

GOD IS KEEPING HIS PROMISES BY SOVEREIGN POWER Exodus 6:28—7:7

Please review this week's catechism question.

INTRODUCTION

Have you ever felt that God commands you to do something that is impossible for you to do? If yes, what command seems impossible to you?

The greatest commandment, according to Jesus, is to love God with all your heart, mind, soul and strength. What makes this an impossible command? Consider, what does it mean to love something or someone? (Example: what would it mean for someone to say, "I love golf," or "I love painting?")

Think with me of what it means when someone says "I love fishing." Here is a person who is happiest when they are fishing. There is bumper sticker on their truck that says, "I'd rather be fishing." The thought of fishing fills them with joy and anticipation. When they are not fishing they are full of yearning to go fishing. They organize their life around opportunities to fish. They get up early in the morning to go fishing. They endure all manner of bad weather in order to fish. Neither heat, nor cold, nor snow, nor rain will keep them from fishing. They love to hang out with others who love to fish and share fishing stories. They love to read about fishing and to learn about fishing from those more experienced at fishing. When they can't fish, they watch TV shows about fishing. They spend money, lots of it, on fishing. They buy boats and poles and sonar and ice augers and cottages on lakes. They plan fishing vacations that take them away from all the comforts of home and cost more money. They do not consider any of these "costs" to be burdensome but they delight in the fishing so much that they will do anything to enjoy what they love.

This is exactly what we are commanded by God to do in relation to him. We are to be full of delight in God at all times. We are to plan our days around being with God. We are to be most happy when we are "with" God. We are to long for and desire above all other things to enjoy his presence. Those who love God arrange their lives to be with him as much as possible. They love to read the Bible, to pray, to go to church and to talk with others who love God. For a person who loves God, missing church is like missing out on a long planned for fishing trip. They will give anything in exchange for

knowing God better and enjoying him more. They love to give away money in order to know God better. The "costs" of knowing God are not burdensome because the joy they have in God far outweighs the cost. These costs seem as nothing to them. Now, if you think that you, on your own, are able to have this kind of delight in God accompanied by a lifestyle that shows forth this delight, you are sadly out of touch with who you really are. By nature we are all enemies of God and even after we've been given new hearts we daily feel the remaining effects of sin in our lives pulling us away from loving God. Loving God is our highest duty and it is plainly something that is impossible for us to do on our own.

Moses, at the end of chapter 6, knows what all of us need to know. He cannot do what God wants him to do. He has, as he literally says in v. 30, "uncircumcised lips." This is an admission that he has no power to do what God commands. It's not only that he has no ability to do what God tells him to do but he has no right to expect any help from God. That was the point of the genealogy. There is nothing in him or any of his ancestors that obligates God to have favor on him and help him.

In v. 30 he asks the question that everyone who knows what God wants them to do asks. In his case God has told him to go talk to Pharaoh and so Moses asks, "How will Pharaoh listen to me?" In our case, God wants us to ask, "How will I ever be able to love God? How will I ever love my neighbor as myself? How will I ever believe that giving money away is a surer way to be happy than in buying new clothes or a new car or a new computer?" As we've seen in previous weeks, God is the one who has put Moses in this position. God is working to put you and I in the same situation. Until you are where Moses is at in v. 30, you will never be where Moses is at in v. 6. Here is another paradox of our life with God, until we know that we have no ability to do God's will we will never be able to do God's will. We are going to see how it is that God enables a person who cannot do his will to do his will.

STUDY

1. What's God's first answer to Moses admission that he cannot do what God wants him to do?

Verse 1 is another of those amazing verses in the Bible. It's more amazing in the original than in most of the English translations. God literally says to Moses, "I appoint you God to Pharaoh." He doesn't say, "like God". He says, "I appoint you God to Pharaoh." Pharaoh is the most powerful man

on earth at this time in world history. The only being greater than Pharaoh is Yahweh, himself. Yahweh, the Creator, Ruler and Sustainer of this world and all the peoples who live in this world appoints Moses God to Pharaoh. He places him above Pharaoh. Not only does he make Moses God to Pharaoh but he places him in authority over his older brother Aaron, the future high priest of Israel. Moses is God to the pagan king and to the chosen people. He is in charge, not Pharaoh. He has ultimate authority and power, not Pharaoh, not his older brother the high priest of God. This authority is clearly a delegated authority, not based upon Moses' qualifications. In other words, Moses does not have this authority by right or by his own effort. God makes this clear when he says, "I appoint you God" and "...everything I tell you, you will tell to Aaron, who will then tell Pharaoh." Yahweh, who holds all the authority in the universe gives his authority to Moses so that Moses can do his will.

2. Moses represents Christ in many ways. How do the following verses show that God, just as he did with Moses, has given Jesus authority to do his will?

- Luke 4:16-21: *God sent the Holy Spirit to enable Jesus to preach good news to the poor, proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind. In short God gave Jesus authority to do his will of salvation, just like he did with Moses.*
- Eph. 1:19-23 *God raised Jesus from the dead and placed him far above every earthly power and made him head over everything for the sake of the church. Christ rules over all powers in order to build and perfect his church.*
- 1 Cor. 15:20-28 *The Lord Christ is raised from the dead and is seated at God's right hand waiting for the final day when he will come and destroy all of God's enemies. God has exalted Christ to his right hand in order that he will one day vanquish all of God's enemies.*

3. What is true of us because we belong to Christ according to each of these passages?

- Luke 10:19: *We have authority over Satan and all his demons and powers. Satan is under our control.*
- Romans 6:1-14 *We are delivered from the power of sin. Sin is not our master. We rule over sin, it does not rule over us.*

- 1 John 3:8, 4:1-4 & 5:18: *Christ has destroyed the power of the devil which is his power to lead us into sin and error. We are no longer deceived by false spirits teaching false doctrine. We are no longer under the control of sin.*

4. What is the reason God made Moses God to Pharaoh and given us authority over Satan and sin?

The authority we have been given is for the purpose of doing God's will. Moses was made God to Pharaoh in order to deliver Israel out of bondage. Christ is given authority to deliver us out of our bondage to sin and death. We share in his authority for the purpose of doing his will. We have power, in Christ, by faith to overcome all the power of the enemy that is marshaled against us to keep us from doing God's will which is to love God and people. God has made us partakers in the authority of Jesus so that we can love God and others.

5. What difference is it to make in our lives that we have been given authority over the powers of this world in Christ?

By virtue of our union with Christ we share in Christ's authority over the powers of this world. We cannot be harmed in any way that matters. Additionally, we have the authority we need to do what God wants us to do. The enemies of God cannot stop us from doing the will of God. There is no authority on this earth that can prevent us from doing what God wants. Nothing can successfully resist us when we are doing God's will. Now let me be quick to say that doesn't mean you will not suffer in this life. Jesus warned his disciples that some of them, as they did his will, would be killed but "not a hair on their head would perish." Satan and sin may rage against us and resist for a time but eventually we will overcome because nothing can successfully resist our doing God's will. We have been made partakers of the divine nature by God's grace and so should expect that the enemies of God would obey us.

6. What are some ways you have experienced authority over the powers of this world?

God enables us to do his impossible to do will by giving us his authority.

7. What is strange about v. 3 in light of v. 2?

God has made it clear that Moses is in charge and Pharaoh is going to obey him eventually but in the meantime, God himself is going to harden Pharaoh's heart so that he will not listen to what Moses has to say. Verses 2 & 3 sound like God is schizophrenic. He tells Pharaoh, through Moses and Aaron, to let Israel go but he hardens Pharaoh's heart so that he won't listen. It sounds like God is working against himself.

8. What problems does this language give you? How do you resolve this apparent contradiction (Pharaoh is guilty of sin and is punished for it when he refuses to listen to Moses and yet he doesn't listen because God hardens his heart.)?

The way that the Bible handles the relationship between God's will and human will is completely different from how human reason would solve the "problem." Human reasoning concludes that if God hardens Pharaoh's heart then Pharaoh isn't truly free and can't be held accountable. Therefore, many people seek to explain away these verses by denying they say what they plainly say. Human reason would say, either humans are completely free and this verse cannot mean what it says or humans are mere automations with no real choices. However, that is not how the Bible presents the facts. God is sovereign, even over human choice. He hardens Pharaoh's heart so that Pharaoh will not listen to Moses telling him to let Israel go. And, Pharaoh's not listening is a real choice and he will be justly punished for not listening. He chooses to madly refuse God's clear word and brings enormous suffering to himself and his people. Yet his choice to not listen is exactly what God wants. Do not be deceived by those who deny that God is sovereign over human choice by arguing that if he is then people have no real choices. That is not what the Bible teaches, even though that line of thought appears logical. One of the reasons you know that this book is God's word is that the way it resolves these highly complex issues is not the way human reason solves things. We make real choices with real consequences and we will be held accountable and yet God is ultimately in control of those choices.

9. According to vv. 3-5 why does God harden Pharaoh's heart so that he will not listen to Moses when he tells him to let Israel go?

He hardens Pharaoh's heart so that he can multiply his signs and wonders in the land of Egypt. He will not listen so that he can lay his hand on Egypt and bring out Israel with mighty acts of judgment. He does all this so that the Egyptians will know that he is the Lord. The final, ultimate reason that God

is going to do the miracles to deliver Israel from Egypt is so that the Egyptians will know that he is Yahweh.

10. Here, as earlier (6:7), God says the ultimate reason he is saving Israel is so that men will know he is Yahweh. How does it strike you that God does all that he does in order to make himself known; or, as Jonathon Edwards has said, "God does all things for the glory of his own name?"

Most people when they hear that God does all that he does for the glory of his own name, don't think that is very good news. In fact, they presume that God plays by a double standard. If a person spends all of his time and energy seeking to impress others in order to make others think he is the greatest person around, we all know that is wrong. If I told you this morning that the main reason I am a pastor is so that you would think that I was a great person, you would never come back again. Self-promoters are everywhere condemned, even by God himself. Yet this is what God repeatedly says in the Bible. His ultimate goal is to make himself known, to glorify himself.

11. How is it right for God to do what we are forbidden from doing, seeking the glory of his own name?

The reason it is wrong for a human being to seek his own glory is because we are not glorious. We are creatures, not Creators. We exist to image forth the glory of God, not our own glory. A human promoting himself is like the chauffeur of the presidential limousine in a parade getting out and standing on top of the limousine and waving and acting as if all the applause and military salutes and the band playing is for him. What would happen to him if he were to pull the President out of the back seat, put him in the driver's seat, and then take his place in the back seat? It would be wrong for the chauffeur to act as though he is worthy of the same treatment as the President. The reason it is right for God to seek his own glory is because he alone is worthy of it. If God preferred someone above himself, he would be an idolater.

12. Why is it good news that God is doing all things for the glory of his own name?

The reason it is a good thing for God to seek his own glory is that it would be very bad for us if God had no interest in his glory being known. If God were indifferent as to whether or not we humans knew him, then he would have no reason to save anyone. If God were not committed to showing forth the glory

of his power and mercy and love, then what possible reason would he have for being kind to wicked rebels like us? We've done nothing except disobey him and so deserve his wrath. If he didn't care if anyone knew his glorious love, then why would he care to save? If God were not motivated to love us out of a desire to glorify his love, then what possible reason would he have to love us? He doesn't love us because we are valuable because we are not. We are rebels. All we have ever done is give God reasons to hate us and destroy us.

13. Why does God want Moses (and us) to know this?

He wants Moses to know that even the opposition of Pharaoh, even his sinful, willful rebellion against God's own command is God's will. Pharaoh's resistance is futile. God has willed his resistance for a purpose. God tells Moses and he tells us as we contemplate doing his impossible will that we should rest assured that as we do his will, no matter what happens to us, he is in control. He is ruling over all the evil in the world and working out all things so that all of humanity knows that he alone is Lord. There is no need for fear. We need not lose heart. No matter what is happening, no matter how bad things seem to be, God is at work making sure that the entire universe knows that he is the Creator, Ruler and Sustainer of all things. I can take risks. I can seek to do impossible things because I cannot be harmed. God will make sure that all things work out for my eternal welfare because he is committed to displaying his glorious power and love in my salvation.

14. How confident are you that God is in control of everything that is happening to you or will happen to you? Why?

15. Have you found this knowledge a motive to take greater risks for God? Why or why not?

God enables us to do his impossible to do will by giving us his assurance.

16. What effect does this word from God have upon Moses and Aaron, according to v. 6? Why is this surprising?

Moses and Adam do everything God tells them to do. They obey God. At the end chapter 6 Moses is completely disheartened and unbelieving. He says he cannot do what God wants him to do and now he is doing everything that God has told him to do.

17. Why does Moses add v. 7, informing us of his age? In other words how did this obedience not happen? See v. 7, 6:30 and 6:13-27.

The obedience of Moses and Aaron is not due to youthful idealism and strength. These are old men and they are going to accomplish amazing things. Old men are not those who normally make a mark on the world. The U.S. military is not out recruiting eighty year olds for their special forces. Eighty year olds are writing their memoirs or sitting on the porch in a rocking chair, not rescuing nations from slavery. The obedience of Moses and Aaron cannot be explained by any human strength but has come from God himself. He has overcome all resistance in Moses and Aaron and he has given them the strength, the ability to carry out his will, in spite of the fact that they are very old, weak and sinful men.

18. Just as God hardens Pharaoh's heart and Pharaoh hardens his own heart, so God enables Moses and Aaron to do his will and they do his will. What must they believe in order to do what they did?

He is sunk in unbelief in v. 28 and he is full of faith in God's promises in v. 6. This is the means God uses to give his ability to his people. We appropriate the power of God by believing the promises of God. It is the nature of faith to obey and obedience always arises out of faith in God's promises. Moses believes that God will do as he has said and that what God is promising is better than going back to Midian and living out his life as a shepherd.

19. What is one command that God wants you to obey that you cannot obey?

20. What promise are you trusting in order to obey this command?

21. What action are you taking to obey?

22. Who will get the credit (the thanks) when you obey?

God enables us to do his impossible to do will by giving us his ability.