

POWER TO LIVE THE GOOD LIFE

Exodus 20:1-17

Acts 2:1-6

1 John 3:24

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June 4, 2017

SCRIPTURE

Then God spoke all these words: {2} I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; {3} you shall have no other gods before me. {4} You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. {5} You shall not bow down to them or worship them . . . {7} You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not acquit anyone who misuses his name. {8} Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. {9} Six days you shall labor and do all your work. {10} But the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God; you shall not do any work--you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. {11} For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it. {12} Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you. {13} You shall not murder. {14} You shall not commit adultery. {15} You shall not steal. {16} You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. {17} You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor (Exodus 20:1-17 NRSV).

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. {2} And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. {3} Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. {4} All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability. {5} Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. {6} And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each (Acts 2:1-6 NRSV).

All who obey his commandments abide in him, and he abides in them. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit that he has given us (1 John 3:24 NRSV).

MESSAGE

According to Acts chapter 2 the coming of the Holy Spirit was an anticipated event.

"When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place" (Acts 2:1).

Pentecost was an anticipated event. The word Pentecost means "fiftieth day" and it was called that because it took place 50 days after another festival known as Passover. Pentecost was originally an Old Testament festival that celebrated God's gracious provision during the spring harvest. Later in history it also became a celebration of the giving of the Ten Commandments to Moses.

Some people naively state that the Ten Commandments are strictly Old Testament and have nothing to do with Christians. A few years ago, a minister from another city was touring the new sanctuary for the congregation I was serving at the time. He happened to notice a plaque that featured the Ten Commandments placed in the narthex. He was shocked and said to me, "What are the Ten Commandments doing being posted in a Christian Church?" I was shocked that he was shocked.

First of all, this is an artificial division of Scripture. Recall that 2 Timothy 3:16, a New Testament passage, speaks of the inspiration and worth of all of Scripture. Secondly, the New Testament itself affirms the Ten Commandments, specifically through the teachings of Jesus, Paul and James. And while John does not list the Ten Commandments like these other three, he writes:

"For the love of God is this, that we obey his commandments" (1 John 5:3 NRSV).

Many Christians have a negative view of law but perhaps they are influenced by their experience with human law. Human laws are imperfect. Some are unevenly enforced. Some are too complicated and confusing. Some human laws are unjust.

But I am talking about God's Law - God's revealed standard of goodness. And God's Law has many benefits.

God's Law restrains evil in the world. The moral law helps to restrain sin. A society

without moral law is in anarchy. The knowledge of God's Law may restrain much, or it may restrain but a little . . . but it does exercise some restraint. As bad as things are, they could be a whole lot worse. The absence of God's moral Law in the world would plunge the world into complete chaos. Justice is imperfect but at least some justice is done. Even under oppressive governments, which I do not wish to justify in any way, some good is rewarded and some evil is punished. There is a measure of restraint.

Another benefit of God's Law is quite personal. God's Law drives us to a Savior. It does this by showing us as we really are - our shortcomings, our failures, our sinfulness, our need for help. The Law constrains us to find someone who can redeem us.

"So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith" (Galatians 3:24 NIV).

The term that Paul uses here is that of a servant whose job it was to take children to the Headmaster of the school. The Law is a servant whose job it is to take us to the Master who is Jesus Christ.

Do you understand this? As Christians, we should not hate the Law - we should love the Law! Twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, the Law endeavors to lead us back to the feet of the Master where we can learn of his infinite love and eternal grace.

A third benefit of God's Law is that it shows us how to live a life that pleases God. It shows us how to say "thank you" to God for rescuing us. Let me point out to you that God gave the Ten Commandments to his people after and not before he liberated them. Had he given it to them before he rescued them the implication would have been that they had to earn their liberation. But what does the text say? "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the house of slavery." By the gracious act of God he rescued his people and gave them the Ten Commandments to show how they can express their gratitude and commitment to him.

Historically, Presbyterian and Reformed Christians have referred to the Ten Commandments or any summary of the commandments as, "A Guide for Grateful Living." The Ten Commandments help us to show in concrete ways our love for God. They give instructions for the good life.

When we return to Acts chapter 2 we see there was another reason why this particular Pentecost was an anticipated event. It was the fulfillment of the promise of the coming of the Holy Spirit. Moses said that he hoped there would be a day when the Spirit would come upon all of God's people (Numbers 11:29). Other prophets said the same including

a man named Joel:

“‘And afterward,’ God says, ‘I will pour out my Spirit on all people’” (Joel 2:28).

This promise was reiterated by Jesus who said to his followers:

“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses” (Acts 1:8).

This promise came true on the Pentecost immediately following Jesus’ resurrection. Furthermore, we see there is a definite relationship between the Holy Spirit and our ability to obey God’s commands. John tells us:

All who obey his commandments abide in him, and he abides in them. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit that he has given us (1 John 3:24 NRSV).

Trying to do something without the necessary power is a lesson in frustration. A three-year-old boy received a Superman cape as a birthday present. He excitedly put on his new costume and ran outside as fast as he could. After a few minutes of running and jumping in the backyard, the boy returned to the house and angrily tore the costume off and threw it on the floor. With disgust the boy complained, "It doesn't matter how hard I try; I can't get this stupid thing to work!"

Trying to live the Christian life without the necessary spiritual power will also lead to frustration. We need the power of the Holy Spirit. But unlike the power represented by the Superman cape, the power of the Holy Spirit really exists. However, the Holy Spirit does not force his way into our lives.

In order to experience the power of the Spirit we need to cooperate with the Holy Spirit. We cooperate with the Holy Spirit largely through prayer and obedience to Scripture. The more we appreciate the Holy Spirit the greater our ability to understand and apply God's Word to our lives, the greater our assurance of faith, greater our intimacy with the Lord, and the greater our ability to communicate the Good News of Jesus Christ to a lost and hurting world.

Subsequently, the question that Pentecost now demands we answer is this: Are you cooperating in such a way as to be experiencing the power of the Holy Spirit in your life?