

July 8, 2018
Sunday Evening Service
Series: Deuteronomy
Community Baptist Church
643 S. Suber Road
Greer, SC 29650
© 2018 David J. Whitcomb

To Ponder . . .

Questions to ponder as you prepare to hear from Deuteronomy 10:12-22.

1. How was the sign of circumcision similar to the veil that covered the heart?
2. What does the Lord setting His heart on you mean to you?
3. What do God's rules reflect and what is the purpose for them (v.13)?
4. What are the best words you can come up with to describe God's character?
5. How does the statement about loving the sojourners (v.19) impact our dilemma with immigration?

ITS A MATTER OF THE HEART Deuteronomy 10:12-22

What is in the heart of any particular person is the great unknown. We cannot look into the heart of our children, our spouse, our fellow church members. In fact, Jeremiah reminds us that we cannot even know our own hearts. God led the prophet to record, *The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it? (Jeremiah 10:9)*. The good news comes in the next verse that teaches us, *"I the LORD search the heart and test the mind,*

to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his deeds" (Jeremiah 17:10).

We must be honest and agree with Jeremiah that we do not really know all that is residing in our own intellect, will, and emotions. At the same time, it is almost a bit scary that God does know every thought, every motivation, every desire that resides deep within our beings. And even more frightening might be the fact that He gives every person according to what is in their hearts.

Moses reminded the second generation of Israelites that God had been very kind and gracious to choose them to be His people. They enjoyed a unique relationship with God that the other people of the world did not understand or experience. But because of this special relationship, God was right to expect special kinds of responses. Because God maintained a unique relationship with the Israelites, He was right to require them to live a unique kind of life.

That same principle is true for us who are born again by God's grace and enjoy fellowship with Him. We are not like the other, normal people in the world. More is required of us because we are God's people. We learn from this text that the key for maintaining the difference that God requires is for us to pay attention to our hearts. Jeremiah was right. Our hearts are deceitful. Because of that trait, it is easy for us to slip into stubbornness. Stubborn people do not reflect a right relationship with God. Let's learn why it is important to guard our hearts and how to guard our hearts.

God's Choice (vv.14-15).

Everything belongs to God. *Behold, to the LORD your God belong heaven and the heaven of heavens, the earth with all that is in it (v.14)*. Here Moses reminded us that God is Creator and, therefore, owner. Because God created all things, He is the rightful owner of all things (i.e. *belong to Him*). As owner of all things, God is free to dispose of all things (including all people) according to His own desires and free will.

Therefore, it is only logical to conclude that the LORD is your God. There are many gods in the world. Throughout history humans have rebelled against their creator God by creating their own gods. All of that essentially means that humans determined to try to be god for themselves. In contrast to the "norm" of our world, God's people

are privileged to know that the one true God, the Creator, Yahweh, the ever-existing, self-existing Heavenly Father, is their God.

How is it that a mere human comes to know God the Creator as the Heavenly Father? God chooses to love His people. *Yet the LORD set his heart in love on your fathers and chose their offspring after them, you above all peoples, as you are this day (v.15)*. How amazing it is that God set His heart on Israel. Although the LORD reigns in supreme authority over all people all the time, He chose Israel. No one forced God to create and then seek out Abraham and promise to build a great nation through him. God was not required to continue His promise through Isaac. No one would have blamed God for withdrawing His promise because Jacob and Esau were such stubborn rebels.

And definitely, God should have abandoned Abraham's posterity after the golden calf incident added to all the other examples of rebellion by the first generation of Israelites out of Egypt. But there stood the second generation of Israelites before Moses being reminded that the self-existing, ever-existing Creator set His heart to love them. God chose those individuals also to be His people.

Maybe more amazing than His choice of Israel is that God still sets His heart on His people. That God loves you and me is a thought too deep, too amazing to pass over quickly. It is true according to John 3:16 that God loves all the people He created. But even more astonishing is the truth taught repeatedly throughout the New Testament that God set His heart on people like you and me. Why would the self-existing, ever-existing Creator set His heart of love on me, convict me of my sin, draw me to Christ by His grace, open my eyes to understand my need for the Savior from sin, and give life to faith in me so that I can believe it?

This is an especially perplexing and humbling thought when I consider it in light of this phrase from verse fifteen that God chose *you above all peoples*. We really have very little understanding of the weight or value of God setting His love on us. The more we contemplate the idea, the more deeply we dive down into this incredible truth, the more astonished we are at what God has accomplished in us and for us.

God's Requirement (vv.12-13).

God has established particular requirements because of this amazing relationship we have with Him. Moses asked, *And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you (v.12a)*? Because He is Creator, God must make rules. God created us in His image, granting us some of His attributes. Therefore, we naturally conclude that the Creator has every right to determine how the created thing or being ought to operate.

Also, because God chooses, the chosen need to know His rules. Created things and people that live or exist in rebellion to the Creator are not too awfully concerned for the Creator's rules. People who ignore and reject the Creator's creativity or even His existence have no concern to consider His rules. If we understand that God created us in His image, for His glory, we will be sensitive to His rules.

So, here are some of the requirements, basic principles upon which the rest of God's laws stand. First, *fear the LORD your God (v.12b)*. Why is the "fear of the Lord" such a fearful requirement? Most people abhor the idea. They recoil and argue that the God of love would never require people to fear Him, especially not His chosen people. Even most people who profess to be Christians reject this idea and actually pretend that it is either not in the Bible or not intended for our much-enlightened age.

Most people who claim to be followers of God do not understand this requirement. The requirement to fear the Lord is found fourteen times just in Deuteronomy. The command shows up a total of thirty-four times in the rest of the Old Testament. Oh! So this is an Old Testament concept? It is. But it is not only an Old Testament requirement. The same command is found sixteen times in the New Testament. In fact, the fear of the Lord is an identifiable trait of believers. Paul told Christians, *Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God. (2 Corinthians 7:1)*.

And yet at other times we believers are told not to fear. Paul told Timothy, *For God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control (2 Timothy 1:7)*. We are not to be afraid of circumstances, other people, or even evil. We are supposed to maintain a very healthy respect for God's power and authority, realizing that He is able to speak the whole world out of existence, but knowing at the same time that He loves us. John Calvin describe

it well. He said, “The fear of the Lord is a bridle to restrain our wickedness.”

The second requirement is that we should *walk in all his ways* (v.12c). This requirement is stated ten times in Deuteronomy. The word *walk* speaks of our lifestyle. God requires His people to live according to His ways. God has been faithful to define *His ways* for us in His law.

Third, we are to *love Him* (v.12d). The requirement to love the Lord shows up eight times in Deuteronomy. Instead of living in quaking fear of God’s power, we are to love Him. To love does not simply mean to have warm feelings toward, but to be wholly given to, so that we gladly sacrifice for Him. To love God, we must know God. To truly know God will drive us to love Him. True love for God always gives the victory in our battle with the desire to love ourselves or lesser gods.

Fourth, we must *serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul* (v.12e). In the rest of Deuteronomy, we discover similar requirements such as “*Serve the Lord*” found six times; or “*Serve the Lord with all your heart*” found three times; and the general concept of “*Practice love for God with all your heart*” found twenty-two times. Right respect for God, ordering our lives according to His way, and loving Him will without fail result in serving God with all our hearts.

Fifth, we are to *keep the commandments and statutes of the LORD, which I am commanding you today for your good* (v.13). The requirement to keep the Lord’s precepts, commands, rules, and such show up sixty-five times in this book. Human nature resists keeping the Lord’s commands because we want to be in charge of our own lives. But our Creator, who knows what is best for us created beings assures us that keeping His commands is for our own good. But then again, we are prone to ask why God puts forth these particular requirements.

God’s Character (vv.17-18).

The previous five requirements reflect God’s character. Therefore, Moses zeroed in on a few of those traits – like the fact that God is almighty. He is God of gods and Lord of lords. *For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords* (v.17a). Obvious from this

verse is the truth that the LORD your God is special. Not that you were so wise to choose to believe in or follow or serve the right God. Not that you just got lucky when you decided to pick out a God. Yahweh is your God because He picked you.

He is the God of all gods and the Lord of all lords. He rules supreme over all lesser gods and lords. In a sense, Satan himself is a god who desired to be lord. He lords it over the people of the earth keeping them in bondage to sin and vain imaginations. *In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God* (2 Corinthians 4:4). We are not to fear Satan and the lesser gods he creates. And we are especially not to fear the lords of this earth who, even contrary to their will and plans, are all subject to our LORD and God.

Rather, we maintain awesome respect for God because He is the awesome God. Moses reminded us that our God is *the great, the mighty, and the awesome God* (v.17c). The English words great, mighty, and awesome are the best we can come up with for even hinting at God’s majesty. When we think of things that can be characterized by such words, we might have in mind Niagra Falls, the Mississippi River (at flood stage), an erupting volcano, a mighty storm. In fact, we cannot even imagine God’s majesty. And we are His through His desire and divine fiat.

Also, we love God and serve Him because God is just. He shows no partiality. He *is not partial and takes no bribe* (v.17d). In light of the many Old Testament injunctions against bribery, we get the idea it must have been prevalent in ancient Middle Eastern cultures. We know from experience that many third-world cultures operate on the bribery principle. God cannot be bribed, though Jacob seemed to think that He can be. When God met Jacob in a dream, *Then Jacob made a vow, saying, “If God will be with me and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear, so that I come again to my father’s house in peace, then the LORD shall be my God”* (Genesis 28:20-21).

God cannot be bribed because He will never show partiality. God never considers a person’s credentials, heritage, or accomplishments when he or she comes to Him. In the final judgment, God will not judge anyone based on looks or personality,

but He will judge them according to their works. Their own works will be their judge.

It only stands to follow then, that God who cannot be bribed and who shows no partiality is just in His dealings with the needy. *He executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing (v.18)*. God provides care for those without it. His laws reveal this plan. His people living according to God's laws will show it. The justice of God is always right, providing for the needy, and exposing the dishonest sluggard. How then do we live in light of God's character?

Therefore . . . (vv.16, 19-22).

Take care of your heart. In the words of our text, Moses told the people to circumcise their hearts. *Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart (v.16a)*. God gave the sign of circumcision (which other cultures practiced occasionally) to mark off His people from among the pagans. It was symbolic of removing sin, of removing impediments to truth, like removing the veil from the heart.

It is rather ironic that Moses would bring up this symbol to these people. None of these males had been circumcised yet (Joshua 5:4-7). But they were ready and willing to be instructed, to follow God in obedience. Conversely, their fathers who left Egypt had all been circumcised. But their hearts were stubborn against God.

Therefore, Moses warned the people to stop being stubborn (v.16b). Another irony about circumcision is that it was a mark to identify God's people, and yet it was always unseen by others. This drives to the truth that this outward act was supposed to be a sign to the recipient that they were to live accordingly. They were marked for God by an invisible sign, and so they must live in obedience to God as the outward manifestation of the private sign. The call to circumcise the heart is like the call to remove the veil. Paul talked about the veil over the hearts of the Jewish people so that they were not able to discern God's love for them, God's provision of the Savior. Paul described the problem like this: *Yes, to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their hearts (2 Corinthians 3:15)*.

We, too, live with a veil over our hearts when we refuse to kill the self-love that veils our heart from really knowing God. Listen to how A.W. Tozer described this great need we have.

*“What doth hinder us? The answer usually given, simply that we are ‘cold,’ will not explain all the facts. There is something more serious than coldness of heart, something that may be back of that coldness and be the cause of its existence. What is it? What but the presence of a veil in our hearts? A veil not taken away as the first veil was, but which remains there still shutting out the light and hiding the face of God from us. It is the veil of our fleshly fallen nature living on, unjudged within us, uncrucified and unrepudiated. It is the close-woven veil of the self-life which we have never truly acknowledged, of which we have been secretly ashamed, and which for these reasons we have never brought to the judgment of the cross . . . It is woven of the fine threads of the self-life, the hyphenated sins of the human spirit. . . To be specific, the self-sins are these: self-righteousness, self-pity, self-confidence, self-sufficiency, self-determination, self-love, and a host of others like them. They dwell too deep within us and are too much part of our natures to come to our attention till the light of God is focused upon them.” (A.W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God*, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2013 reprint, pp. 47-48.)*

Our goal is to stop being stubborn and learn to live like God. To live like God is to love God and love our neighbor. Specifically, we are to love others like we are loved. *Love the sojourner, therefore, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt (v.19)*.

There should be no question about the fact that the Egyptians did not love God's people. They taught God's people what not to do. They made life miserable for God's people who were sojourning. The Israelites were sojourners because Egypt and the surrounding nations were quite protective of their borders. That is why Joseph asked permission to bring in his family as sojourners. That is why Israel wandered around in no man's land for 40 years. The Sinai peninsula was land no nation owned or cared to own. Because nations were protective of their borders is why Moses asked permission to enter and pass through Moab and Seir (Deut. 2). That is why God fought the war of possession for His people as He dislodged the inhabitants of the Promised Land.

All the nations had rules about sojourners as Israel did as well. But God's people were to show compassion for the folks who were legally living in the land (E.G. the Gibeonites who lied their way in).

Second, we are to also love the LORD. *You shall fear the LORD your God. You shall serve him and hold fast to him, and by his name you shall swear (v.20).* We show love to God by right respect, service and loyalty. The idea of swearing by His name is like taking an oath of allegiance. The pledge of allegiance to the American flag once was a solemn oath. Now many of the people who have been made wealthy and phenomenally popular by the American culture despise such an oath. Likewise, after God's people had been in the Promised Land a few years and enjoyed the bounty God promised and provided, allegiance to Him faded. In the New Testament a spoken oath is secondary to an obedient life that speaks volumes about our allegiance to Jesus.

We not only swear allegiance to God, but we declare our love for God. *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. (vv.21-22).* If we really love God, fear God, serve God, we will declare it. It is not just that we say glowing things about God, but that He IS our praise. He is the essence, the sum total, the meaning of our praise. In light of who He is and in light of what He has done, how could we not praise Him?