

Sermon Outline

“ABBA! FATHER!”:
KNOWING GOD AS OUR BELOVED FATHER

THE LORD HAS SET HIS LOVE ON US

Deuteronomy 7:1-11

I. Introduction

J.I. Packer: “...*you sum up the whole of New Testament religion if you describe it as the knowledge of God as one’s holy Father.* If you want to judge how well a person understands Christianity, find out how much he makes of the thought of being God’s child, and having God as his Father.” (*Knowing God*, p. 201)

II. God’s Promise and Instruction About Holy Warfare (Deut 7:1, 2)

- A. The passage begins with a description about Israel’s future; the state of affairs in which Israel would soon find themselves.
 - 1. At the time these words are spoken, Israel is still in the wilderness.
 - 2. In time to come, God will bring Israel out of the wilderness into the land that he had promised their ancestors.
 - “When the LORD your God brings you into the land that you are entering to take possession of it, and clears away many nations before you, the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations more numerous and mightier than you, and when the LORD your God gives them over to you, and you defeat them,”
 - 3. Those words are a restatement of the Lord’s promises to his people—the Lord will cause them to be victorious over their enemies.
- B. When the Lord defeats these nations, Moses makes very clear that Israel...
 - 1. “must devote them to complete destruction”
 - 2. must “make no covenant with them and show no mercy to them.”

***Questions for reflection:** (1) What is the promise the Lord makes to Israel? (2) What must Israel refrain from doing after they have defeated the enemy nations?

III. Laws against Intermarriage and Idolatry (Deuteronomy 7:3-5)

- A. In addition to the instructions on warfare, the Lord also adds a prohibition against intermarriage between Israelites and Canaanites.
- B. The assumption here is that pockets of Canaanite civilization would still remain even after the wars.
- C. The Lord calls Israel to *refrain* from intermarriage.
 - 1. He says “You shall not intermarry with them, giving your daughters to their sons or taking their daughters for your sons” (v 3).
 - 2. The reason: “for they would turn away your sons from following me, to serve other gods” (v 4).

3. Should such a backsliding occur, the Lord will punish his people: “Then the anger of the LORD would be kindled against you, and he would destroy you quickly.”
 4. We must be able to discern the heart of God behind these words.
 - a. It is easy to read such threats apart from the larger context of God’s heart.
 - b. Satan tempts us to think poor thoughts about God.
—He wants to think that God is petty.
 - c. God is jealous for Israel’s loyalty because God has already committed himself to Israel’s good.
 - d. For Israel to commit idolatry is akin to adultery.
- D. The Lord wants Israel to *destroy* the idols of the land (v 5).
1. “But thus shall you deal with them: you shall break down their altars and dash in pieces their pillars and chop down their Asherim and burn their carved images with fire.”
 2. The Lord burns with hatred against all false worship.
 3. Even if the Lord does not call his Church to burn down idols of wood today, God does call his children to destroy the idols in our minds and hearts.
 - a. What are these idols?
 - i. Worldly false beliefs and value systems
 - ii. Habits of sinful behavior we so love and cherish
 - b. Holy warfare is primarily a war for right worship.
 - i. It is the war to protect and advance the supremacy of God in the heart of every human being and every culture on earth.
 - ii. We evangelize because we want God to be loved supremely in the hearts of our countrymen. We want God to have his royal rights restored and respected in our land.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) What other prohibitions or instructions does the Lord have for Israel aside from waging war on the Canaanite civilizations? (2) Why does the Lord prohibit intermarriage between Israel and the people of the land? (3) What does God threaten to do to Israel in the event of their idolatry? (4) What does the Lord instruct Israel to do concerning the idols? (5) What is the equivalent to these idols in our lives today? (6) “Holy warfare is primarily a war for right worship.” Discuss. (6) We evangelize because we “want God to have his royal rights restored and respected in our land.” Discuss.

IV. For You Are a Holy People to the Lord (Deuteronomy 7:6)

- A. Here is why Israel must refrain from intermarriage and destroy the idols—and why God gets especially angry at Israel.
 1. “For you are a people holy to the LORD your God.”
 2. Israel must obey God, and God takes Israel’s disobedience so seriously because there is now a very special relationship between God and Israel.
- B. This relationship is expressed by the word, “holy.”
 1. The word “holy” means to be “set apart.”
 2. Israel, in other words, is special to God.
 3. When God looks on Israel, he doesn’t simply see a bunch of sinful people—he sees his special treasure, his special companion, his son in the world.

- C. How did all this come to be?
 - 1. It wasn't because Israel was that pious of a nation.
 - 2. In fact, by this time in Deuteronomy, Israel is a nation of complainers.
 - 3. Moses explains in the rest of verse 6: "The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth."
 - 4. Once again, God's free and sovereign election is the source of Israel's holiness.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) Why must Israel refrain from intermarriage and idolatry? (2) How does the Lord see Israel? Who is Israel to the Lord? (3) How did Israel become holy to the Lord?

V. The Lord Has Set His Love on You (Deuteronomy 7:7, 8)

- A. Moses elaborates upon his answer in verses 7 and 8.
 - 1. Moses makes sure that Israel knows that God did not choose them for their size: "It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples,"
 - 2. God does not value what so many nations value—size of land, cultural greatness, or military power.
- B. So if God was not moved to love Israel because of their size, what was it that moved him?
 - 1. "...but it is because the LORD loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers..." (v 8)
 - 2. Why, according to verse 8, did the Lord set his love on the tiny nation of Israel?
 - a. First, it was because the Lord loves Israel.
 - i. God loves Israel because God loves Israel.
 - ii. The reason rests in God himself and in his personal, sovereign choice.
 - iii. Israel did nothing to earn this choice.
 - b. Second, it was because the Lord is keeping the oath that he swore to Israel's fathers.
 - i. This does not weaken the freeness of God's choice.
 - ii. Out of his own free will, God chose to enter into covenant with Israel's forefathers.
- C. Out of this loving obligation to Israel, God acted to save his people in their time of need: "that the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt."

***Questions for reflection:** (1) Why did the Lord set his love on Israel? (2) According to verse 8, what "moved" God to love Israel? (3) What did God do to fulfil his loving obligations to Israel in Egypt?

VI. The Lord Our God (Deuteronomy 7:9-11)

- A. From here, Moses proceeds to make God known to his Church (vv 9-11).

- “Know therefore that the LORD your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations,”
- B. Why does Moses see the need to teach Israel about the love of God?
1. Perhaps he knows that Israel needs that encouragement and assurance.
 2. When Israel goes into the promised land to deal with the powerful nations who dwell there, Israel is going to need courage.
 3. Courage and faithfulness comes mainly from knowing that God will always be faithful to his people.
 4. God will not abandon his people, because he is the “faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations [.]”
 5. In other words, God has devoted himself to the wellbeing of his people.
- C. But courage also comes by a different source.
1. It comes from knowing what God will do to Israel if they disobey.
 2. God will fully support Israel only if they obey his Law.
 3. If Israel doesn’t obey the Law, then they can only expect punishment.
 4. God “repays to their face those who hate him, by destroying them.”
 5. The fact that God repeats this threat twice makes clear that God is very serious when he says this.
 6. He will destroy Israel if they break faith with him.
 7. The fate that will befall the Canaanites could very well befall Israel as well: “He will not be slack with one who hates him. He will repay him to his face.”
 8. While God is indeed our loving Father, and his fatherhood sweetens his lordship, he is still our absolute Lord.
- D. As a consequence of the Lord’s threats, Moses exhorts Israel once more: “You shall therefore be careful to do the commandment and the statutes and the rules that I command you today” (v 11).
- E. Israel is holy and special to the Lord.
1. And yet, membership has its responsibilities as much as it has its rewards.
 2. The great responsibility of being special to God means that Israel is obligated to do the will of God.
 3. God is the Head of the household and his rules must be obeyed—or else!

***Questions for reflection:** (1) Who is God? What kind of God does Israel have? (2) How would God’s faithfulness and steadfast love encourage Israel’s fidelity in the new land? (3) How would God’s anger also encourage Israel’s fidelity in the new land? (4) “While God is indeed our loving Father, and his fatherhood sweetens his lordship, he is still our absolute Lord.” Discuss. (5) According to verse 11, what is the imperative that Israel is to obey?

VII. Israel, the Disobedient Son of God

- A. *How well does Israel do in keeping faith with God?*
- B. Israel does end up breaking faith with the Lord.
- C. Eventually, all the curses that God threatened back in the book of Deuteronomy come upon Israel and the nation is largely destroyed.

1. In Deuteronomy 28, God promised Israel that disobedience will end with exile.
 2. By the end of 2 Kings, Israel is exiled to Babylon.
 3. Sin does not make us more free.
- It only causes you to actually lose more and more of ourselves until we are thoroughly enslaved by other wicked powers.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) How well does Israel keep faith with God? Does Israel remain faithful to the Lord's commandments in Deuteronomy 7:1-11? (2) What happens by the end of 2 Kings? (3) What does Israel's losing the land and (re)enslavement to Babylon teach us about sin?

VIII. Jesus, the Obedient Son of God

- A. But there is forgiveness and healing with our heavenly Father.
—History does not have to end with destruction, but restoration.
- B. God knew from the very start that Israel will one day disregard this instruction and incur punishment upon themselves.
- C. Why then does God give Israel these threats and laws in the first place, if he knew that they would flunk the test?
 1. God gave Israel the laws to show them what the truly good and holy life was.
 2. God also gave Israel the laws to create right behavior in his people.
 3. But God also gave the Law to prepare Israel and the world for the Righteous One who would come to render perfect obedience to God.
—Galatians 3:23-24: "Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith."
 - a. As good, beautiful, and necessary as the Law of God was, it was never intended by God to be the source of life either for Israel or the rest of the world.
 - b. The Law was never the means by which Israel and the nations would reconciled to God and gain eternal life.
 - c. This is because of two considerations:
 - i. The Law requires total obedience.
 - ii. We are naturally disobedient.
 - d. Since we cannot keep the Law fully, we will inevitably come under the punishments that are attached to the Law—the final and ultimate punishment being eternal condemnation and separation from God.
—"The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me. For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me. So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good" (Rom 7:10-12).
 - e. The only way that God has established for us to flee the punishments of the Law as well as attain its righteousness is if someone else actually performed the two for us.
 - f. The Lord Jesus Christ has met both needs by his death and obedient life.

- D. When God said, “You shall therefore be careful to do the commandment and the statutes and the rules...” the only one who obeyed the Lord’s instructions to the fullest was Jesus Christ our Lord.
- E. Because of that, he could become the true source of life and righteousness to the human race.
 - “For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes” (Rom 10:4).
 - “And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is written, ‘Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord’” (1 Cor 1:30, 31).

***Questions for reflection:** (1) According to Galatians 3:23, 24, what was the purpose for which God gave the Law? (2) Why is Jesus Christ the true source of life and righteousness for his people?

IX. Christians, Obedient Sons of God in Jesus Christ

The Law of God calls us to reciprocate the love our heavenly Father has shown us by obeying his commandments. Yet, it is really the Lord Jesus Christ, God’s beloved Son, who fulfills those obligations both for us and in us. This centrality of Christ to the plans of God is important for how we actually go about obeying God. It means that we begin our obedience first by looking to Jesus, resting on what Jesus had done for us. And then from there, we strive to obey the commandments of God, knowing that it is the same Lord Jesus Christ who works out his will in us.

- A. Our Lord Jesus fulfilled the Law once and for all by his obedient life, so earning for us the right to become children of God (cf. Jn 1:12).
- B. Our Lord Jesus continues to fulfill those obligations in us by creating real obedience in us by the power of his Holy Spirit.
- C. This is how we know God as our beloved Father, not first by sensing God immediately for ourselves, but by trusting in Jesus Christ, the supreme Doer of the commandments, the One whom God loves supremely.
- D. So, we do what God requires of us
 - 1. By looking to the Lord Jesus Christ,
 - a. receiving his obedience for ourselves
 - b. sharing in God’s love for him
 - 2. By continuing to do God’s commandments, realizing that it really is Christ himself who is at work in us to do his will (cf. Phil 2:13).

—In short, we keep trusting Jesus and we keep obeying God.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) How ought we to do the commandments of God? (2) How did the Lord Jesus fulfil the Law of God for us? (3) How does the Lord Jesus continue to fulfil God’s Law in us today? (4) How does knowing that Jesus fulfilled God’s Law for you make you zealous to obey God?