make*

one hair white or black. ³⁷But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.

To a Christian, abuse of God's name goes further, since His name refers to more than a few letters in a word. It refers to who God is. Misusing God's authority is often referred to as blasphemy. We have the potential of claiming for ourselves that which is the work of God, and claiming for God works which are only of the flesh. Both of these are examples of taking the Lord's name in vain. An excellent example is stated by Saul in 1 Samuel 23 when King Saul blessed the Ziphites, claiming the Lord's blessing on them for helping him to kill David. Saul was appropriating the Name of God in the commission of a heinous sin.

Finally, the word used for "vain" refers to a lack of power. The greatest violation of this commandment is simply to refuse to give to God the authority that He deserves. Taking his name (who He is) in vain is to reject His Lordship, a decision that will eternally separate one from Him. We often misunderstand this commandment, thinking that it only refers to the spoken word, and by so doing miss the main point: if we reject God for who He is and do not experience the power of His salvation, we are eternally lost.

Again, to the obedient Christian, no such commandment is necessary. It is obvious, as the Holy Spirit leads us, that we are not going to do reject Him as we and remain in obedience to Him, and God has provided forgiveness for those who trust in Him. Christians understand the glory of God and His Spirit helps us to understand the scope and nature of that Glory, and inspires us to love and respect him to the utmost.

Exodus 20:8-11. Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. 9Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: ¹⁰But the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: ¹¹For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it.

What is the purpose of the Sabbath? It is to honor God, resting from our worldly work schedule as we remember how God reserved a Sabbath for himself. The statement is to keep the Sabbath Holy. What does this mean?

Note something important here. The Sabbath is to be Holy, separated out for God's purpose. To me, this does not mean to remain idle for 24 hours. We can use the time to (1) get away from our worldly responsibilities so that we can (2) worship God. I also don't see that worship limited to an hour on Sunday morning, but rather, it is an attitude of remembering God throughout the entire day, as we should every day. However the busy, and appropriate, schedule of the week draws our attention from Him. The cessation of those activities gives us focus and purpose. There are many activities which we can do on the Sabbath to Honor him. What are some of these? We might consider attendance in all church activities, opening our homes to visit with others (in God's name), visiting the sick, spend time in personal devotion and Bible study and prayer. We might simply rest, doing so in an attitude of love and worship for God.

A typical Sabbath pattern may not follow this model. A more typical model might be something like the following:

1. The alarm goes off in the morning, everyone in the family is in a rush to get to church, attended out of duty rather than out of love for God.
2. Arrival at church is rushed, barely on time, and probably late.
3. Participation in worship and church Bible study is shallow, with one's mind focused more on the activities of previous days, the remaining day, or activities of the following week. The sermon better not run late because the plans of the day could be interrupted.
4. After the church services are over, rather than stay and fellowship with other Christians, everyone piles into the family car for a quick trip home or to a restaurant (to beat the crowd),
5. Then, after lunch the remaining day is dedicated to self-indulgence, typically characterized by a mesmerized expression as the television set is providing the entertainment.

Simple attendance in church services on Sunday morning out of habit or duty, followed by a day of watching TV does not necessarily honor God. The only part of this schedule that is consistent with the command of God is the cessation from

work. The part of doing so for the purpose of honoring God seems to be left out. One does not need to wonder why the Sabbath does not serve to spiritually refresh and revive the Christian when true worship is left out of it.

Now, does a person's Sabbath have to be on Sunday? For me, when I typically work on Monday through Thursday, and have so many Sunday responsibilities, I have found that Saturday makes a better Sabbath for me. I would break from the work, spend time with the family, and do Bible Study, usually in preparation for a Sunday School class. I usually skip breakfast and lunch to spend the time fully devoted to my Bible study. Though this is not a religious "fast," it is the basic context of the scriptural fast.

One way to listen to the Spirit concerning this concept is to ask, as we plan our Sabbath activities, if they do indeed honor God, and serve to revive and refresh us spiritually. If these activities do not do so, we may be able to refine our choices a little. Again, with a little understanding of the Sabbath, and listening to the Holy Spirit, we are not dependent on the Commandment in Exodus. God's Spirit reveals to us what we are to be doing on the Sabbath that will honor God.

Exodus 20:12-17. Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee. ¹³Thou shalt not kill. ¹⁴Thou shalt not commit adultery. ¹⁵Thou shalt not steal. ¹⁶Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour. ¹⁷Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour's.

The last commandments refer to our relationships with each other, honoring our parents, and respecting the lives and property of others. Again, if we are listening to the Spirit, we are not dependent on these commandments. In the book of Galatians, Paul firmly stresses that we, as Christians, are not under the Law. That is, we are no longer under its condemning authority. We do not need to live in fear. We have access to God himself through the Holy Spirit, and come under His divine authority. That authority provides answers to us in all of the decisions of our lives and does so in a way that is much more meaningful and contextual than we would obtain if we tried to use the Bible as a rule book. This latter approach necessitates a sound biblical-historical hermeneutic. That is, before one can use the Bible as a rule book, one must be able to clearly

understand what the authors are saying. Unless one is quite expert in the original languages and culture, erroneous interpretations can evolve, leading to various legalistic behavior. This is not the purpose of scripture.

Let's come back to the purpose for all of these commandments, and the purpose for listening to God, that we would honor Him through obedience to Him. as a "nation of priests, such obedience is not an option. As such, God has given each of us the responsibility of a priest: first, we have access to Him. Second, since we know him, we are called to share that knowledge with others. It is obvious that to do so, we must live a life that is holy. How can we do that? Pray unceasingly, listen to the Holy Spirit, trusting in Him rather than our own understanding. As we consider this, consider the amount of your own dedication to God. Are you truly dedicated to obeying God's commandments to you as they are revealed by His Word and His Spirit? As we leave this study, examine where in your life you can remove some of the idols which distract you from being the priest that God has called you to be.