

Such an heart

O that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children for ever!

Deuteronomy 5:29

It is a rare instance in our English translation to see an exclamation point, as we understand that the original ancient Hebrew did not have such punctuation. We are told that translators will add such punctuation when they can discern an emphasis in the language structure or particular verbs in the original. In this case, it is even more remarkable that the exclamation applies to the response of the LORD to Moses, who in this instance is recounting what the LORD said to him regarding the people's response to the ten commandments when they were originally given.

In the reiteration of the commandments, earlier in this chapter, to the children of those who had died in the wilderness, Moses had also recounted that the previous generation had requested to not hear the voice of the LORD anymore, lest they die, and wanted Moses to pass on the remaining laws from God, which they said they would hear and do (v. 27). The exclamation in our text, in response to the people, reveals the overwhelming love and care of God for the welfare of His people, and the relation of His commandments to that love. The implication of this whole statement also makes clear that the LORD knew that they had not "such an heart."

So we see, especially in Paul's epistles to the Romans and Galatians, that God had also already ordained that salvation would be by grace through faith, since mankind would not keep the law. But let us not misrepresent the truth exclaimed in our text and supported in those and other epistles. The commandments of God were given for our good, to bring wellness to our lives. So with the law and commandments being holy, just, and good, they can bring blessing to our lives (cf. Romans 7:10-12; Galatians 3:21-22); but they cannot bring salvation, because we cannot keep them as required. Therefore, in our New Testament epistles we have plenty of exhortations and admonitions to walk in the Spirit (e.g., Romans 8:1, 12:1; Galatians 5:16ff), who puts within our hearts not only the desire but the power to live according to the ways of the LORD.

Let us therefore rejoice with the apostle, and thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord for a renewed mind that serves the law of God (Romans 7:25), motivated by faith that works by love (Galatians 5:6-7). Then let us pray with the psalmist: *Give me understanding, and I shall keep thy law; yea, I shall observe it with my whole heart. Make me to go in the path of thy commandments; for therein do I delight. (Psalm 119:34-35)*