

July 15, 2018
Sunday Evening Service
Series: Deuteronomy
Community Baptist Church
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**LOVE THE LORD; KEEP HIS RULES;
CONSIDER HIS DISCIPLINE**
Deuteronomy 11

This chapter feels odd to me. Twenty years ago I would not have sensed any discomfort at all in unpacking the statements Moses made according to this text and making application of those truths to our circumstances. But things have changed in the last twenty years.

Let me illustrate. Not long ago, I had a conversation with a middle-aged lady who had attended church very regularly in the past. However, now she sees no need to be bothered with such old traditions. It was very easy and tempting for me to profile her because everything she said fit into a pattern I have seen over and over in the past couple of decades. There are multitudes of Christians who have “come out of” similar backgrounds who agree. They were typically reared in conservative homes and churches where they were constantly preached at about keeping rules. In fact, they conclude that they were taught that they needed to keep rules so that Jesus would love them. But now they have been enlightened and realize that Jesus does not intend for them to keep rules at all. Rather He just wants them to love Him and be happy. They conclude that Jesus offers unconditional love so you can do or say anything you want and Jesus doesn’t care.

Like many such changes in church life, there is probably some truth to this change in attitude. It is true that some Christian groups slipped into legalism which errantly teaches that the only way for a sinner to be saved is to keep God’s rules, or whatever the church, pastor, parent says is God’s rules. It is also true that pastors can easily put people on a guilt trip for not attending church services faithfully, not giving a “tithe,” and not showing up for work day.

However, while we are throwing out the dirty water of human rules and traditions, we need to be careful not to throw out the essence of what it means to be God’s baby. The kind of people who I attempted to describe above often consider texts like ours from the Old Testament to be just that—old. In other words, it does not apply to modern-day Christians. I guess they assume that somewhere between Malachi and Matthew, God changed. Or maybe, even though Jesus claimed to be co-equal with God the Father, He and God are actually not the same because Jesus never, ever would expect His followers to keep rules.

That conclusion might be hard to defend in light of Jesus’s clear proposal: “*If you love me, you will keep my commandments*” (John 14:15). Or “*Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him*” (John 14:21). Also remember this principle: The Gospels and Acts repeatedly encourage people to believe in Jesus. Romans tells us how to believe in Jesus. The Epistles (1 Corinthians – Jude) tell us what the life of one who believes in Jesus looks like. More precisely, the hundreds of imperatives (commands) found in the “letters” describe the life of faith.

“No,” God hasn’t changed. And “No,” the New Testament really does not teach a message that conflicts with the Old Testament message. Sinners are still saved by grace through faith in God’s Word. And because we love the God who saves us by grace, we desire to please Him by obeying His rules. That is actually a very commonsensical conclusion that we see applied in many relationships in life. It is the standard teaching Moses gave to the second generation of Israelites who were about to enter the Promised Land. Moses gave good advice to us also.

God’s Formula For Maintaining a Relationship (vv.1-7).

Our relationship with our LORD is built on love. Therefore, we come face to face with this command at the outset of our text, *You shall therefore love the LORD your God (v.1a)*. “Love God” is not a recommendation or suggestion. It is a command. Notice that it is a command involving a relationship between you and YOUR God. The

LORD is your God, which was a great reminder to the Israelites that they are not God. Neither are you or I God.

This is a critical principle because the command to love God undergirds, is foundational, to every aspect of our relationship with God. If we do not love God, service to Him becomes drudgery and duty. If we do not love God, keeping His commands becomes legalistic, meaningless tradition and self-righteous works.

God's people have multiplied reasons to love Him as is revealed by the word "therefore." Obviously, this word forces us backward in the immediate context where we learned, *He is your praise. He is your God, who has done for you these great and terrifying things that your eyes have seen. Your fathers went down to Egypt seventy persons, and now the LORD your God has made you as numerous as the stars of heaven (Deuteronomy 10:21-22)*. Is God's choice and blessing sufficient reason to love Him?

Or we can go even deeper into the context of chapter ten and remember that God gave His commands so the people could know Him (10:4). God chose the Levites particularly to illustrate how the people should serve Him (10:8-9). God sent Moses to lead the people into the Promised Land instead of destroying them for worshiping the manmade god (10:10-11). God chose these people above all the people on earth (10:15). God is the One almighty, majestic God above all others (10:17).

Or we can go even further in the context and rehearse the whole history of God's relationship with these chosen people (Deut. 1:1-10:22). All of this brings us to the correct conclusion that we must fear Him, serve Him, and keep His commands (10:12).

Now that we know we must love God first and foremost, we can learn with Israel that our LORD expects us to keep His rules. Once we decide to agree with God and attempt to keep His rules, we will wonder what we are supposed to keep. Moses expressed that with the words *keep his charge, his statutes, his rules, and his commandments (v. 1b)*. Here are four words that map out our manual for living out our love for God, "charge, statutes, rules, and commands."

A charge is an obligation, commission, or duty assigned. God assigns a duty in connection with the covenant He makes with His people. Statutes refer to a decree or something prescribed. Literally the word means to cut or etch in stone like God did with the Ten

Commands. This body of instruction is like a president issuing "executive orders." The third word, rules, speaks of the act of deciding. It is like a sentence or what the judge concludes. Rules are not voted on but decreed. Finally there is the word, commands, with which we are very familiar. Commands make up instruction from an authority to a subordinate. But more than that, commands are a statement that must be obeyed. Thus we read that God commanded creation. *For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm (Psalm 33:9)*. All creation had to appear in obedience to God's command.

In comparison, how do we relate to God's rules, commands, requirements? God's plan is for us to keep them. The word "keep" means to watch over, observe, and protect. Therefore, keeping God's rules has to be an activity not a theory, philosophy, or theological discussion. Keeping God's rules is the "DOING" of faith. That is what James meant when he wrote, *So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead (James 2:17)*.

Moses also spelled out when God's people are expected to keep His rules. In a word, it is *always*. Actively applying God's rules is to be the character of His peoples' lives. We must not forget that the motivation for this activity is love, and love implies a relationship. If God is a theory, a topic of theological discussion, a mystical spirit out there somewhere, there is no love – He is not. He is a being who created us in His image so that we understand that we must know God personally, intimately. When God breaks into your naturally sinful life, convicts you of sin, gives you faith and saves you, love begins and continues to grow. Your entire relationship with God is rooted in love. You are now with Him, for Him, in Him part of His family, and on His team.

Here is a fellow who claims he is part of the Mighty Aardvarks football team. He shows up at the meetings. He works out at the practices. He has the uniform. His name is on the roster. But when the coach puts him into the game, he doesn't act like he is a Mighty Aardvark. The quarterback throws him the ball and he turns around and runs across the wrong goal line. The quarterback hands him the ball and he promptly hands it to the opponent. The opposing running back is charging for the goal line and this fellow steps aside and cheers him on instead of tackling the opponent. All the players and all

the people in the stands will come to the firm conclusion that this guy is not a Mighty Aardvark because he is not keeping the team rules, commission, or expectations.

So why do we allow people to call themselves Christians, children of God, when they ignore God's rules just like that? There is a difference between having no relationship with God and having a relationship from which we sometimes wander. Sometimes that love and loyalty wanes even for Christians.

When love is not sufficient motivation to obey, God also calls His people to consider the LORD's discipline. The LORD's discipline is built on or flows from His authority. Therefore, Moses pointed out, *And consider today (since I am not speaking to your children who have not known or seen it), consider the discipline of the LORD your God, his greatness, his mighty hand and his outstretched arm (v.2).*

He challenged God's people to stop to think about the discipline of the LORD. We do not naturally like to think about such things. That is why God commanded His people to do this regularly. We prefer to think of God as our friend and buddy instead of our authority who is able and justified to level discipline against disobedience. It is good for us to keep in mind that our LORD is great, mighty, and should be seen with His powerful, righteous, active hand stretched out against rebellion and disobedience.

People who chaff against God's rules, commands, and the obligations He has handed down to us try to ignore this trait of God. People who really do not love God because they do not know God, try to dismiss this reality out of hand. Some of the people present as Moses spoke had not personally witnessed these illustrations, while those who were under twenty when they left Egypt had.

All people, especially God's people, need to learn from the three illustrations of the LORD's discipline. First, Moses reminded God's people that, in the past, God disciplined Egypt. They needed to remember *his signs and his deeds that he did in Egypt to Pharaoh the king of Egypt and to all his land, and what he did to the army of Egypt, to their horses and to their chariots, how he made the water of the Red Sea flow over them as they pursued after you, and how the LORD has destroyed them to this day (vv.3-4).*

God wasted Egypt, a culture of people who for centuries had ignored God, worshiped imaginary gods, and treated God's chosen

people harshly. Furthermore, God used Pharaoh as an example of His retributive discipline. Moses recorded, *But for this purpose I have raised you up, to show you my power, so that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth. You are still exalting yourself against my people and will not let them go (Exodus 9:16-17).* Within that context God also disciplined the Egyptian army to death. Anyone who witnessed the parting and un-parting of the Red Sea (which drowned the best army in the world) would be impressed with God's ability to discipline. If we really believe the Bible, we should still be impressed with that.

Second, God also disciplined His own people in the past. Therefore, God's people, the children of the disciplined people needed to remember *what he did to you in the wilderness, until you came to this place (v.5).* On various occasions of rebellion God sent plagues, sent snakes, even killed thousands of His own people. Ultimately, God killed everyone over the age of 20 who He had delivered from Egypt.

Third, God disciplined particular individuals among His people. The people needed to remember *what he did to Dathan and Abiram the sons of Eliab, son of Reuben, how the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up, with their households, their tents, and every living thing that followed them, in the midst of all Israel (v.6).*

Having laid down three illustrations, Moses drove the point home. *You know this, so consider it. For your eyes have seen all the great work of the LORD that he did (v.7).* The people needed to learn from this example that God's discipline is first of all retributive for unrepentant sinners. On one hand, God is very patient. On the other hand, He eventually lets justice fall and the unrepentant sinner feels the sting of discipline. This is true even for God's people, Christians, who persist in sin.

Second, we learn that God's discipline is instructional for His people who are maturing. In fact, that is the essential meaning of the Hebrew word translated "discipline." While we are maturing, becoming more like Christ, we tend to wander from the path prescribed by God's statutes, rules, commands, and obligations. Through discipline (instruction) God brings us back into line through the teaching and instruction of His Word. Sometimes God even uses painful circumstances to correct us.

God's discipline for His children is always a display of love. The writer to the Hebrew Christians challenged us, *And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives." It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons (Hebrews 12:5-8).*

Love God, obey God, understand why and how God disciplines.

Love and Obedience Results in Blessing (vv.8-15).

In verses eight and nine Moses taught that principle that so many modern Christians despise. He told the people to keep the commands in order to possess what you possess (vv.8-9). Huh? This principle applies to the fact that the possession is certain, but full possession depends on obedience. *You shall therefore keep the whole commandment that I command you today, that you may be strong, and go in and take possession of the land that you are going over to possess (v.8).*

The connection is clear. They were, and we are, to keep the **whole** command. We are not permitted to parcel out what we like and do that. Why keep the law? For Israel the promised result was that you may be strong, that you may go in, and that you may possess. It was important for the people to rest in the fact that the possession was already certain. God already determined the certainty of the possession. The question was: Will the people obey God in order to enjoy the blessing He already gave?

This is exactly the formula regarding our salvation. Our promised possession, our full salvation, eternal life is already certain. God's chosen people, the saved, will inherit eternal life. But are we possessing it right now? How many genuinely born again people live in mediocrity because they do not obey God's rules? How many of us sacrifice the incredible blessings of God, like knowing Him more, realizing His grace more, experiencing His fellowship on a deeper level, because we do not trust and obey?

Maybe we would be more likely to obey in order to possess if we understood that living long in the possession is the LORD'S promise. Moses challenged his peers to obey *that you may live long in the land that the LORD swore to your fathers to give to them and to their offspring, a land flowing with milk and honey (v.9)*. To the Israelite's the promise was a literal long life. This is another indication that God intends for the Promised Land to be a picture of the Christian's possession of eternal life.

It is a good picture because even the literal, actual land was different kind of land (vv.10-12). That was an important matter because the relatives of these people always seemed to be too concerned to care for the old land. *For the land that you are entering to take possession of it is not like the land of Egypt, from which you have come, where you sowed your seed and irrigated it, like a garden of vegetables (v.10)*. It seems strange how Korah, and many of the other rebels against God and Moses, claimed that Egypt had been a land flowing with milk and honey. Korah argued against Moses saying, *Is it a small thing that you have brought us up out of a land flowing with milk and honey, to kill us in the wilderness, that you must also make yourself a prince over us? (Numbers 16:13)*. Apparently they forgot that they had been slaves in Egypt.

They were much like Christians who look at the rules of the Christian life, who begin to experience the maturing process of Christ-likeness, who experience the discipline of the Lord, and long for the slavery of sin. The life of sin, like life in Egypt, demands that the individual work endlessly in an futile effort to find the peace God gives.

Conversely, God cares for your new possession. *But the land that you are going over to possess is a land of hills and valleys, which drinks water by the rain from heaven, a land that the LORD your God cares for. The eyes of the LORD your God are always upon it, from the beginning of the year to the end of the year (vv.11,12)*. God took responsibility to oversee and care for the land He promised. In the same kind of way, God oversees the abundant life in which Christians live.

Also, within the new possession that God gave, the people would discover showers of blessings (vv.13-15). It is a picture of how full obedience brings God's full blessings. *And if you will indeed*

obey my commandments that I command you today, to love the LORD your God, and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul, he will give the rain for your land in its season, the early rain and the later rain, that you may gather in your grain and your wine and your oil (vv.13-14). Again, the question is whether the people would obey. In response to obedience, the Lord pours out His rain which makes His land produce blessing. Rain, showers of blessings are a type of God's spiritual blessing in Scripture.

God's blessings makes His people full. *And he will give grass in your fields for your livestock, and you shall eat and be full (v.15).* Israel would enjoy God's physical blessings if they obeyed. We enjoy God's spiritual blessings when we obey His Word. Therefore, we wonder if failure to obey, or a slight concern for obedience, is a reason that many professing Christians are spiritually emaciated, spiritually unalert, almost unresponsive spiritually?

Disobedience Results in Discipline (vv.16-17).

Disobedience is a matter of being deceived which is why Moses warned, *Take care lest your heart be deceived (v.16a).* We too need to pay close attention to our hearts because they are so deceptive. Satan, the original and great deceiver, still lies to God's people like he lied to Eve. The flesh lies to us because it desires to displace God from our heart's throne. The world lies to us. That is why we must pay close attention to what is going on in our hearts.

It is inevitable that a deceived heart turns away from God. Moses warned that a deceived heart would cause God's people to *turn aside and serve other gods and worship them (v.16b).* That would be a matter of disobedience. Disobedience angers the LORD: *then the anger of the LORD will be kindled against you (v.17).* By this point in Moses's speech, the people surely should have learned that the Lord had proven in the past that He can be angered.

How sad that OUR Lord would be angry with us. Do we remember the opening command? *You shall therefore love the LORD your God (v.1a).* Our love for Him is reciprocal. Therefore, we must guard against disobedience which would change all that. Disobedience will bring the Lord's discipline in which *he will shut up the heavens, so that there will be no rain, and the land will yield no*

fruit, and you will perish quickly off the good land that the LORD is giving you (v.17b).

Therefore, the only logical conclusion for us is to obey! The closing verses of our text draw the most fitting conclusion:

You shall therefore lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul, and you shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall teach them to your children, talking of them when you are sitting in your house, and when you are walking by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates, that your days and the days of your children may be multiplied in the land that the LORD swore to your fathers to give them, as long as the heavens are above the earth (vv.18-21).