

The LORD Your God Walks in Your Midst

Week 8

Scripture: Deut. 21-25

Sermon Series: *Deuteronomy: The Final Words of Moses*

Topic: Moses, Law, Sanctification

I. Introduction

We are in week 8 of an 11 in our series through the “fifth book of Moses,” or Deuteronomy. This final book of the Pentateuch is the record of Moses’ final words to the people of Israel before his death.

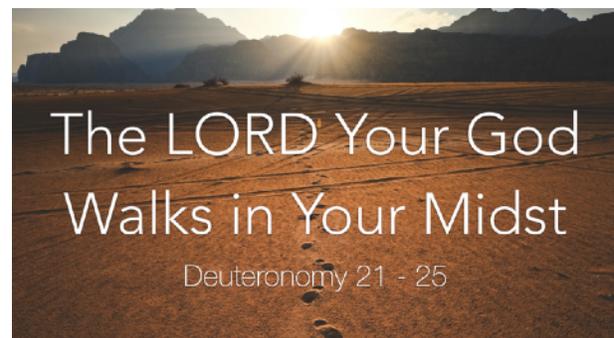
Moses is doing everything within his power to prepare them to enter into and equip them to remain in the Promised Land. He is reminding them of who they are and who their God is. Moses is applying to daily experience how life in covenant with God ought to be lived.

You just heard read to you a brief summary of a few main points from this final section of Moses’ second speech to the people. There is only one more speech to go, which is then followed by a song and final blessing.

II. LORD Your God Walks in Midst of You

In these five chapters before us this morning, at the heart of them are these words,

“...the LORD your God walks in the midst of you...
...therefore your camp must be holy...” (Dt 23:14).



The presence of God among the people of Israel is the defining reality. God being with his people is the very quality that makes them distinct from all other peoples on the planet.¹ The nearness of God changes everything. His presence shapes how this people ought to live and conduct themselves wherever they are.

Thus, in this final portion of this second speech, Moses explains to the people *what life ought to look like when one is daily living in the presence of God*. He uses everyday life experiences to demonstrate how their lives ought to be different because of the fact that God is “*walking in their midst*.” God’s presence among them will shape their belief and practice in the home, in regard to marriage—sexuality and divorce, in worship, and in work.

What Moses is doing in *expounding and applying the Ten Commandments* the circumstances of every day life. He is essentially doing a case study on applied holiness. He is thinking of circumstances that every person will encounter, and then offering examples of how God’s presence among them should affect their response to those circumstances. He lists all kinds of circumstances, such as,

- how to treat women taken captive in battle,
- how to deal with unrepentantly rebellious sons,
- what to do with something you find that someone has lost,
- the building of railings during construction of new houses,
- the planting of two kinds of crops in the same field,
- the wearing of clothes with two kinds of fabric,
- how to handle rape, premarital sex, incest, prostitution, and divorce
- who can attend corporate worship services,
- how to treat troublesome distant cousins and abusive former bosses
- guidelines on latrine use
- how the treatment of runaway slaves
- how to handle giving of loans, taking collateral, and charging of interest to both family and foreigners
- when to pay your employees
- regulations on eating from your neighbor’s garden
- exempting newly weds for military service during the first year of marriage
- taking personal responsibility of one’s own actions
- regulations on harvesting of crops and providing food to the poor
- how to fight fair
- how to care for the widow of a deceased brother
- how to set fair prices in the market place

¹ Exodus 33:14-16.

Thus, we will not work our way through these chapters as they are written, but rather topically based upon the commandment to which they correspond. First, we'll ask what is Moses saying to Israel. Then, we will conclude by asking what is God through Moses now saying to us, to Christians today.

Please stay with me to the end. There is both a difference from and yet continuity with the application of the God's law under the Old Covenant and its application to those of us living under the New. If you have to leave before I finish, then please return later and listen to the Podcast or watch the video.

A. What Is Moses Saying to Israel?

The first question is, What is Moses saying to Israel in this second speech. These are not simply a mashup of random stuff on the mind of a dying man. Rather they are the careful application of what a holy life looks like when lived out in the presence of a holy God.

1. Reminder: The Ten Commandments

As we begin, perhaps it would be helpful to be reminded of the 10 Commandments.

- | | |
|------------------------------|-----------------|
| 1. No God but Yahweh | 6. No murder |
| 2. No carved images | 7. No adultery |
| 3. No abuse of Yahweh's name | 8. No stealing |
| 4. Keep the Sabbath day | 9. No lying |
| 5. Honor your parents | 10. No coveting |

The following seven paragraphs are like topical headlines that highlight Moses' primary themes in these five chapters. Remember, all of these are shaped by the fact that God is present in the midst of his people. He is with them. Therefore, how ought they to live.

2. Honor your parents (#5)

The first thing Moses says to Israel takes us into the realm of the home. Moses tells the people to *honor their parents*. This is an application of the fifth commandment.

¹⁸ "If a man has a stubborn and rebellious son who will not obey the voice of his father or the voice of his mother, and, though they discipline him, will not listen to them, ¹⁹ then his father and his mother shall take hold of him and bring him out to the elders of his city at the gate of the place where he lives, ²⁰ and they shall say to the elders of his city, 'This our son is stubborn and rebellious; he will not obey our voice; he is a glutton and a drunkard.' ²¹ Then all the men of the city shall stone him to death with stones. So you shall purge the evil from your midst, and all Israel shall hear, and fear.

Deuteronomy 21:18-21 (ESV)

This is an instance of a son who refuses to submit to the repeated discipline of his parents. This young man is still living in their home and yet he ignores their discipline, through willful stubbornness, and hardhearted rebellion. He is lazy and undisciplined. He abuses both food and alcohol while refusing to listen to the instruction of both his mother and his father.

This young man is clearly not honoring his parents. What he is doing is evil. Rebellion and stubbornness is evil.² Therefore after a sufficient amount of time has gone by, and yet there was no change, the parents were to “take hold of him” and drag him into court, at the city gate in the presence of the elders and they are to publicly testify to this son’s sinful rebellion. Assuming the evidence is convincing, given that it comes from at least two witnesses—in this case mother and father—that wicked young man is to be stoned to death so that “*the evil will be purged from their midst*” (Dt 21:21).

If God is in their midst, then evil must be purged from their midst. Rebellion is evil in the sight of God and repeated rebellion was to be removed from the midst of a people among whom God dwelled.

3. No Murder³ (#6)

The next example takes us into the judicial realm and it derives from the sixth commandment, “*no murder*.” The purpose of the sixth commandment was to cause the people of God to cherish life because God cherishes life. However, some crimes were so heinous that the only just punishment was execution.

²² “And if a man has committed a crime punishable by death and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, ²³ his body shall not remain all night on the tree, but you shall bury him the same day, for a hanged man is cursed by God. You shall not defile your land that the LORD your God is giving you for an inheritance.
Deuteronomy 21:22-23 (ESV)

Some crimes were punishable by death, as we have just seen in the instance of the unrepentantly rebellious son. Part of the purpose of the death penalty was *deterrence*. In the case of the rebellious son, Moses explains, “*all Israel shall hear and fear*” (Dt. 21:21). The news of the execution of the rebellious son was to be widely made known so that other rebellious Israelites in the land would quickly forsake their sinful rebellion. Thus, some convicted criminals, after being put to death, were “*hanged on a tree*” so that all Israel would see and forsake the evil for which this person was condemned.

Yet, even the condemned person was to be given the dignity of a quick burial. The land was not to be defiled by having the exposed body of the criminal hanging for more than one day.

² 1 Samuel 15:23.

³ The Hebrew word also refers to accidental death or death due to negligence. See ESV footnote at Exodus 20:13.

He was to be buried at sundown. Even though the convicted man bore the curse of God in his execution, yet he was to be given the respect of burial at the end of the day. In this instance, God's presence was there in His curse against sin, but the curse was to come to a quick end and not continue for multiple days.

4. No Adultery (#7)

The third example takes us into the realm of sexuality and stems from the seventh commandment, "*no adultery*." The seventh commandment reveals God's desire that his people treat sex with holiness. *God's presence among his people shapes how they were to think and act in regard to sex.* In these five chapters, roughly 40% deals with sexuality, specifically in relation to marriage, divorce, rape, incest, premarital sex, and prostitution. I have simply chosen one verse to highlight this topic.

"A woman shall not wear a man's garment, nor shall a man put on a woman's cloak, for whoever does these things is an abomination to the LORD your God.
Deuteronomy 22:5 (ESV)

The word 'cloak' is a general term and can refer to more than merely an article of clothing, but specifically refers only to "an item suitable for a man"⁴ Thus, Moses' aim is to maintain clear distinction between the outward appearances of men and women. Men are not to appear like women and women are not to appear like men.

That such a thing is an "*abomination*" to the LORD connects what Moses is now saying back to what he previously said about the "abominable"⁵ worship practices of the nations whom the LORD was driving out of the land, and is intended "to discourage homosexuality... transvestite practices found in Canaanite and Mesopotamian worship."⁶

Moses is teaching the people that sexuality is God's idea. God created sex and thus he defines it. He created humanity as two distinct sexes, male and female. The sexual relationship that he—in his holiness—created is confined to the context of marriage. Thus, adultery is prohibited as are all other forms of sexual immorality, such as rape, incest, premarital sex, and prostitution.

Moses gives this command, in 22:5, immediately before speaking about not mixing two kinds of seed in one field, nor mixing two kinds of animals when plowing (i.e. ox and donkey), and not mixing two different kinds of thread in one cloth. These are not arbitrary, but rather the outworking of practical wisdom.

⁴ J. G. McConville, *Deuteronomy*, ed. David W. Baker and Gordon J. Wenham, vol. 5, *Apollos Old Testament Commentary* (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Apollos; InterVarsity Press, 2002), 337.

⁵ Deuteronomy 7:25; 12:31; 13:14; 18:12; 23:17–18.

⁶ J. G. McConville, *Deuteronomy*, ed. David W. Baker and Gordon J. Wenham, vol. 5, *Apollos Old Testament Commentary* (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Apollos; InterVarsity Press, 2002), 337.

- No farmer plants two different kinds of plants in the same field because it makes harvesting difficult if not impossible. Imagine trying to harvest a field that had been sown with a mixture of corn and alfalfa seeds. Corn is tall and alfalfa is lower to the ground. A combine intended for harvesting corn would destroy the alfalfa. However, one field planted with nothing but corn can be more easily harvested.
- Plowing with mixed animals will never be easy. An ox is much taller and stronger than a donkey. Two different animals would walk at different paces and pull with different ability. One or the other of them would constantly be chaffing under an uneven yoke. The rows to be plowed would never be straight. However, plowing with two of the same animals is much easier for the animals and yields a much better result.
- The prohibition on wearing cloth made of two different kinds of thread may be simply practical or it may be ritual. It could be that the two threads will wear differently and result in a quicker weakening and tearing of the cloth. Or it could be that cloth made of wool and linen was the kind of cloth worn by Egyptian cult prostitutes since the word 'cloth' here is originally an Egyptian rather than Hebrew word.⁷

The point is that *things go badly when mixing what ought not to be mixed*. God walks among his people and therefore their sexual lives should align with His intention for sex and sexuality. The godless people who were being removed from the land mixed sexually in ways that God prohibited. Therefore, the people of Israel must not sexually mix together in unholy ways. Because God walked among them they must all maintain a holy attitude toward their sexuality. God created sex to be enjoyed between one husband and one wife for life. Moses was telling all Israel to keep this ideal ever before them.

5. No Stealing (#8)

The fourth topic relates to the eighth commandment, "*no stealing*." Moses finds application of the eighth commandment at home and at work or both in private and in public.

"You shall not see your brother's donkey or his ox fallen down by the way and ignore them. You shall help him to lift them up again.
Deuteronomy 22:4 (ESV)

This application relates to home. This may not at first appear to related to stealing, but Moses began this section (22:1-3) by discussing what to do if you find your brother's ox or donkey wandering on your property. Moses says you are to keep the animals safe until your brother comes seeking it and then you shall give it to him. He goes on to explain that they were to do this with anything that was lost. *Whatever was found was to be returned to its rightful owner*. The people of Israel were not to keep for themselves that which rightfully belonged to another.

⁷ J. G. McConville, *Deuteronomy*, ed. David W. Baker and Gordon J. Wenham, vol. 5, *Apollos Old Testament Commentary* (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Apollos; InterVarsity Press, 2002), 338.

The point here is God walked among them and helped them. Therefore they were not to fail to help one another when it was needed, whether that be in the form of returning a lost animal or reaching out and helping up a brother who had fallen. They were not to rob one another of help since God in the midst of them had helped them! The following two paragraphs relates to God's presence among them at *work*.

¹⁹ "When you reap your harvest in your field and forget a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it. It shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow, that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands. ²⁰ When you beat your olive trees, you shall not go over them again. It shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow. ²¹ When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, you shall not strip it afterward. It shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow. ²² You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt; therefore I command you to do this. Deuteronomy 24:19-22 (ESV)

When they were at work harvesting and they forgot a bundle of wheat in the field, they were not to go back and get it, but rather leave it for those who were needy. They were to be generous to the landless, "*the sojourner, fatherless, and the widow.*" They were to share the blessing of God who was with them in their harvest with those who had no field to harvest. *They were not to steal for themselves the portion of God's blessing on their harvest that ought to be left for the poor of the land.* A second example Moses uses applies to work in the marketplace in regard to setting prices.

¹³ "You shall not have in your bag two kinds of weights, a large and a small. ¹⁴ You shall not have in your house two kinds of measures, a large and a small. ¹⁵ A full and fair weight you shall have, a full and fair measure you shall have, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you. ¹⁶ For all who do such things, all who act dishonestly, are an abomination to the LORD your God. Deuteronomy 25:13-16 (ESV)

Moses is telling the people to be honest in setting prices at work. They were not to have two different sets of weights in their scales. There was not to be a heavier weight for the rich—so more could be taken from them—and a lighter weight for the poor—from which you got less. There was not to be two standards of pricing. Marketplace pricing was to be just and fair. There was to be a fair standard of pricing for all. Because God hates such dishonesty. The God who walked among them was with them in marketplace.

6. No Lying (#9)

This final example of what Moses says to the people has to do with the ninth command, "*no lying.*" Moses tells the people to be a people who keep their word.

²¹ "If you make a vow to the LORD your God, you shall not delay fulfilling it, for the LORD your God will surely require it of you, and you will be guilty of sin. ²² But if you refrain from vowing, you will not be guilty of sin. ²³ You shall be careful to do what has passed your lips, for you have voluntarily vowed to the LORD your God what you have promised with your mouth."

Deuteronomy 23:21-23 (ESV)

God is with them and walks in the midst of them and he hears their words. Therefore, they ought to speak the truth. Vows are voluntary. No one forces you to make a vow. But if you make a vow, then you'd better keep it. Because if you don't then God will consider you guilty of sin. If you refrain from making a vow, then you will not be guilty of sin. Therefore, "*be careful to do what has passed your lips.*" In other words, be a people of your word. If you give your word, then keep it. Don't think that LORD who walks among you is deaf. He hears what you say. He is a truthful God and therefore his people must be a truthful people.

Summary: What did Moses say to the people of Israel?

1. *Honor your parents.* If you persistently refused to do this, then you deserve to die. God is walking among you. He gave you parents, therefore honor them.
2. *Honor life.* If you refuse to do this and rather willfully take a human life, then you forfeit your right to live. God is walking among you. He is the giver of life, therefore honor life.
3. *Honor sex.* Sex is reserved for marriage, which God defined as being between one man and one woman. This standard is to be honored by all whether your married or unmarried. Anyone who willfully choose to dishonor this standard deserves to die. God is walking among you therefore, embrace a holy sexuality.
4. *Honor other people's stuff.* Do not take what is not yours. Give to others what is rightfully theirs. This includes help when they are down. God is among you and will give you what you need without you having to take what belongs to someone else.
5. *Honor the truth.* Speak the truth. Watch your mouth. If you can't speak the truth, then stop talking. God who walks among always speaks the truth therefore you too ought always to speak the truth.

B. What is God Through Moses Saying to Christians?

We have seen what Moses said God was saying to the people of Israel, but we live in a different day and time from them, so what might God saying to us? What is God through Moses saying to Christians today.

1. To What in Old Covenant are Christians Still Bound and From What Are We Released?

How are we to know what to hold onto in the Old Testament (OT) and what to let go of since we Christians live under the **New Testament (NT)**? There are many today who argue that Christians are to be “unhitched” from the OT. In such a statement, there is in little true and much confusion. To clarify this issue, I offer four statements.

1. ***We are bound by all that God established in creation.***

God’s intentions and plans for humanity that were established in creation are pre-cultural and transcultural. These truths existed before any law or culture existed. Therefore they transcend cultural interpretations and applications. Thus, the fact that God created us male and female, established marriage as the foundational human relationship, the blessing of children and increasing population, that God intended unique roles for men and women and husbands and wives, and the prohibition on murder are examples of such truths that universally apply and abide. These principles do not change. Therefore, all that is grounded in creation order remains binding upon Christians today.

2. ***We are bound by all that is affirmed in New Testament.***

All OT truths that are affirmed in the NT are binding upon Christians today. For example, all but one⁸ of the ten commands are affirmed in the NT, as is the prohibition against drinking blood, the practice of witchcraft, etc. Jesus commanded his disciples, “Go... make disciples of all nations... teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Mt 28:19-20). The sexual ethics taught by Jesus are the same as the sexual ethics affirmed in the OT (except for the killing of those who break them). God’s definition of marriage is affirmed by Jesus in NT. Thus, they are still binding upon us. Paul affirmed the same sexual ethics which Jesus affirmed. Thus, that which is taught in OT and affirmed in the NT, remains binding upon Christians.

3. ***We are loosed from all in OT that Jesus fulfilled.***

Jesus said, “I have not come to abolish the law, but to fulfill it” (Mt 5:17). Therefore all that in the OT prefigured or pointed to Christ, and was fulfilled by Jesus, is no longer binding upon Christians today. For example, Jesus fulfilled the “rest” to which the sabbath pointed. Jesus said, “Come to me and I will give you rest” (Mt 11:28). Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath and fulfilled the Sabbath. Jesus plainly states that dietary distinctions are abolished (Mk 7:19). Jesus fulfilled Passover (and all to which the other feasts pointed), thus Christians are not obliged to observe Passover or any other Jewish feast. Jesus fulfilled the purpose of the sacrificial system, thus Christians need not

⁸ The fourth commandment, to keep the sabbath, is not explicitly affirmed in the NT, but rather observing the principle is affirmed. Christians moved from Saturday worship to Sunday worship because that was the day on which the Lord was resurrected. Thus, the principle of sabbath keeping is embraced by Christians on the first rather than the seventh day of the week.

slaughter animals to find forgiveness of their sins. Christians are loosed from all in the OT that Jesus fulfilled in NT.

4. *We are loosed from all in OT that relates to geographic Israel.*

Israel was a theocracy attached to a particular piece of land. Christianity is not tied to a particular piece of land. Jesus blew open the kingdom of God by commanding his disciples to take the gospel of God to "*all nations.*" Judaism was a "come and see" religion whereas Christianity is a "go and tell" religion. Therefore, Christians are loosed from all in OT law that is specifically connected to the geography of Israel.

What is the God through Moses saying to us Christians today?

Just as God was through the tabernacle present in the midst of Israel, so God through Christ and receiving His Holy Spirit is present in the midst of Christians today. Therefore, to those who have His Holy Spirit within them, what might the Lord be saying to us today.

2. Honor your parents (#5)

Parents, *don't kill your kids, rather teach your kids to honor you.* Train your children to respect. Do not allow your kids to be disrespectful of you. If you tolerate disrespect at home, then out in the world your children will be disrespectful and dishonoring of persons in positions of authority. If you think I'm wrong, go have lunch with any school teacher and ask them how their job is going. Teaching your children to respect you will help them learn respect for God. Failing to train your children to honor you makes them more susceptible to dishonoring God. The apostle Paul says, "In the last days... children will be disobedient to their parents..." (2 Tim 3:1-2). Thank God Jesus was not like that. After being rebuked⁹ by his parents for being gone for three days and not telling them where he was, we are told Jesus went home and "*was submissive to his parents*" (Lk 2:51). If the Spirit of Jesus is within us, then we must honor the parents he gave us.

3. No Murder (#6)

Through Moses God is saying to us Christians today, "*Do not approve of the taking of life.*" Life comes from God and only God has a right to take it. Therefore, we cannot approve neither of the murdering or our unborn children, nor of euthanasia or assisted suicide. Christians must love life. The Spirit of God is life and he is within us, therefore we must love life.

4. No Adultery (#7)

What is God through Moses saying to us today, "*You must keep yourselves sexually pure.*" Christians do not hook up on the first date (or the second or third or thirtieth 30th). Christians do not treat sex as a recreational activity. Christians do not sleep together before they are married. Christians do not pass their time looking at porn. Christians do not go to strip clubs for

⁹ Luke 2:48.

bachelor parties. Christians do not participate in prostitution. Christians do not swing or wife swap or watch TV shows that glorify such behavior. Christian men do not dress like women and neither do Christian women dress like men. Since the Holy Spirit is within you, then what you believe and practice about sex must also be holy.

5. No Stealing (#8)

What is God through Moses saying to us today, "*Stop stealing.*" Don't cheat on your expense report at work. Don't be dishonest when filling out your taxes. Don't buy personal stuff with the company credit card. Stop ordering stuff on Amazon using your friend's account because he forgot to log out when he last used your computer. When you find a Bank of America credit card while you're out for a run, don't try to use it to buy Celtics tickets, go the local Bank of America branch and turn it in. When your planning your budget, add a line for giving to the poor. Plan to financially lend a helping hand. Since the Holy Spirit is within you, then he knows your needs and give you what you need without you taking what does not belong to you.

6. No Lying (#9)

What is God through Moses saying to us today, "*Do not lie.*" When you give someone your word that you will do something, then you'd better do it. When you say you will be some place at a particular time, then be there. If you say you'll pray for someone, then you'd better pray for them. If you're prone to exaggeration, then take care to talk less. Since the Holy Spirit of Jesus who is with and within you is Truth, then speak only what is true!

III. Conclusion

We have all failed to keep God's commandments. We have all fallen short of God's good and just character. We have all done things that make us worthy of death. If God were only just, then we would be dust. But because of his great love with which he loved us, He sent His only Son to save us.

We are imperfect and yet Jesus is perfect. Jesus never dishonored his parents. He never murdered. He was sexually pure. He never stole. He never lied. Yet he did die. He had no sins for which he deserved to die. And yet he died. Why? He died to pay the price of the sins of those who would trust in him.

Jesus was cursed and hanged on a tree,
so that you and me
from that curse could be set free.

He died to purchase the right to give life—His own Holy Spirit—to those who would ask him for the gift of life, the gift of His Holy Spirit. He died to pay the price required for us to commune with the Father who created us. Jesus died so that he might bring to God all who have faith in Him.

IV. Discussion Questions

1. What was the main point and heart of the message?
2. How would you summarize what Moses was saying to Israel?
3. How do the Ten Commandments related to the main point of the message?
4. Are Christians still bound to keep Old Testament law? Why or why not?
5. What were the four statements offered in helping understand the difference from and continuity between the Old and New Covenants?
6. How would you answer the question, What is God through Moses saying to Christians today?
7. Did the Lord say anything to you through this message? If so, what?
8. Where do you see Jesus in this portion of Scripture?