

Consequences of Disobedience *Deuteronomy 27:13-16, 28:15-68*

I'd like to begin with a hypothetical that's not so hypothetical for some of you. Let's say you have teenage children living in your home. You're going away for the weekend, so you give them a detailed set of instructions pertaining to they should do and what they shouldn't do:

- Feed the dog twice a day.
- No parties at the house this weekend.
- Be home by 10 p.m.
- Eat three meals a day; do the dishes after every meal.
- Etc.

You give a detailed set of instructions. But as you're about to leave for the weekend, you decide that for added motivation you would mention two other things: 1) how beneficial it would be for your kids if they obeyed your rules, and 2) how detrimental it would be if they didn't. "If you obey these rules we will continue to give you food and shelter. If you don't, we'll have to reevaluate." Sometimes being crystal clear is important.

As the children of Israel were about to enter the Promised Land, God not only gave them detailed instructions about what they should and shouldn't do. He also told them the blessings they would experience if they obeyed and the consequences if they disobeyed. Articulating the blessings and curses was supposed to provide added motivation to obey God.

Last week we looked at the blessings of obedience in Deuteronomy 28; we saw that those blessings involved prosperity in a very comprehensive sense. Today we are going to see how God also warned them of the consequences of disobedience. This was meant to be a deterrent to sin. They were supposed to hear the curses associated with disobedience and conclude, "We don't want that for ourselves or our children or their children." Remember that God didn't merely want correct behavior; He wanted them to love Him with all their heart.

After we look at consequences of disobedience in the old covenant we will see that we still experience consequences of disobedience in the new covenant; but the context is very, very different. We'll need to think very carefully about this issue.

Consequences of Disobedience in the Old Covenant (Deuteronomy 27-28)

Deuteronomy contains two lists of curses, one in chapter 27 and one in chapter 28. We'll look at each of these lists briefly to get the flavor of what is being described.

Deuteronomy 27:15-26 tells the Levites (priestly tribe) to proclaim twelve "curses" for twelve different sins. A couple of observations about this list. . . **First**, this list follows the general flow of the Ten Commandments, beginning with sins against God (such as idolatry) and ending with sins against one's neighbor (deception, injustice, sexual sins, and violence).

Second, after each curse, the people were to answer/respond by saying “amen.” In this way the people were agreeing ahead of time that the consequences of disobedience were appropriate, that they deserved the curses that would come upon them.

Let’s look at this passage. Verse 15 reflects the first two commandments, “You shall have no other gods before Me,” and “You shall not make for yourself an idol. . .” (Dt. 5:7-10).

15 ‘Cursed is the man who makes an idol or a molten image, an abomination to the Lord, the work of the hands of the craftsman, and sets it up in secret.’ And all the people shall answer and say, ‘Amen.’

The specific nature of the curses listed here in chapter 27 aren’t spelled out (as they are in chapter 28). The implication, however, is that they would experience tangible negative consequences. Verse 16 reflects the fifth commandment, “Honor your father and your mother” (Dt. 5:16)

16 ‘Cursed is he who dishonors his father or mother.’ And all the people shall say, ‘Amen.’

The final ten curses generally reflect the final five commands against murder, adultery, stealing, bearing false witness, and coveting what your neighbor owns. Listen as I read verses 17 through 26.

17 ‘Cursed is he who moves his neighbor’s boundary mark.’ And all the people shall say, ‘Amen.’ 18 ‘Cursed is he who misleads a blind person on the road.’ And all the people shall say, ‘Amen.’ 19 ‘Cursed is he who distorts the justice due an alien, orphan, and widow.’ And all the people shall say, ‘Amen.’ 20 ‘Cursed is he who lies with his father’s wife, because he has uncovered his father’s skirt.’ And all the people shall say, ‘Amen.’ 21 ‘Cursed is he who lies with any animal.’ And all the people shall say, ‘Amen.’ 22 ‘Cursed is he who lies with his sister, the daughter of his father or of his mother.’ And all the people shall say, ‘Amen.’ 23 ‘Cursed is he who lies with his mother-in-law.’ And all the people shall say, ‘Amen.’ 24 ‘Cursed is he who strikes his neighbor in secret.’ And all the people shall say, ‘Amen.’ 25 ‘Cursed is he who accepts a bribe to strike down an innocent person.’ And all the people shall say, ‘Amen.’ 26 ‘Cursed is he who does not confirm the words of this law by doing them.’ And all the people shall say, ‘Amen.’

There was no doubt about what constituted disobedience in relation to these issues. Christopher Wright points out that the progression in this passage is significant: those who sin against God by not worshiping Him exclusively typically end up sinning against their neighbors; those who loved the Lord their God also ended up loving their neighbors as themselves (see Wright, *Deuteronomy*, p. 287). The consequence of disobedience is a breakdown in the basic relationships and structures within society: husbands and wives, parents and children, care for the weak and helpless, business relationships, etc.

The list of curses in chapter 28 gives specific consequences of disobedience for those living under the Law. Last week we saw that the blessings of obedience involved prosperity in every area of life; here we see that the curses of disobedience involved these same areas of life. We actually see that the blessings are reversed. For example, listen to 28:15-19. If you were here last Sunday you might recognize that this is the exact opposite of what we read verses 3-6.

15 “But it shall come about, if you do not obey the Lord your God, to observe to do all His commandments and His statutes with which I charge you today, that all these curses will come upon you and overtake you: 16 “Cursed shall you be in the city, and cursed shall you be in the country. 17 “Cursed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl. 18 “Cursed shall be the offspring of your body and the produce of your ground, the increase of your herd and the young of your flock. 19 “Cursed shall you be when you come in, and cursed shall you be when you go out.

Instead of prosperity they would experience hardship and deprivation in every area of life. Notice down in verse 25 how their enemies would have their way with them:

25 “The Lord shall cause you to be defeated before your enemies; you will go out one way against them, but you will flee seven ways before them, and you will be an example of terror to all the kingdoms of the earth.

Verse 27 speaks about Israel experiencing the plagues that their enemies experienced in Egypt:

27 “The Lord will smite you with the boils of Egypt and with tumors and with the scab and with the itch, from which you cannot be healed.

You get the picture, right? If Israel abandoned their God and their covenant with Him, they would forfeit His protection and would end up like every other nation. The last half of the chapter describes how the nation of Israel would eventually be dragged off into exile “because you did not serve the Lord your God with joy and a glad heart, for the abundance of all things” (28:47). If they wanted to serve the gods of other nations they could serve them *in* those nations (see verses 63-68). The rest of the chapter is rather brutal in describing the consequences of their disobedience.

In summary, God was (and is) slow to anger, but eventually God would have no choice but to turn Israel over to the natural consequences of her rebellion.

Consequences of Disobedience in the New Covenant. (Galatians 3:1-14, Matthew 7:24-27, Galatians 6:7-8)

As always, we begin by fixing our eyes on Jesus and preaching the gospel to ourselves. Galatians 3 is especially relevant for this discussion because there Paul quotes Deuteronomy 27:26 which we read a few minutes ago. In Galatians 3 Paul is arguing that a person is justified by faith, not by keeping the Law. Some were trying to convince the Galatians that they not only had to believe in Jesus but that they also had to follow

the Law of Moses. In a fascinating argument Paul appeals to Abraham's experience - how he was justified by faith long before the Law was given to Moses. He quotes from Genesis 12 in which God promised Abraham that "in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" and then concludes this in verse 9:

9 So then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer.

Since the old covenant (the Law) is now obsolete, a person is no longer blessed by keeping the Law. Blessing flows from believing in Jesus and experiencing the new birth. The other side of the coin is that those who are in Christ are no longer cursed by disobeying the Law. In verse 10 Paul quotes Deuteronomy 27:26 which we read earlier:

10 For as many as are of the works of the Law are under a curse; for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law, to perform them."

Since nobody could flawlessly obey every single thing written in the law, there's a sense in which everyone living under the law was under a "curse." The law itself acknowledged this, providing an elaborate sacrificial system whereby people could offer animal sacrifices to atone for their sins. Notice in verses 13-14 the stark contrast for us living under the new covenant.

13 Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us— for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree"— 14 in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we would receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

Paul quotes Deuteronomy 21:23 when he writes, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree." That passage says that when a person is executed by hanging from a tree, that person is cursed. Since being crucified on a cross is basically the same thing as being executed by hanging, Christ too was under a curse. Since He was sinless, He bore our curse in His body on the cross.

In verse 14 Paul writes that the blessing of Abraham is ultimately the promised Holy Spirit. Those who believe in Jesus (not those who keep the Law) receive the promised Holy Spirit through faith. This is the primary blessing of the new covenant in this life: the triune God Himself dwells within the believer and within the Church. We are never alone. The triune God is with us and for us.

If you are a believer in Jesus, you have become a new creation in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17). You might not always feel like it, but it is true nonetheless. This isn't just religious talk; it is reality - what is really true.

How does the reality of being "new creatures in Christ" inform how we think about disobedience?

First, ***we no longer need to think in terms of condemnation and being cursed***. The gospel, the good news, is that Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law having become a curse for us. There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. “Condemnation” and “curse” are no longer appropriate categories for those who are in Christ Jesus. Those who are in Christ Jesus through faith stand before God as blameless as Jesus Himself. [I’m not making this up; I’m not giving you a pep talk; I’m merely saying what Scripture says about us.]

So if we shouldn’t think in terms of condemnation and curses, how ***should*** we think about disobedience? The New Testament suggests that ***we should think primarily in relational terms when we think about obedience and disobedience***. One of the dominant images that the New Testament uses is of the Church (the body of Christ) as a spiritual family. God is our Father and we are brothers and sisters in Christ.

Obedience is doing what our heavenly Father tells us is good and right. Obedience is the practice of living in a way that is compatible with our identity as sons and daughters of God. When we are obedient, even when it’s hard, we experience joy and peace, satisfaction and shalom. This past week I did something that I was convinced God wanted me to do; it was very difficult and somewhat painful. At the same time, it was very satisfying in a deep, spiritual way. I had the sense that my Father was actually pleased with me. That is the fruit of obedience.

Disobedience is doing what our heavenly Father tells us is wrong and destructive. Disobedience is living in a way that is incompatible with the name of God and His purposes in this world. Unless our hearts become hardened, when we are disobedient we experience an appropriate conviction of sin. This is not condemnation, but a deep sense that what we’ve thought, said, or done is wrong, incompatible with being “a new creation” in Christ. The Spirit within convicts us of sin. This past week I said something to another person that I shouldn’t have; in other words I sinned with my words. Immediately I felt guilty; that dissonance isn’t condemnation but conviction of sin. That is the fruit of disobedience.

Sin isn’t merely breaking a rule buried deep within a rulebook somewhere. They are more personal and relational. Paul described the sin of anger, for example, as “grieving the Holy Spirit.” That a very relational way of thinking about our sin: causing grief to the very Spirit of God.

Even though God doesn’t curse us for our sins, there are still consequences. Last week we read Jesus’ parable at the end of the SoM in Matthew 7:24–27 about the house built on the rock and the house built on the sand. There Jesus contrasted the person who hears and “acts” (i.e., puts into practice, pursues obedience) and the person who hears and ignores (i.e. disobeys). One weathers the storms of life; the other experiences great loss. Long-term disobedience produces a life that is unprepared for the trials of this world.

Using different imagery, Paul makes the same basic point in Galatians 6:7–8. He appeals to the common experience of planting a field or a garden when he writes:

7 Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap.

You've probably noticed that if you plant an okra seeds that okra plants come up out of the ground. You don't sow okra seeds and reap sweet corn or soybeans, right? What you "sow," this you will also reap.

Of course sometimes you sow seeds and don't harvest anything. That's why Jesus told the parable of the four soils. We need to make sure that our hearts are good soil, that they are hospitable and receptive to the Word of God. Here in Galatians 6 Paul is making a different point; he is talking not about the soil of our hearts but about the seed we sow through our behavior.

Paul is saying that the person who thinks his/her behavior has no consequence is deceived or deluded. God has hardwired this principle of sowing and reaping into the universe. I think we'd all agree that a person would be foolish to climb up on the roof of a house and mock the law of gravity, "God, I don't believe there are consequences of stepping off this roof. I believe I can fly." A person would be equally foolish to say, "God, I don't believe there are consequences for my greed, lust, anger, revenge, and impatience." That's why Paul says, "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap." Further explanation is given in verse 8:

8 For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.

"Sowing to the flesh" is to indulging the flesh in some way; the crop that will eventually be harvested is corruption (or "decay"). Instead of experiencing wholeness and healing, when we sow to the flesh our lives are compromised. We experience less life and fulness, less of God's kingdom and righteousness. This isn't God cursing us for our sin; this is the natural consequence of reaping what we've sown. Psalm 103 tells us that in His lovingkindness God has not "rewarded us according to our iniquities" (Ps. 103:10); He often minimizes the corruption of our disobedience. But ultimately we reap what we sow. As you're very aware, when we sow to the flesh over time, we develop obsessions or addictions that drain away our life/vitality. We end up enslaved to the passions of our flesh.

This principle/verse isn't written as an angry threat. Out of compassion Paul wanted his friends in Galatia to understand what was at stake when it comes to disobedience. Just as the father in Proverbs wanted his boy to avoid all the sorrows of sin, God wants us to experience His best.

Can you identify an area of disobedience in your life? If so you would be wise to contemplate what the consequences of that sin might be and be warned. How might your sin bring corruption to your fellowship with God, to the relationships that matter most to you, or to your usefulness to God in this world? Honestly, I think we need a

sense of urgency when it comes to our disobedience. This is not a time for complacency or thinking, “Someday maybe I’ll get around to obedience, but not today.”

Biblically speaking, today is the most important day of your life. That’s because yesterday is gone and you may not be here tomorrow. The author of Hebrews quoted Psalm 95 when he wrote, “Today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts” (Hebrews 4:7). You may or may not hear God’s voice tomorrow; so today if you hear His voice, do not harden your heart.

Instead, soften your heart and “sow to the Spirit.” Do things that invite the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives: responding to the prompting and conviction of the Holy Spirit, internalizing the Word to fuel the work of the Spirit, submitting to others in the body of Christ, praying in faith, etc. When we sow to the Spirit, we “reap eternal life.” We don’t earn or merit eternal life; rather we experience more and more life.

This requires faith, believing that God exists and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him (Hebrews 11:6). Next Sunday morning we are going to begin an 8-week study of faith, specifically how to grow and deepen our faith. Between now and then, let’s sow to the Spirit and make no provision for the flesh so that we don’t miss a single thing that our heavenly Father wants to do in our midst.