

God's people walk in God's ways on God's mission

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Date: 03 October 2021

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[0 : 0 0] Christ. Now, can you turn with me in your Bibles to Deuteronomy? We're going to look at a couple of different passages in Deuteronomy, beginning at chapter 4. As we continue to think about the mission of the people of God, tonight we will think about the fact that God's people walk in God's ways on God's mission. So, Deuteronomy chapter 4, verses 1 to 9.

Now, Israel, hear the decrees and laws I am about to teach you. Follow them so that you may live and may go in and take possession of the land that the Lord, the God of your ancestors, is giving you.

Do not add to what I command you and do not subtract from it, but keep the commands of the Lord your God that I give you. You saw with your own eyes what the Lord did at Baal Peor.

The Lord your God destroyed from among you everyone who followed the Baal of Peor, but all of you who held fast to the Lord your God are still alive today. See, I have taught you decrees and laws as the Lord my God commanded me, so that you may follow them in the land you are entering to take possession of it. Observe them carefully, for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations who will hear about all these decrees and say, surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the Lord our God is near us whenever we pray to him? And what other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws I am setting before you today?

Only be careful and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them fade from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them. And then in Deuteronomy chapter 10 and from verse 12 to verse 19.

[2 : 1 5] Deuteronomy 10 at verse 12. And now Israel, what does the Lord your God ask of you but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in obedience to him, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to observe the Lord's commands and decrees that I am giving you today for your own good. To the Lord your God belong the heavens, even the highest heavens, the earth and everything in it. Yet the Lord set his affection on your ancestors and loved them, and he chose you, their descendants above all the nations as it is today. Circumcise your hearts therefore, and do not be stiff-necked any longer, for the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes. He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow and loves the foreigner residing among you, giving them food and clothing. And you are to love those who are foreigners, for you yourselves were foreigners in Egypt. So the mission of God's people is to walk in God's ways. Now, why does that subject matter? Why does it matter that God's people walk in God's ways? Well, let's begin to think about that with perhaps a surprising voice, with the voice of Gandhi. So in 1927, Gandhi was interviewed, and he famously said,

I like your Christ, but not your Christians. And as he went on to explain the problem that he had, as he saw, and bear in mind, sort of colonial background, not everything that was done in the name of Christianity really reflected Jesus. Of course, that's true. But as he looked at his view of Christianity, he saw Christians seeking after wealth at the expense of others. He saw the West exploiting foreigners for personal gain. He thought Christians were chasing prosperity over the life, liberty, and happiness of others. And he said, the Christians are the most warlike people.

And of course, we recognize that he's responding to the West. And so there's misunderstandings bound up with that. But it helps us to think about perceptions. Closer to home, perhaps you've been in discussion with someone, and they've spoken to you about, you know, Christians being hypocrites. And how can we associate with a church when there's so many hypocrites there? Or perhaps you've had those awkward conversations with someone who's not a Christian and wonders, how is it that Christians have such a capacity to fight with each other? And why are there so many divisions within the church? Or maybe it becomes even more pointed than that. And somebody who is a Christian is recognized as having some kind of immoral practice, immoral practice, perhaps having shady business dealings, and that's enough to turn someone off from Christianity. I imagine I'm not alone in having had those conversations with people.

What becomes clear is that there is a connection between our Christian lives, the life of the church, and the response of others. So we began thinking about how that can become a negative.

Perhaps the world sees the worst about us and decides to have nothing to do with Jesus on that account. But you know, that was intended from the beginning to be a positive. If you were here last week, you might remember Abraham. We began thinking about Abraham. Abraham who was called by grace to live in faith and obedience. And he was given that wonderful promise that he would receive blessing and he would in turn be a blessing to the nations. And one of the things that God said to Abraham is that he was to teach his children to walk in God's ways also, so they'd be living among pagan people, idol worshippers, in such a way as to show what difference faith in God would make. God saved by grace people are to walk in his ways with joyful obedience so that others will be blessed and indeed that others might become followers.

[7 : 04] Perhaps as we think about that expression, walk in God's ways, we can use some pictures to help us to think about this. We talk, don't we, about people following in the footsteps of someone else. So, children follow in the footsteps of their parents perhaps. Or we have a mentor or someone we look up to and we want to follow in their footsteps. So, there's the idea of imitation. Christians are to imitate the character and the actions of God. Of course, we will never do that perfectly, but yet we aspire to that. So, we walk in God's ways in that sense. But also walking in God's ways, we can perhaps think about having a route map that gives us directions so that we might avoid dead ends, perhaps that we might avoid dangers. If you've ever arrived at a big city at night, you perhaps realize the value of knowing here are the neighborhoods that you really want to avoid. Here is the safe route to go to your destination. God's people are to walk in God's ways so that we have that right path, but so we might also lead others, family, friends, others, to walk in God's ways too. That's very much where Deuteronomy places us.

Deuteronomy as a book connects three things over and over again. It connects the idea of election, that God has chosen his people. It connects the idea of election with ethics. God's chosen people are to live in a certain way, namely God's way. And it also connects election and ethics with mission, that God's people walk in God's ways so that the nations might see and take notice.

And in turn become worshipers of the one true God. To remind us of the context for Deuteronomy, this is Moses speaking to God's people. They're about, sorry, they're about to enter the promised land. And Moses, who's not going to get to the promised land, gives them extended guidance for life in the land. And the big idea, God has chosen you. So when you get to the land, walk in God's ways so that God's blessing might come to you and it might flow from you to others. So our two texts tonight will help us to see that. But we'll stick first in Deuteronomy 10 to just see these three principles laid out really briefly. First of all, election. Sorry, I'm going to be very croaky this evening. Election.

God's choice of his people. Verse 14 and 15, we see that. Who is the Lord? Verse 14, he is the God to whom belong the heavens, even the highest heavens, the earth, and everything in it. So God is king over creation, king over all people. But what has this God done? Yet the Lord set his affection on your ancestors and loved them, and he chose you, their descendants above all nations. Set his affection on them, loved them, chosen them from among the nations. And one of the things that Moses understands is that the people might think, hey, of course, well, he chose us. We're wonderful. And so he reminds them why.

Chapter 7, verse 7, the Lord did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest. So why did he choose them? It was because the Lord loved you and kept the oath he swore to your ancestors that he brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery. Election. He loved them because he chose to love them.

[10 : 54] God loves the church because he chooses to love the church. Gracious love shown to the unlovely. God shows grace, and his people are to gratefully respond to that wonderful calling in how we live. So verse 14 and 15 talk about election. What comes before, verse 12 and 13, speak to us of ethics of God's ways. You read the book of Deuteronomy, you discover there are so many verbs used to speak about obedience. It's like one couldn't capture it well enough. So there's this whole range of words. So we have them here. There's five in our section.

What does the Lord ask? That they would fear the Lord. They would walk in obedience to him. They would love him. They would serve the Lord with their heart and soul, and they would observe the Lord's commands to take them together. What's this point to? It points the need for total allegiance in all of life to their creator, redeemer, God. It speaks to the direction of the life of God's people.

It speaks to the delight that should be in the hearts of God's people. It speaks to the devotion and loyalty to God and no other that should be at the heart of God's people.

So before he gets into the details of what this might look like, first he wants to go to Hut. Now, how do God's people obey? Here's a reminder that we're not given a tick box exercise.

It's one of the things that Jesus does in the Sermon on the Mount, isn't it? He goes deeper in explaining how important the heart and the motive and the attitude is. This isn't legalism. This isn't some kind of superficial obedience. This is obeying out of love and a commitment to the God who has saved. Why obey? Back to verse 14. Because he is the Lord.

[13 : 13] He is the King of creation. He is the Lord over all of life. Again, you look at Deuteronomy. You discover every part of life matters to God. We find the laws in these first five books of the Bible about how they do their farming and law court practices and life in the family and life in the marketplace and life on the battlefield. All of life is to be lived under God, lived following God's ways.

We don't compartmentalize our lives of faith. Well, today's Sunday, so this is God's day, so we'll live God's way. But the rest of our week at school or uni or in the workplace, it's kind of different. It's not like that. God's law, our relationship with God is to govern all of life. And bear in mind the context as well. They're going to be surrounded by nations who worship false gods. They're going to be surrounded by idolatry and unbelief. And so they are called to choose to live differently for God, recognizing, verse 13. All these commands and decrees are for your own good. There is a goodness in obedience.

I'm going to borrow from the wisdom of the rooted Bible study for a moment. I wasn't there when the women were meeting, but I'm going to borrow their wisdom. In the realm of motivation to exercise, some of us will get this. There is a massive difference between I should exercise and I want to exercise. One, that duty that you're going to really struggle to drag yourself up, but want to, there's a desire there. You're much more inclined to get there. True heart obedience goes beyond, well, I know I should obey King Jesus, to I want to obey King Jesus, because it's for my good, it's for my family's good, it's for my community's good, if we are living God's way.

Let's think about this a little bit deeper before moving on. So I may have mentioned to some of you anyway, that I'm reading a book in our presbytery. We have a book group where some of us meet and chat about different books, and we're reading a book called Mere Evangelism, which is a really helpful distilling of some of C.S. Lewis's teaching. And Randy Newman, who writes this book, he talks about a thing, I've never heard this phrase before, but he discusses cut flower culture. So you think about a bouquet of flowers, if you like that kind of thing, you can admire the beauty of those flowers, but all the while they're in that vase, we know they're cut off from their roots. So we're enjoying their beauty, but they're in the process of dying, because they have no roots. And Newman went on to say that for society in the West, or post-Christian society, we are by and large cut off from the roots of biblical morality. We are not rooted as a society like we used to be to Christian morality, but still, and we can see this, people still want the fruit of that morality. So one way that we can see this, sort of negatively, we will say at the one hand, people will say, because we're cut off from it's not that biblical root. Well, everyone is free to create their own morality, you know? We can all decide what's right and wrong. And everybody thinks that sounds fine until we perceive a moral failure, and then people can be really judgmental. And so we understand, no, everybody has an idea of justice and right and wrong, but because we've become, sort of, separated from the roots, from God who gives us ultimate right and wrong, people are really struggling to know where it really comes from.

So one of the positive things for us as Christians, and when we think about our ethics, how we live, our truth, what we believe, is that we can show to people, yeah, well, we have that common ground. We also believe in justice, but we have the chance to reconnect people to the Bible and to the God of the Bible, to the Creator God, in this case, who is righteous and just.

[18:09] And we can lovingly look to direct people to where their longings will be met. You want justice? But all the while acknowledging that nobody is perfect, well, we can point to Jesus. And the forgiveness that He provides, and the justice that He took in our place, and the justice of God, who promises in the end to right all wrongs. And so we have an opportunity with our ethics, what we believe, to try and make contact points with folks who have those same longings, but just don't realize how to connect them to the Bible.

But let's move from ethics, to think about how ethics and mission connect. Because what Deuteronomy does is it says that when God's chosen people live God's way, then God's mission happens.

And so here in chapter 10, here's one aspect that we can identify. We are to live God's way to be a blessing to others. So as we walk in God's ways, as we are looking to imitate Him and to reflect His character, it takes on a particular form. So here in verse 17, we read this description that God gives of Himself. The Lord your God is God of God and Lord of Lords, the great God mighty and awesome.

He shows no partiality and accepts no bribes. He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow and loves the foreigner residing among you. So how does our ethics connect to mission? Well, we pursue justice in Jesus' name. We shall love to the weak and to the foreigner in Jesus' name.

The logic here is given to, verse 19, you are to love those who are foreigners, for you yourselves were foreigners in Egypt. It's a reminder, you've been shown grace. God treated you with kindness when you were a foreigner. Freely you have received, therefore freely give. Love the weak and the foreigner in response to the way God loved you when you were weak and you were foreigners.

[20 : 32] The basic point is that living God's way is both the best way for us personally, but it will also pass on blessing to others. In this case, justice and love and mercy and kindness.

Living God's way also has that attractive, compelling quality to it. Attracting people to the one true God who is revealed in the New Testament in Jesus. So if you turn back to that passage in Deuteronomy 4, and especially verses 5 to 8. So Moses has just said, you're about to go into the land. What you need to do when you get into the land is to observe God's laws. Live God's way. And when that happens, he says people around are going to take notice. People around are going to admire certain things.

First of all, they will admire, verse 6, their wisdom. Observe God's laws and decrees carefully, for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations.

So the way that God's people lived was remarkably to be different. As they pursued the wisdom of God in everyday life and in worship and in marketplace practices and in their homes, it would attract admiration from those who'd never seen anything like it before. Then verse 7. It's a wonderful verse.

What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the Lord our God is near us whenever we pray to him. So as the people of God worship, it draws admiration. There's something unique about this nation Israel. God is present with them. And God listens when his people pray.

[22 : 36] We thought about Elijah and the prophets of Baal and the prophets of Baal dancing around and shouting around and cutting themselves and trying to force their God to answer, but their God's not true, so he does nothing. And Elijah, he quietly prays and fire comes from heaven. Admiration because of a God who is near to us and a God who answers our prayers. I wonder, do we talk about the way God answers our prayers? It's attractive to people. And then verse 8. The ways of God draw admiration. What other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws I'm setting before you today. So we see how our obedience matters. How important it is to the mission of God's people that together and individually and as families we are walking in God's ways. As Jesus put it in the sermon in the mouth, let your light shine so that men might see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven. I want to pull it all together by turning to Acts just for a minute or two. So we began with

Gandhi, a negative example. I like your Christ, but I don't like your Christians. A positive example, Acts chapter 6. Here is a situation where there are some widows who are in need, in need of daily food distribution. And the apostles decide that what needs to be done is that deacons should be appointed in order to make sure that they are being cared for. And in verse 6 and then verse 7, as these deacons are chosen, they presented these men to the apostles who prayed and laid their hands on them. And what happens next? So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith. From the beginning of the church in the New Testament,

God's people were intent on living out God's ways, in this case caring for the poor and the weak. And that led to the mission of God continuing. And it's always been that way.

So we need to pray for ourselves and to think, God has chosen me if he's chosen us. What does that mean for how we're living? We need to connect our election with our ethic.

And to do that for the sake of our mission. Conscious that there is a world around who doesn't know anything about God perhaps, or Jesus perhaps. Who wants certain things and we share those values, but they don't know how to connect it with the God of the Bible.

[25 : 46] And very practically as we've been thinking about this, God said to the people of Israel to care for the foreigners, to care for the weak and the needy. And haven't we heard of extreme need?

So we have an opportunity to pray for the church in Burma, to give for the church in Burma. Tomorrow at lunchtime, our connect group will start. People who are most likely new to the city, wanting to practice their English, gain some confidence, but quite possibly to find friendship.

We have a chance to pray for that group and to love them with the hope that we can share Jesus with them. And every day we can have that sense of purpose. My day-to-day acts matter. The love and service, the duty and the care that I offer in Jesus' name matters for his kingdom and for his glory.

So let's pray as we close. Father God, we are thankful for your character. And we pray that you would, by your Spirit, help us to imitate you, to be imitators of the Lord Jesus Christ. We pray that with the help of the Spirit, our light would shine so that others might see our good deeds and glorify you as they understand that what motivates us is the love that we have received, the love that we then want to pass on. Again, we pray that you would give us a heart for the church in Burma to give our prayers and to give our money as we are able. We pray again for the Connect ministry as it begins, asking that you would cause deep friendships to flourish and that those who are spiritually seeking after you would find you and be compelled towards you as they see the love of your people.

Lord, we recognize that people can be so quick to give up on Jesus because of Christians and perceptions of the church. Lord, please keep us from being a barrier and instead help us to be a bridge between people and their Lord and Savior. Amen.

[28 : 30] Now we're going to close with a hymn which helps us to reflect on what we've just been talking about, oh how good it is, unity and mission belonging together. So let's stand to sing.

Oh how good it is when the family of God dwell together in spirit, in faith and unity, where the bonds of peace, of acceptance and love are the fruits of His presence here upon us.

So with one voice we'll say to the Lord, and with one heart we'll lift out His word.

Till the whole world sees the Redeemer has come, for He dwells in the presence of His people.

O how good it is on this journey we share, to rejoice with the happy and weep with those who mourn, for the weak find strength, the afflicted find grace, when we offer the blessing of belonging.

[30 : 32] So with one voice we'll say to the Lord, and with one heart we'll lift out His word.

Till the whole world sees the Redeemer has come, for He dwells in the presence of His people.

Till the whole world sees the Redeemer has come, for He dwells in the presence of His people. Oh how good it is to embrace His command, to prefer one another, forgive as He forgives when we live as one.

We all share in the love of the Son, with the Father, and the Spirit. So with one voice we'll say to the Lord, and with one heart we'll lift out His word.

Till the whole world sees the Redeemer has come, for He dwells in the presence of His people.

[32 : 01] Till the whole world sees the Redeemer. Till the whole world sees the Redeemer has come, for He dwells in the presence of His people.

Lord, our God, for Your glory we pray that people might see the Redeemer in us, that You would cause us to walk according to Your wisdom, that You would give us wholehearted worship, a devoted loyalty to walking in Your ways, so that more and more people around us and around this world might come to worship the God who has loved us and given Himself, given His Son Jesus for us.

And we pray in His name. Amen.