

Deuteronomy 10:12-21 “What the Lord Requires”

Intro. In this text of Scripture Moses is nearing the conclusion of his second address to the nation. Here he asked an important question, “What does the Lord require of you?” He then answers his own question, giving the basic requirements of the covenant between God and His people. This is what Jesus referred to in Mt. 23:23 as “the weightier matters of the law.” Remarkably, he omits any direct reference to sacrifices or other forms of worship,¹ and the prophets who followed Moses put emphasis on the kinds of requirements listed here over sacrifice (1 Sam. 15:22; Amos 5:21-25; Hos. 6:6; Mic. 6:6-8). We would do well to remember that observing the outward rituals of worship is no substitute for the kind of requirements we see here.

Since we are talking about requirements of the Old Covenant, some would say that this text of Scripture is not relevant to believers under the New Covenant of grace. Yet when we examine the basic requirements given here, they certainly apply to believers today. The apostle Paul said in Romans 8:4 that the purpose of the saving work of Christ on our behalf was “that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.” Apart from faith in the saving work of Christ, the new birth, and the indwelling Holy Spirit, no one can keep God’s law. Yet the abiding moral principles of the law should indeed be kept by believers today. The difference is we have the capacity to do so. I hear people today say that Christianity is not about keeping the law, but about a relationship with Christ. Yet a true relationship with Christ should result in obedience to Christ. He said in John 14:15, “If you love me, keep my commandments.” He said in the Great Commission that we are to teach His disciples “to observe all things that I have commanded you” (Mt. 28:19).

So let’s look into this text of Scripture, observed seven basic requirements of the Lord, and see to make proper application to believers today. Now the first is this:

I. GIVE REVERENCE TO GOD

Moses said in v.12 that we are “to fear the Lord your God...” He repeated that command in v.20. This ought to form the one leading emotion in the heart prompting us to walk in all the ways of the Lord.

Moses gives several reasons why we should fear and reverence God. They all boil down to the greatness of God. He says in v.14, “Indeed [or Behold] heaven and the highest heavens belong to the LORD your God, also the earth with all that is in it.” Think of the heavens that God has created. He has created trillions of stars stretched out over the vast reaches of the universe and beyond. However far one may travel in space, it all belongs to the Lord. Most of the stars are far greater in power than the sun of our solar system. How can you explain the existence of such powerful sources of energy? Surely so great an effect must have a greater cause. God is even greater in power and should be revered.

¹ Though such could be included in the requirement of v.20 to “serve” (*abad*) the Lord.

Then as Creator, the Lord obviously rules over all things. Such a great sovereign ruler must be revered. So Moses says in v.17, “For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords,² the great God, mighty³ and awesome....” When he says that our God is the “God of gods,” he is not affirming the existence of other gods, unless he is referring to lesser spirit beings such as the angels, including fallen angels. He is mainly affirming the sovereignty of God over all authorities, whether in the heavens or on earth. He then reinforces the notion of the Lord’s supremacy with a triad of descriptors: He is “great,” “mighty,” and “awesome.” I want to focus on the Hebrew word translated “awesome,” which actually refers to one who causes or inspires reverence or godly fear because of His greatness and power. In fact, in the last of v.21, he reminds them of the fact that He “has done for you these great and awesome things which are eyes have seen.” The same Hebrew word is once again translated “awesome.” Recall the 10 plagues that brought Egypt to their knees. Recall the parting of the Red Sea and the destruction of the Egyptian army that followed. Recall how the mountain quaked at His presence in Sinai.

Then Moses gives one example of the power of God to fulfill His promises in v.22, “Your fathers went down to Egypt with seventy persons, and now the LORD your God has made you as the stars of heaven in multitude.” Normally, the harsh conditions and stress of slavery would have caused the Israelites to have little population growth. Yet through the blessing of God they continued to explode in population growth in spite of slavery. That was attributed to the great power of God, who was thereby fulfilling His promises to the patriarchs (Gen. 15:5; 22:17).

So the starting place in a healthy relationship to God is reverence. Just about everything else flows from a recognition of the absolute greatness of God and the fact that he should be feared and referenced. Do you fear and reverence God? The fear of God leads to repentance of sin, a fundamental requirement of a right relationship with God. Prov. 8:13 says, “The fear of the LORD is to hate evil....” Such fear and awe of God also motivates one to worship God and obey God.

I am appalled at the lack of fear and reverence for God that I see today. Rom. 3:18 says, “There is no fear of God before their eyes” (cf. Ps. 36:1). People disobey even the most basic commands of God without fear of God. They irreverently take His name in vain. Even in times of worship I see manifestations of a lack of reverence for God. Yet if we are going to have a right relationship with God and live for Him, we must have a reverent attitude toward God.

The second requirement stated in v.12 is:

II. LOVE GOD

Though stated third, I will list this command second, for the other requirements flow from both reverence and love for God. Also, the Bible identifies love for God as the greatest commandment, and Moses repeats this requirement in his concluding summary in 11:1. It is yet another restatement of the great commandment found in 6:5, “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.”

Moses gives a powerful reason why the Israelites should love God. It is because he has shown His love for them. He says in v.15, “The LORD delighted only in your fathers, to love them; and He chose their descendants after them, you above all peoples, as it is this day.” (Cf. 7:7-8).

² Compare Rev. 17:14 and 19:16, where this title is transferred to the exalted Son of God.

³ This is the very title that was given to our blessed Lord and Savior, Isa 9:6.

This theme is carried over to the New Testament, for we Christians are also declared to be elect of God. So we are to love God in return for His love. Do you truly love God? Have you expressed your love for God in word, in song, in service, in gifts, and in other ways?

Someone (J. Gerhard) has well pointed out that the fear of God should be united with the love of God; for love without fear makes men remiss, and fear without love makes them servile and desperate.

Another basic requirement stated in v.12 is:

III. WALK IN ALL HIS WAYS

Here the life that we are to live is compared a particular pathway or road we are to follow. Yes, God has a will for your life. We are to walk in God's ways, not our own, nor in the ways of the world. You are to walk with Him and not veer to the right or to the left. Jesus said in Mt. 7:14, "...narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it." Notice also that we are to walk in "all" His ways. The Lord expects complete obedience, not partial obedience. Don't bargain with God suggesting that if you obey him 80% of the time He should accept 20% disobedience.

Here I want to add a related requirement stated in v.13, "and to keep the commandments of the LORD and His statutes which I command you today for your good?" This is repeated in his concluding summary in 11:1. Yes, God has outlined His will for our lives by giving commandments we are to obey.

Why should you walk in the ways of the Lord and keep His commandments? As stated in the last of v.13, it is "for your good." If you keep the commandments of the Lord you will avoid suffering the consequences of sin and you will enjoy the blessing of God. Obedience to God is truly for your own good.

So I call upon you to walk in all the ways of the Lord and keep His commandments.
Another basic requirement stated in the last of v.12 is:

IV. SERVE THE LORD

This requirement is repeated in v.20. One way we show our love to God or anyone else is to serve them. And notice that we are to serve the Lord "with all your heart and with all your soul." We are to serve the Lord diligently, and not halfheartedly.

Even so, we are to serve God. We are to work for God. In 1 Thess. 1:9 Paul said that those believers "turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God." Heb. 12:28 says we are to "serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear." (Cf. Heb. 9:14). In Rev. 2:19 Jesus commended a church for their works and service for Him. We, too, are to serve the Lord whole heartedly. Rom. 12:11 says, "not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord." We will continue to serve God in heaven for all eternity (Rev. 7:15; 22:5).

How are we to serve God today? We are to offer the service of worship and praise. We are to serve God through some ministry in the local church. None of our ministries should go lacking of workers. We are to serve God by being witnesses and missionaries for him. Paul says

in Rom. 12:1 that presenting our bodies a living sacrifice “is your reasonable service.” So I ask you, “Are you serving the Lord with all your heart and soul?”

Yet another requirement of the Lord is this:

V. CIRCUMCISE YOUR HEART

Moses says in v.16, “Therefore circumcise the foreskin of your heart, and be stiff-necked no longer.” This is the first time in the Bible that something is said about circumcising the heart.⁴ Yes, as a sign of the covenant, the Israelites were to circumcise the flesh. But that is no substitute for the inward work of circumcising your heart.

What does this mean? It means to cut away anything from our lives that interferes with fulfilling the requirements that we have already talked about. We are to cut away anything that interferes with loving God, obeying God or serving God. It involves an act of repentance. The prophet Jeremiah recalls this Scripture and says in Jer. 4:4, “Circumcise yourselves to the LORD, and take away the foreskins of your hearts ... because of the evil of your doings.” What sins do you need to cut out of your life? But it also involves faith in God to do His part to bring it to pass. In fact, look at what Moses says later in Deut. 30:6, “And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.”⁵ Notice this is a work of God on our behalf. This is even a promised benefit of the new covenant. In Jer. 31:33 God said, “I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts....” So ask God to help you cut out of your life anything that is not pleasing to Him, and anything that interferes with full devotion to Him.

Moses identifies one thing they needed to cut out of their lives, and that is their stubbornness toward God. God had already declared that they were stiff-necked in Deut. 9:6, 13, which gives a picture of stubbornness. So after mentioning the need to circumcise their hearts he said in the last of v.16, “be stiff-necked⁶ no longer.” In other words, they should not persist in their obstinate resistance to God. Instead of stiffening their resistance to the will of God, they should bow their wills to the will of God.

Have you been stubborn about doing your own will and resisting the will of God for your life? If so, it is time to cut it out!

Another requirement of the Lord is this:

VI. BE LIKE GOD

Notice what Moses said beginning in the last of v.17, that God “shows no partiality nor takes a bribe. He administers justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the stranger, giving him food and clothing. Therefore love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.” Here we see that:

A. We Should Be Just in Our Dealings Like God – Moses says of God in the last of v.17

⁴ Though Leviticus 26:41 mentioned the nation’s uncircumcised heart.

⁵ Rom. 2:28-29 says, “For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter....”

⁶ Throughout the Old Testament “stiffnecked” is a metaphor for stubbornness and recalcitrance (cf. Job 9:4; 2 Chr. 30:8; 36:13; Neh. 9:16-17,29; Jer. 7:26; 17:23; 19:15). – Merrill.

that He “shows no partiality nor takes a bribe.” As Lord over all He cannot be enticed or coerced into any kind of partiality through influence peddling. He does not pervert justice by letting the identity and status of the person—whether poor or rich (cf. Lev. 19:15)—affect His dealings with people. His justice is absolutely impartial.

We also should show no partiality or accept bribes. And just as God is just in his dealings with the fatherless and the widow, even so we should be just in our dealings with the poor and defenseless in society. Likewise, James said, “Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble...” (Jas. 1:27).

B. We Should Be Loving Like God - After all, the second greatest command is found in Lev. 19:18, “... you shall love your neighbor as yourself...” Here we see that your “neighbor” includes the stranger, that is, the emigrant who is new to the land. Likewise, Lev. 19:34 says, “The stranger who dwells among you shall be to you as one born among you, and you shall love him as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.” Due to their own previous status as immigrants in the land of Egypt, they are especially bound by this requirement.

We see here that just as God loves the stranger, even so we should show love to the immigrants among us. While it is the government’s job to control who comes into our country, our job as individual Christians is to love the emigrant, regardless of their legal status. Just as God provides food and clothing for the emigrant, even so we should do the same when we come in contact with someone in need. This teaching is reflected in 1 John 3:17, where John says, “But whoever has this world’s goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?” I must take this opportunity to apply this to our World Hunger Offering. We should all support this offering to help the poor and needy through our missionaries at home and around the world. I’m sure some of it is used to help poor immigrants, including refugees.

Finally, Moses says in the last of v.20 that we are to:

VII. HOLD FAST TO GOD

This requirement is repeated by Moses in 11:22 and 13:4, as well as by Joshua (Josh. 22:5; 23:8). This is the language of a faithful covenant relationship. The word translated “hold fast” (*dabaq*) is found in Genesis 2:24 of how husbands and wives are to be joined together in a marriage covenant. Thus, we must hold fast to Him, as One we love and delight in, as One that we are devoted to. Sometimes it carries the meaning of “to cling to,” or “to pursue, follow after.”

So let us never depart from the Lord but instead steadfastly cling to Him and pursue a close relationship with Him.

Conclusion: So can you remember what the Lord requires of you? Here it is once again: Give Reverence To God, Love God, Walk In All His Ways, Serve The Lord, Circumcise Your Heart, Be Like God, and Hold Fast To God.

Now you cannot be saved by fulfilling these requirements as works. The Philippian jailor asked in Acts 16:30, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” I will give the answer expressed by the apostle Paul in Acts 20:21. It requires “repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus

Christ.” It is that simple. Those requirements must be fulfilled first, and then you will have the spiritual capacity to fulfill the other requirements that we have talked about today!

Sources: Daniel I. Block, *The NIV Application Commentary: Deuteronomy* Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012); Adam Clarke, *Adam Clarke’s Bible Commentary* (accessed from *Online Bible*), completed by 1832; Matthew Henry (on *Online Bible*); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [Ver. 5:30] (Ontario: onlinebible.net, 2017); C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978 reprint); Eugene H. Merrill, *New American Commentary: Deuteronomy* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994). Other sources listed in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982). J. Vernon McGee read, but nothing added.

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