

# Deuteronomy 5:1-6:3

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[ 0 : 00 ] A few years ago in my old life as a minister in Richmond, I went out and did a little survey and I said, can I ask you a couple of questions?

Oh yeah, sure mate, no problem. I might be a bit fuzzy headed though. It's been a big night. Lots of drinking, lots of drugs, out with the girls. What do you want to ask me?

I thought, great, this is going to go well. So we got into the questions and he quite quickly said, look, don't get me wrong mate. I think the Ten Commandments and stuff are great, but I don't like religion because I just don't want anyone telling me what to do.

I thought, well that's interesting because actually that sums up the problem with all of us, isn't it?

The problem is not you've been out drinking and taking drugs all night or whatever else you've been doing. The problem is you don't want someone else telling you what to do.

The problem is, there's a problem with all of us, isn't it? We naturally don't want someone telling us what we want to do. We want to be free to live life our own way. And it's interesting, if you listen to the public discourse about morality in our world, the prime thing is always individual rights.

[ 1 : 30 ] I was reading even this morning an interesting letter in the Guardian newspaper written by the lady who heads up the British Pregnancy Advisory Service. And the thrust of our argument was, we need to be free to have individual rights.

No one should be protesting about right and wrong. It's about what's our freedom. No one wants to be told what to do. No one wants to have an authority over them.

Let's bear that in mind as we look at what God is saying to us here. I've had a little break from Deuteronomy, so let's just remind us. Moses is speaking. Moses is speaking to the Israelites who've been wandering around the desert for 40 years.

They're now on the border of the promised land, about to be able to go in and take possession of what God has promised them. And Moses' aim here, as a faithful pastor, is to encourage them to walk faithfully with their God, who's been faithful to them.

In fact, if you look to the very last verse of what we're going to be looking at today, chapter 6, verse 3, as Moses sums up, this is really his aim. Do this and live.

[ 2 : 45 ] This is God's promise. Live in the light of it, says Moses. Now, as we look at this passage this morning, I want first of all to deal with two objections, and then ask three questions. So, first of all, two objections.

Two objections we often get to the law of God. So, one thing I often hear people saying is, how can you preach this? This is just legalism. This isn't grace, this is legalism.

Doing something to earn God's favour. Well, is it? Is that what Moses is teaching? If you look, first of all, at chapter 5, verse 6. What is the context of this?

This is very important. Chapter 5, verse 6. Before Moses says the Ten Commandments, he said, God said, I am the Lord, your God, who brought you out of the land of slavery.

So, out of the land of Egypt. Out of the house of slavery. This is not about obeying, so you become God's people. It's about being God's people, and therefore living that out in your life.

[ 3 : 46 ] Obedience is never a means of getting God's promise. It's always a response to God's promise. It's a consequence of trusting. So, that's the first objection. This isn't legalism. This is living in the light of what God has done, who God is.

The second objection I've heard, it's a more theological objection. A friend of mine, who's a gifted Bible teacher, and a good man, and he's a friend, but he has said, I'll never preach a sermon series on the Ten Commandments, because that's the old law.

It doesn't apply to us today, as Christians. Now, is that true? Well, we could talk about that for hours, we don't have time, but let's just first see, what is the source of these commands, and what is

the significance of them?

So, what's the source? Who's it coming from? That's coming from the Lord, isn't it? It's coming from a God, who made heaven and earth. It's his law. It's an expression of his very character. And actually, all the laws we see in the Ten Commandments, are things that are implicit, implicit, previously, in the Old Testament.

In Commandments 1 to 4, are in fact quite clear, in Genesis chapter 1 verse 1, through to chapter 2 verse 4. It's all there. This is God's character.

[ 4 : 55 ] That's what the law is. That's its source. It comes from the Lord. And what are we as human beings? We are made in God's image. We're to reflect his character. This is law for all of us.

This is the way all human beings are supposed to be, before our great creator God. So that's the source of it. What's the significance? Look at verse 22 of chapter 5 for a moment.

See how God highlights these commands in the Ten Commandments he's given. Verse 22. These words the Lord spoke to all your assembly at the mountain, out of the midst of the fire, the cloud, and the thick darkness, with a loud voice.

And he added no more. And he wrote them on two tablets of stone and gave them to me. These are the words God spoke. He didn't add to them. These are the words God wrote down.

These are significant. The source comes from the Lord, the Creator. The significance, these are special words he has given us. So of course they apply to all of us. And for those of us who are Christians, these are not just directions for how to live.

[ 5 : 58 ] They're also in a sense a promise of where we're going, of where the Lord is taking us. As these commandments reflect his character, so they reflect what we will be when we are remade perfectly in his image.

It's the promise of what we're going to be. So of course they're relevant. Are they obsolete and irrelevant? No. They're God's words to all people, and particularly to his people. Are they legalistic? No. They come in the context of grace, in the context of being rescued, to be his. So they're the two objections. Now let's go on to the three questions. Moses gives us, in this chapter, three great reasons to keep to God's word, to keep to God's law.

But rather than tell you what those three reasons are, I'm instead going to ask three questions, and see if you've got them at the end. So here are the three questions. Who owns you? Who owns you? Second, what do you fear? What do you fear? And thirdly, what's your goal? What do you want in life? So who do you, who owns you?

[ 7 : 09 ] Who do you fear? And what's your goal? What do you want in life? Keep those in mind as we go through. So first of all, who owns you? Everyone is owned by something, aren't they?

So that guy I met on the streets in Richmond, he was owned by his sort of desire for pleasure. He was wrecking his life, but that's what owned him, that's what drove all decisions he made. Think of another friend of mine who lives in Japan, as it happens, but in conversations with him, he was telling me how his work had become his idol.

He looked to his work for security and hope in life. His work owned him, it directed everything he did. So what owns us? The first reason to obey the Lord is he owns us.

That's what Moses is saying back in chapter 5, verse 6. Let's read that verse again, it's so important, isn't it? I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

So when the Lord rescues people, when he redeems people, he takes them from being under the ownership of somebody else to being under his ownership, under his rule. So what redeeming means is to buy back a slave from one place to own them for yourself.

[ 8 : 18 ] In Egypt, they've been under Pharaoh's ownership, under Pharaoh's rule. They've been brought out to now be under God's rule. They were under new ownership. Now we know what that's like for football players, don't we?

I am a sort of half-hearted Arsenal supporter. I was very sad the day four years ago when Seth Fabregas was sold to Barcelona. I was even more sad when he was then bought by Chelsea this season.

That's just wrong. That just shows my vindictive heart that still needs to be worked on. So who owns him now? Who sets his training regime? Who tells him where to play and how to play?

Well, certainly not Arsene Wenger anymore. Certainly not even the boss of Barcelona. He's now under Jose Mourinho's thumb. He tells him what to do. We as Christians, those who trusted in the

Lord Jesus Christ, have been transferred, Paul says, from the dominion of darkness, from the rule of Satan, to the kingdom of the Son God loves.

We are owned by the Lord Jesus. We are owned by God, Father, Son and Spirit. And that should be shown in the way we live. The Apostle Paul puts it like this, writing to Titus, Jesus Christ gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.

[ 9 : 35 ] We are owned. Who owns us? The living God, the Lord Jesus Christ who redeemed us. And the way we live should show that he owns us. So that's the first reason to follow God's law.

It's because we belong to him because he's bought us. Our adherence, our obedience, our striving to be faithful to God's law shows the world that he owns us.

Now I want to study just two things about this law as well. Firstly, it's personal. We tend to think about laws as the impersonal things, don't we? If you've read the Highway Code, it's not a terribly interesting thing, is it?

It's a set of rules about what you do at traffic lights and all the rest of it. But law in the Bible is not like that. It's a father's instructions to his people. And the text here underlines in three ways how personal this law is.

Let's look at verse 2 of chapter 5. The Lord our God made a covenant with you at Horeb, with us at Horeb. Not with our fathers did the Lord make this covenant, but with us, all, who are all of us here alive today.

[ 10 : 42 ] Moses is saying it's not just for people 40 years ago, it's for us. It's our personal God who's entered into a personal relationship with us. He's the living God. His covenant goes through generations. And verse 4, look what he says.

The Lord spoke with you face to face at the mountain and in the midst of fire. When someone speaks to you face to face, it's very personal, isn't it?

It's God's personal will for us. Not a disembodied principle of law. And also, as we see in verse 6, it's personal because the Lord is the one who rescued us, who owned us, who owns us.

So that's the first thing. This law is personal, but secondly, it's total. Because we are totally owned by the Lord who's brought us, this law is total and covers every area of life.

So the watching world could look at Israel and say, well, they're owned by somebody else. They're owned by this God they worship. As the watching world looks on, who does it see owns us?

[ 11 : 43 ] See, this is really the question these ten commandments pose to us. Where does my allegiance lie? Where do I find my identity? What controls me? Or who controls me?

And we're not going to work through all these commandments, partly because we've already done a great job of that using the Heidelberg Catechism over the last few weeks. And you can always look that up online. But I want to show a couple of examples.

We want to look at one specific example, the fourth commandment. And secondly, we look at the whole shape of these commandments as we look at who owns us and say that's the issue that's at the heart here. So let's look at verse 12.

The fourth commandment, the law of the Sabbath. You see, the Sabbath was a great sign of being owned by God's people. In fact, back in Exodus chapter 31 when the Lord had given this command to the previous generation, he had said that the Sabbath was a great sign of being his people.

And look at what he says about the Sabbath here. Look at the reason the Lord gives for them to obey the Sabbath, to observe the Sabbath day. Look at verse 12. Observe the Sabbath day to keep it holy as the Lord your God commanded you.

[ 12 : 47 ] He's the one in charge. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work. And why was all this? Well, verse 15.

You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt and the Lord your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore, the Lord your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.

So on the Sabbath day, a rich Israelite household couldn't force their slaves to work, couldn't even make their animals work. The male and the female slaves, the donkeys, the livestock, they all had to rest.

It was a sign that the Lord was the real owner, not the wealthy, not even the animal owners, but the Lord was the ultimate owner. And so they were to be different from all the other nations around

them.

The Sabbath was to mark them out, to show that the Lord owned them, not something else. And of course, that was a challenge to those who wanted to build up wealth. That was a challenge because they wanted to work.

[13:50] So later on in the Old Testament, Amos chapter 8, verse 5, we read the complaint of the people. When will the Sabbath be over, they offer wheat for sale. They wanted to be owned by money.

They were owned by their desires to accumulate wealth. And so they wanted to work on the Sabbath. The Sabbath was there as a reminder. We are God's people. He has rescued us. We are owned by him. So for Christians today, for example, the way we use this Sunday, what is now the Sabbath for God's people in the New Testament, is a sign to the world of who owns us. Now I realise in many professions you have no choice about whether you work on a Sunday. I get that. I don't want anyone to leave here feeling unnecessarily guilty. But let me tell you a little story contrasting two family businesses to get to the heart of this idea of who owns us.

I have a friend who is very involved in his family business. His father owns it. He's very involved in running it. I have about 10 or 15 shops into West London and out into Berkshire and Buckinghamshire.

[14:56] And when I asked him about this, all their shops were open on a Sunday. He said, we just couldn't afford to close down on Sundays. It's the biggest day. In contrast to that, he also said, who owns him?

Who's calling the shots on that business? That's the financial pressures, isn't it? The requirement to make money. And surely to make money to pay their staff and to pay their bills and that's important. But in contrast to that, I think of another business, the entertainer toy shop chain. Run by Christians. Started just one shop in Amersham in 1981. Now it's the largest independent toy shop in the UK with many branches.

If you look on their website, that I did this week, under their values, they've got four values. One of them is these. Sunday training. You won't find any of our stores open on Sundays.

Our teams work extremely hard all week, so Sundays are reserved as a day to relax and spend time with friends and family. They're believers. They take that command seriously.

[16:04] Who owns them? They know they're owned by the living God. And so they submit to his law on that. And there have been numerous newspaper articles about them.

But they show where their allegiances lie. Now we can spend a whole sermon series on the Ten Commandments. We can spend a whole Sunday school series on them. We may well do that at some stage. The main point is this.

Who owns us? As the world looks along, as they see how we use our time, as they see what's important to us, what does that tell our friends, our neighbours, our colleagues about who owns us? About who directs our life? Because the Sabbath is just a test case. Is it our culture's values of pleasure and leisure and money and entertainment?

Or the Lord has brought us and saved us and made us his own? It's not just this specific commandment. The whole shape of the commandments also highlights this point.

[17:02] There's a lot of talk these days about values, isn't there? What are a person's values? We get more and more of that coming up to the general election next May. As politicians will talk about their values and what's important.

Well, in some ways, the order of the Ten Commandments shows us some of God's values, if you like. His priorities for the people he has made. So what are his priorities? Well, commandments one to four all deal with our relationship with God, don't they?

Who he is and how we as creatures are to relate to him. Command four about the Sabbath in a sense is also about the welfare of society. Everybody having a chance to rest.

And not think that money is God. Commandment five, look at that, verse sixteen. Only your father and your mother as the Lord your God commanded you, that your days may be long and it may go well with you in the land the Lord your God is giving you.

It says that family is important to God because society is only strong when families are strong.

Chapters of Commandment seven, verse eighteen, about adultery, that reinforces the importance of family.

[ 18 : 10 ] And so you've got God, society, family. It's only after that come the sort of individual rights if you like, about property and life and the right for truth.

Verse twenty, don't bear false witness. So what's God's order of values? What's God's priority?

That we as humans relate to him properly first, that society is strong, that family is strong, that individuals' lives and relationships and property are protected and that truth is told?

How does that compare to our society? Where individual rights, money, all come above, certainly far above God, even above family rights, even above society.

Family is almost totally disregarded, isn't it? Then look at the Tenth Commandment, how does that fare in our world? Tenth Commandment, verse twenty-one, you shall not covet your neighbour's wife, you shall not desire your neighbour's house, his field, his male servant or his female servant, his ox or the donkey or anything else for your neighbours.

Yet coveting is at the heart of our economy, isn't it? Don't you saw the news on Friday morning about the Black Friday sales and how many shops, how many Tesco stores had to have the police come to stop people pulling down television sets and fighting over each other for the goods they coveted which were finally reduced so they could come and get them.

[ 19 : 33 ] One Old Testament commentator puts it like this and he's very perceptive. Western society has almost precisely inverted God's order of priorities. Having built an ideological worldview on breaking the Tenth Commandment, it is hardly surprising that we trampled over the preceding ones until the first is virtually meaningless.

Why obey God's law? Why follow God's ways? It's a sign to the world of who owns us, of who owns us, of what our lives are about. The Lord owns us because he has rescued us.

That's the first reason to obey. We obey because the Lord has made us his by rescuing us. Which leads us on to the second reason to obey, the second question.

Second question, what do you fear? What do you fear? What are your worries in life? Do you have a teacher at school who you do not want to get on the wrong side of?

It's good when he likes you or she likes you but you don't want to get in trouble with him. I know I had teachers like that. Or is there a boss you're scared of? My life is in his hands.

[ 20 : 44 ] I need to obey. Well look who Israel feared. Look at verse 23 will you? What did Israel fear? At least at this time. As soon as you heard the voice out of the midst of the darkness while the mountain was burning with fire you came near to me all the heads of your tribes and your elders and you said behold the Lord our God has shown us his glory and greatness and we heard the voice out of the midst of the fire.

This day we have seen God speak with man and man still live. What were they scared of? What did they fear? They feared the grandeur, the might, the holiness of the living God.

They did not take him for granted. See verse 25 what their request was. Now therefore why should we die? We've come so close to this God we are in fear of our lives.

Why should we die? For this great fire will consume us. If we hear the voice of the Lord our God any more we shall die. So they said Moses you go and talk to God for us so that we don't die.

They feared the living God. They were in fear of their lives. So they sensed the holiness, the otherness of the great creator. There's this kind of modern idea that spirituality, religion, it's nice and comforting.

[ 22 : 04 ] Well for the Israelites getting a taste of God's glory. It was not comforting, it was terrifying because he is holy and magnificent. Now how do we get a taste of God's glory today?

Is God in the New Testament somehow more warm and fluffy and cuddly? No. John's gospel begins by telling us we have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only.

The word became flesh, you tabernacle, dwelt among us. We see God's glory now in the Lord Jesus Christ. Specifically, where do we see that glory most clearly? As you read through John's gospel as we are in the house groups at the moment, we see his glory is revealed in the cross.

As God's holiness in his absolute detesting of sin is revealed in the cross and the death of his own son, but as God's hatred of sin and his justice and holiness are revealed in his son's death, so is God's greatness of God's love in providing his son to make a way for us to be his.

We should not be any less reverent and fearful and in awe of God now than the Israelites were. So we have a clearer sight of his glory, not just a mountain with fire and smoke and a loud voice, but Calvary, the son of God stricken for us, bearing our sin in our place, so that God's holiness can be satisfied and his love satisfied as well.

[ 23 : 38 ] So God is no different. So what do we fear? What do we respect? What do we honour? Is it God? Or something else? There's this great line in the Narnia Chronicles.

Children have just gone to Narnia, they've just heard about this lion, Aslan, and they're talking with a beaver and they're getting a little bit worried. So one of the children says about this lion called Aslan, is he safe?

To which the beavers reply, safe? Don't you hear what Mrs. Beaver tells you? Who said anything about safe? Of course he isn't safe, but he's good.

He's the king, I tell you. That is our God. Is he safe? No. But is he good? Oh yes. But he is the one we're to fear.

He is the one we're to listen to. He is the one we're to love and respect. And yet if we don't have, if we just think of God as being safe, we'll actually have very little motivation for obeying him.

[ 24 : 43 ] So one of the motivations for obeying God is his great grace. When we see how holy he is, how amazing it is that he should love us and rescue us, then that gives us a motivation for obeying him, for following him, for trusting him.

So if we have a small view of God, we have a small view of grace and only a small motivation for obeying. But when like the Israelites at Sinai, we get this great view of God, his majesty, his holiness, they have a great motivation for following him and believing him.

And of course we have an even greater motivation than they did. God provided a mediator for them, look at verse 31, just so we can see this. God provided Moses to stand in the gap as it were, look at verse 31.

But you stand here by me, the Lord says to Moses, and I will tell you the whole commandment and the statutes and the rules that you shall teach them, that they may do them in the land that I am giving them to possess. So the Lord gave Israel a mediator, Moses, so they could know his will. As the story unfolds, Deuteronomy 18, the Lord promises through Moses that one day he would give another prophet to whom they should listen, to whom he would speak his words.

[ 25 : 53 ] And in the New Testament we find that that great prophet is actually the Lord Jesus. He's our mediator, he speaks God's word to us. But not only is he our prophet to stand there and teach us God's truth, but he is our king to rule over us as God's ruler.

And our priest whose sacrifice brings us to God. That one mediator who enables us to fear and love and trust this Lord.

And we have a clearer view of God's majesty because the Lord Jesus is our mediator. So here's a second reason for obeying. Because we've been bought by God, we're owned by him.

And secondly, because the Lord is majestic and holy and to be feared and respected. And he shows us that especially through our mediator, the Lord Jesus.

So the first two, the last point is more brief, you'll be glad to hear. Why obey? Because we're owned by the Lord. Secondly, because the Lord is majestic and to be feared. So the third question then.

[ 26 : 56 ] Who owns you? What do you fear? Third question. What do you really want in life? What do you really want in life? What's your goal? I guess the goal for the people who are grabbing television sets off the shelves of Tesco's on early morning, on Tuesday, on Friday rather, was accumulate, get stuff, entertainment as well, big television set.

That's what we need, entertainment. The Lord has something so much better for his people. I don't know if you noticed as Nicky was reading this, how the whole text is dripping with God's desire for those people to have good things and do well.

Let's go back for a moment to chapter 5, verses 9 and 10. The commandment is not to bow down or serve any idol. I'm sure there's punishment, but listen to the goodness of God here as well.

Verse 9. We often fixate, don't we, on the punishment of the third or fourth generation.

But you see the big point here? As one commentator puts it, this is the biggest numerical contrast in the Bible. Third or fourth generation to a thousand generations.

[ 28 : 20 ] That shows us God's desire is not so much to punish but ultimately to bless, to do good to those who will love him, who trust his promises. We see that reflected also in the fifth commandment, to honour your father and mother, verse 16.

Honour your father and mother. Why? End of verse 16. That it may go well with you in the land.

Well, verse 29, look on to the end of the chapter. The Lord says, oh, I wish they would always fear me like this.

Why? Verse 29. Oh, that they always had such a mind as this, to fear me and to keep my commandments. Why? That it might go well with them and with their descendants forever. This is the God of the covenant, the faithful God. His longing is for it to go well with the people. He's redeemed, the people he loved, the people he set his love upon. That's his goal for us. That's his longing for us. Are our desires that strong? Are our desires too weak to be settled for comfort or money in this world? So verse 33, as Moses sums up, you shall walk in all the way that the Lord your God has commanded you, that you may live and it may go well with you, that you may live long in the land that you shall possess.

[ 29 : 37 ] That's what the Lord wanted for them. He wanted them to have the fullness of everything he promised. He wanted them to have life and to have the land he promised them. What does he want for us? He wants us to enjoy the forgiveness we have in Jesus, to enjoy the fellowship with Father, Son and Spirit that he's brought us for.

He wants us to enjoy the eternal life with him in the new creation which this promised land was just a foretaste, a shadow of. That's what God's desire is for us. So what is our hope?

What is our longing as we sit here today? Do we want what God wants? See the way to have what God wants is to trust him.

That's what all this is about. Is that what Moses is teaching? You need to obey all this so you can get into the land? No. He's saying you are God's people. He's redeemed you for this purpose. He's given you these promises.

Now you need to trust them. And trust is shown by obedience. Do you remember the last time you went to a doctor? You went to doubt because you were ill and I'm sure she or he gave you a prescription for some medicine.

[ 30 : 46 ] Now how do you show you trust the doctor? You take the prescription to the pharmacist, you get the medicine and you do what it says in the tin. Your trust is shown by obedience.

Now when the medicine gets does its work, when you get better, why are you better? Is it because of your work? Is it because you took those tablets three times a day as you were told to do?

And wait, you deserve to be better now, you follow the rules. No. You're better because you trusted the doctor's prescription and they told the truth and it worked.

So it is here with the law of God. As they trust in God, they will obey it. Their trust is shown in obedience and so it is in the New Testament. John 14, verse 15, Jesus says, if you love me, you will obey my commandments.

If we love and trust him as our saviour, that will be shown in our lives. We'll obey his commandments. We don't obey so that we belong to God. We obey because we belong to God.

[ 31 : 50 ] We don't obey so that we earn something. through our trust expressed in obedience by the grace of the Lord Jesus, we gain what is promised.

Who owns you? Are you owned by the culture around or by the living God who brought you and loved you? What do you fear? People? Or the living God?

What do you want? Conflict? Ease? Or the life that God promises? Here are the three reasons to obey. Because the Lord has rescued us and owns us.

Because he is majestic and worthy to be feared and trusted. And because he has promised us life. And that life is found only in Jesus. Let's pray.