

Deuteronomy 4:1-2,6-9 and Psalm 15

If you fossick around in a dusty room of the church hall you may find two old notice boards. They would have once been pinned into the front wall of the church. On one board would be the Apostle's Creed and Lord's Prayer and on the other the Ten Commandments. It was not an uncommon architectural practice to keep these three sections of the church catechism before God's people as they met for worship Sunday by Sunday. Moses, David and the Lord Jesus would have been very pleased to endorse such a practice.

God's Covenant and Commandments and Moses.

God called Moses from Midian to lead Israel out of Egypt. God revealed to Moses that he was the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and that he was sending Moses to do this great work. The sign for Moses that this was a genuine call was that he would assemble Israel at Mt Horeb or Mt Sinai, as it was sometimes called.

God did deliver Israel from Egypt and he assembled them at Mt Horeb. There the Lord caused the mountain "to blaze with fire to the very heavens with black clouds and deep darkness" and there he declared to Israel his covenant, the Ten Commandments. They were his people and as his people they were to keep his commandments. The commandments were to be kept in the Ark of the Covenant and this was to be housed in the Tent of the Lord. The Tent and the Ark and the Commandments were to be kept at the centre of Israel's life as God's nation.

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When we read Deuteronomy four, we are reading part of a sermon Moses preached to Israel just before they were to enter Canaan, the land of God's promise. Moses was recalling this great Mt Horeb event and the covenant God made with them in the Ten Commandments.

The people of Israel were to remember that He, the Lord their God was the One who brought them out of the land of bondage by his plagues upon Egypt and by his drowning the pursuing Egyptian army in the Red Sea. Israel was God's people with whom he made a covenant of Life. If they would obey him he would continue to be the Lord who would give them the land of promise and dwell in their midst to bless them.

Israel for their part was to obey the commandments. They were not to have other gods. They were not to make idols. They were not to misuse God's name. They were to observe the seventh day as a holy day to the Lord. These four laws were their right response to God who saved them and would dwell in their midst to hear their prayers and bless them.

As well, they were to honour their parents, not to murder, not to commit adultery, not to steal, not to give false testimony against their neighbour and not to covet anything that belonged to their neighbour. These six laws were the right way for God's people to treat each other so that they might enjoy the life God was giving them.

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Moses called upon Israel to hear these commands and to observe them carefully. These commandments and their exposition were their wisdom among the nations. They were not to forget either the event they saw or the words they received. They were to root them deep in their heart and were to teach them to their children and future generations, they were to learn them and follow them. These were the words of the holy God and they were to be His holy people. This Law was to be kept in the Ark of the Covenant in the Lord's Tent and kept in the midst of God's people as a sign of God being in the midst of his people.

God's Covenant and Commandments and David.

God went before his people and gave them the Promised Land. As time went on the fortunes of the nation fluctuated. Israel would forget God and neglect his the covenant and commandments. They would worship other gods and behave like other nations. God would then send judges and prophets who would call the people back to the covenant and commandments and when the people responded God would be with his people to bless them. During this time the Tent of the Lord was struck in various sites in the Promised Land.

When Samuel became their prophet the people asked him to anoint a King for them like the other nations. First Saul then David was anointed Israel's king. Through David's reign the confederacy of the twelve tribes was fashioned into a state and the centre of Israel's worship was moved to Jerusalem.

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When we read Psalm 15 we read one of David's psalms from this period. The question of who shall have the love of God and enjoy his fellowship is raised. An exposition of the commandments is at the centre of the answer. The first four commands are summed up as those who fear the Lord. The second six are summed up as those who speak the truth from the heart, who do not wrong to a friend, who do not slander, who keep an oath even when it hurts, who are not greedy for money, who do not accept bribes, who despising the vile person and who honour those who fear the Lord.

God's Covenant and Commandments and the Lord Jesus

The covenant that the Lord Jesus enacted by his death and resurrection is new and greater. His covenant is eternal. He offers forgiveness of sins and the Holy Spirit. With the Spirit comes every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places now as well guaranteeing glory in the heavenly city at his coming. The promises are elevated to a new level.

And how are we to live in this new covenant that grows out of the old? We are to be the holy people and keep the old commandment from the heart. We are to love the Lord our God with all our heart and mind and strength and to love our neighbour as ourselves.

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Conclusion.

The Anglican Reformers have mirrored the revelation of God's commandment from old to new in the Book of Common Prayer service of the Lord's Supper. At the heart of the service is the remembrance of the covenant death for God's people. By faith and with thanksgiving we feed on Christ by faith. At the beginning of the service the minister reads the Ten Commandments and the people pray God's mercy upon them by "inclining their heart to keep each law" and then finally by beseeching him "to write all these thy laws on our hearts".

Perhaps it is too difficult to restore the old dusty notice boards with the ten commandments on them but the idea was right to have them in front of the people of God constantly so that they may be written on our hearts by the Spirit to incline us to do them and live in Christ's kingdom.