

“People of Extremes?”—Deuteronomy 30:19-20

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “People of Extremes?”, is Deuteronomy 30:19-20 → *I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live, loving the LORD your God, obeying His voice and holding fast to Him, for He is your life and length of days.* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

How many times have you heard someone referred to as “OCD.” OCD stands for Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder, “an anxiety disorder in which people have unwanted and repeated thoughts, feelings, ideas, sensations (obsessions), or behaviors that make them feel driven to do something (compulsions).” While such an anxiety disorder can have serious affects on peoples’ basic functioning in life, most of the time when I’ve heard it used to describe another person it is simply meant to point out some kind of extreme “need” to do a task or behavior a certain way. In this sense, one person is simply describing another person as very picky about some behavior in his/her life.

While determining a person's psychological make-up is a complex task Scripture does teach that we tend to be people of extremes. (cf. Ecclesiastes 7:16-18) From civil laws to personal behaviors we struggle to find a positive "middle ground" which clings to the good and avoids the bad. Either way, we ultimately must face the consequences of our choices in life.

When one looks at being people of extremes from God's point of view the picture is much different. For Him everything is clearly "black and white," laid down in His written Word in order to provide for and protect us. The problem comes when you rationalize His Word to such an extent that everything becomes "grey area" and you can't see clearly to make the right choices. Before you know it, your choice can be wrong, outside of God's revealed will.

In our text Moses called upon the Israelites to make a choice between two extremes, referred in Deuteronomy 30:15 as *life and good* or *death and evil*. Such a choice was based upon having experienced God's grace in the Exodus as well as His justice and providence during their forty year desert wanderings.

On the borders of the Promised Land, Moses placed this command before the people to *obey the commandments of the LORD* their God . . . *by loving Him, walking in His ways, and by keeping His commandments and His statutes and His just decrees* (cf. Deuteronomy 30:16) **after they had experienced**

**the LORD's redeeming and providing power in their lives.** It is important to remember that whenever the LORD puts commands before us to choose His path it is always based upon how He has established a relationship with us **by His gracious working in our lives!**

Even before giving the Ten Commandments the LORD stated the motivation for following such commands in Exodus 20:2 → *I am the LORD your God, Who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.* God established His covenant with His people **by saving them in order that they might obey Him in love!** In light of God's redemption, obeying the Ten Commandments are His peoples' way to show gratitude to Him. In fact, a better translation might be "You will have no other gods . . . You will not misuse the name . . . You will not steal" and so forth. Obedience is the natural outflow of grace. Jesus put it this way in John 14:15 → *If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.* So, how do we come to love Jesus?

The Exodus event in the lives of the Israelites looked forward to God's saving you and bringing you out of your slavery to the power sin through Jesus' Person & Work for you. Living in that covenant relationship with Jesus, **the Spirit gives you the ability to choose to follow God's ways.** We do not choose God's ways in order to go to heaven but because we're already going to heaven!

Moses reminded God's covenant people about the consequences of their choices in life because, standing on these borders forty years earlier, they chose the extreme of forsaking the LORD in idolatry. When He was out of their sight forty days they decided to create and worship their own god—a golden calf. Throughout their wilderness wanderings they constantly grumbled against the LORD and conspired against Moses. Experiencing such extreme “spiritual polarization” moved Moses to remind the people of the consequences of their behavior. It's no different than us reminding those we love of the consequences of their poor choices so that they do not end up in trouble . . . again.

Jesus applied this same extreme of forsaking Yahweh in idolatry to your relationship with Him when He said in Matthew 12:30 → *Whoever is not with Me is against Me, and whoever does not gather with Me scatters*. When it comes to the first Commandment—*You shall have no other gods before Me*—there is no middle ground.

Jesus reinforced this fact in Revelation 3:15-16. He said: *I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth*. These Christians lived in the “grey area” so much that they became hypocrites—people who claimed to be Christian but really didn't believe what

they were saying or doing for Jesus. Here Jesus defined idolatry as a *lukewarm* attitude of apathy and complacency with no **true** commitment to Him whatsoever.

Christians especially find themselves constantly in a conflict between the desire to follow *the commandments of the LORD* and the “pull” of the sinful ways of the world. While choosing to follow Yahweh we are tempted to disobey Him at the same time. Paul described this conflict in Romans 7:15-19 → *I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. . . . So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing.* Such spiritual battle waging within us as we strive to *obey the commandments of our God . . . by loving Him, walking in His ways, and . . . keeping His commandments* is so difficult that it caused Paul to express, *Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?* His only answer and hope? *Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!* (cf. Romans 7:24-25) As long as we are this side of heaven we will experience this constant conflict as we strive to live as disciples of Jesus in a sin-controlled world.

However, as much as you don't like it, this conflict is the place of Christian

faith. If you are not in this conflict either you've become secure in your sin with a disregard for obeying the commandments of God or you are secure in your obedience with self-righteousness. These two extremes are exactly where the devil wants you because both lead to hell. Thus, if you are struggling in spiritual battle while striving to be obedient to Christ, be encouraged because Christ has you! In the midst of the extremes of idolatry and the spiritual battles connected with obedience **we all need the atoning work of Jesus for the forgiveness of our sins!**

In our text Moses put forth three very important aspects of following the LORD as His disciple, all of which stem from a recognition that only He is our Life.

- ① *Loving the Lord our God* → Our motivation for obedience is derived from God's love for us sinners in Christ Jesus. This is why all our meanings to the commandments begin with the words: "We should fear **and love** God so that we may . . ." The main reason we break God's commandments is because we aren't loving Him first and foremost in our lives. Every sin is a 1<sup>st</sup> Commandment issue.
- ② *Obeying His voice* → Obedience is based upon listening to Him speak to us through His written Word, the Bible. As Jesus described His relationship with us as our Good Shepherd He pointed out the

importance of listening to His voice in John 10:3-5 → *He calls His own sheep by name and leads them out. When He has brought out all His own, He goes before them, and the sheep follow Him, **for they know His voice.*** Listening means to hear with the desire to obey what you hear.

- ③ *Holding fast to Him* → This happens as you come to Him constantly in repentance and faith through exposure to His written Word and partaking of the Lord's Supper at worship together. You cling to the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins! You trust His Holy Spirit to guide you in your daily living so that you can experience true life and be **extremely** committed to the LORD! Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding,  
keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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