

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS
Commentary by Michael Sigler
June 24, 2012

The Heart of the Law

Read Deuteronomy 10:12-22; 16:18-20

Key verses: “What does the Lord your God require of you? Only to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways, to love Him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments of the Lord” (Deuteronomy 10:12-13).

How odd these words must seem to so many people today, living lives of *radical autonomy*. To many people in 2012, the only requirements worthy of consideration are those that keep the independent *self* at the center of our worlds. Who today seriously asks the question, “What does the Lord your God require of you?”

To the disciples of radical autonomy, relationships are tended only as long as they bring *me* gratification. When they are used up or become unworthy of my time and effort, the relationships are terminated—“time to move on.” Commitment is a dirty word to the disciple of radical autonomy. Religion has its place only as it serves in some way to aid *me* in my search for personal comfort, pleasure, and self-fulfillment.

How different is Biblical faith. Our faith tells us that the best way to live is by putting God, not self, at the center of our world. Our faith tells us that, ultimately, life finds meaning and purpose only as we *commit* ourselves to God and to others, only as we are willing to ask on a daily basis: “What does the Lord your God require of you?”

The answer to that question, in verse 12, begins ironically with the word “Only.” *Only* “walk in all” of God’s ways? *Only* “serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul”? Only?!

Yes. The commitment God requires of us is total. God wants all of us. But in turn God offers us all of himself! As part of this requirement of total commitment, God also commits to us his ample and sufficient *grace*.

This grace is evident when we remember that the events of Deuteronomy 10 are a *renewal of covenant*. The people of ancient Israel had broken their side of the covenant with God. But in chapter 10, God graciously renews his covenant with his people. One is reminded of the New Testament antidote to our having broken covenant with Christ: “If we confess our sins, he is faithful

and just and will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

What does the Lord your God require? God requires our total commitment, but God also offers us ample grace, sufficient grace. When we fail to keep our side of the commitment, God’s grace is there to lift us up and give us a new start.

We see God’s grace that accompanies his requirements, also, in the important phrase that comes at the end of verse 13: “for your own well-being.” Every commandment of God, every “requirement,” is given for this reason: The God who made us and who knows how our lives work best gives every commandment and requirement for our “own well-being.”

We see God’s grace that accompanies his requirements, also, when we recall *who it is* that asks us to love, serve, and obey him. He is the one to whom belongs “the earth with all that is in it,” the “heaven and the heaven of heavens” (v. 14) Yet, this “God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome” (v. 17) has “set his heart in love” on us! (v. 15)

In love, the God of the universe pursues a covenant relationship with you and me. Yes, that relationship requires our total commitment. But it comes with God’s total commitment to us, and God’s promise of sufficient grace— grace to help us keep our commitments and grace to pick us up when we fall.

So, maybe the question isn’t so strange, after all: “What does the Lord your God require of you?” Only this (vv. 12-13)....

1. To “fear” the Lord. Jim Elliot, who gave his life in an effort to take Christ to a then unreached tribal group in South America, wrote in his journal: “In reading the Scriptures I find a great moral power. Therein am I made aware of two great forces for good in human experience: the ‘fear’ of God and the ‘grace’ of God. Without the fear of God, I should not stop at doing evil; the fear of God restrains from evil. Without the grace of God, I should have no desire to approach positive goodness. The one is a deterrent from evil; the other an encouragement to good.”

2. To “walk in all his ways” and “keep the commandments of the Lord.” As we walk, God’s grace can keep us on the path of godliness. And if we fall, God’s grace is there to pick us up, point us in the right direction, and get us going again!

3. To “love” the Lord and “serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul.” A Christian minister wrote: “While traveling in Ghana, I learned that in the dominant language of Ghana the only way to ask the question, ‘What is your religion?’ is to ask, ‘Whom do you serve?’Your true god is the one you serve.”

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Commitment. Love. Service. Obedience. Grace. These are the things that God both requires of us and offers to us, the things that keep us “walking” in God’s ways and learning to love God and to love others. These are the things that call us out of our lives of radical autonomy and into the only kind of life that is worth living.

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