

For the Love of God

Choose to Live
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June 22, 2014



CHOOSE TO LIVE Deuteronomy

If you have the Word--and I hope you do, or somebody around you does you can look on with--let me invite you to open with me to Deuteronomy 6. It's in the Old Testament; it's the fifth book in the Bible. Deuteronomy 6.

I was preaching at the Southern Baptist Convention two Sundays ago, where it was good to be reminded of how valuable it is to be joined together with 40,000 other churches in the way that we are, as a part of the Southern Baptist Convention. Sometimes people ask me, "What's the point of a denomination like that? Like, don't denominations divide?" Without a doubt, there can be challenges that come with denominations. But they can be good—really good—for a number of reasons. Just to throw out two:

For biblical accountability. It is good to have other churches that we as a church are accountable to biblically, in such a way that if we were to stray away from the authority of God's Word in this church, we would have other churches who are holding us accountable for that. You think about the news that came out even this week from the PCUSA, Presbyterian Church USA, denomination, which has now changed their official stance on marriage from being the union of a man and woman to simply a union of two people—which is a direct repudiation of God's design for marriage according to His Word. So I praise God for the opportunity to be joined together with 40,000 other churches based around a firm confidence in the Word of God, regardless of what is happening in the culture around us. So that's a good thing.

And then, the other primary reason for denominations is for the sake of cooperation in mission. It's a pretty awesome thing to pool together the resources of 40,000+ churches for the spread of the gospel in North America and among the nations. It's really unprecedented, when you think about it, in the history of Christianity. And that may sound like an overstatement, but it's not. The International Mission Board is the largest mission-sending force in the history of the Christian church. It's an organization that leverages the resources of these 40,000 churches to focus on church planting among unreached peoples. That in addition to the North American Mission Board, which is focused on church planting across our continent, in addition to the seminaries which are training up thousands of pastors and church leaders, and on and on. So no one church is intended to go at this mission alone. So to be able as a faith family to partner together with a much bigger picture than just The Church at Brook Hills, to join together in biblical accountability for the sake of missional advancement of the gospel to the ends of the earth. It was good to be there in that gathering of pastors and church leaders.

And then last Sunday I was on the way from there to preaching this last week in South Carolina, and had the joy of preaching in Washington, D.C., at Capitol Hill Baptist Church. This is a church that has had a huge influence on my life, that has had a huge influence on this church—maybe in ways you may not realize. We've partnered together with that church in many different ways. So it was good to be able to encourage them with the Word.

But I have missed being here, particularly as our immersion in the psalms was coming to a close. I was able to listen online, but it's just not the same. Much thanks to Pastor Jim and Matt for the way they led us, and just these last six weeks, I've just loved walking through the psalms in the way we have. It's not that we won't look at any psalms in the next few weeks, as they're still in our Bible reading, but as far as three different psalms in three different services, many times with three different preachers—that concluded last week. But oh, just so rich.

And I was tempted, as I was thinking about and praying about what to preach today based on our Bible reading, and so just—if you're visiting with us, or maybe you haven't been following along with Bible reading—we started in January as a church reading through the Bible together over the course of two years. We'll read through the Old Testament once, the New Testament and Psalms twice, and it works out to about two chapters a day. Usually there's a chapter from the Old Testament and then one from the New Testament or the Psalms. And so right now we're in Deuteronomy and Psalms. And there were some good psalms this last week. I was tempted to say, oh, let's dive into one of those. Why leave the Psalms behind? They're great. But, the book of Deuteronomy—we can't move on without pausing and considering what God is saying to each of us individually and all of us collectively as The Church at Brook Hills through the book of Deuteronomy.

So if you had to rank the books of the Bible for some reason, Deuteronomy would be one of the most important. It would be near the top of that list. And I say that because Deuteronomy is the most quoted book in the Bible. It's referenced over and over again throughout the rest of the Old Testament. The words contained here are the words that the people of God come back to over and over again. And then it's referenced over and over again in the New Testament, more than any other Old Testament book. It's the foundation for what followers of Christ should believe, and how we live.

So we need—as we're journeying through the Bible together—to pause and think about how significant this book is, not just for the Bible, but how significant this book is for our lives. This book has huge implications for our lives on a daily basis. Which is why, if I were to give this sermon a title, I would call it "Choose to Live," which is a direct quote from what we're going to read about in a few minutes in Deuteronomy 30.

But we're going to start in Deuteronomy 6. So Deuteronomy 6 is a chapter that contains some of the most famous verses in all the Bible. Before we read it—we're going to read the whole chapter—but I want to set the stage. So, just as a reminder of where we were at, or if you're visiting with us or not been reading along, here's what we've read to this point.

So we started in January with the first book in the Bible, Genesis, where we saw God call a people to Himself, called the people of Israel. Starting with Abraham, then with his son Isaac, his son Jacob, and God promised to give them many descendants and give them a land that He would settle them in. But at the end of Genesis, the people of God had not yet taken possession of that land.

In fact, when you get to the next book, the book of Exodus, they are living in a foreign land, Egypt, and they're slaves there. What happens in Exodus is God miraculously brings them out of slavery in Egypt. He brings the Israelites to Mt. Sinai, where He initiates a covenant relationship with them. Basically—similar to how we might picture a marriage relationship—where God commits Himself to Israel, commits to bring them into the Land He's promised to them.

And as He commits Himself to them, He gives them His law, which basically describes how the people of Israel will relate to God in the Land they're going into. So that's why we have the next book we have in the Bible, Leviticus. It details the law that God gave to His people.

And then after Leviticus you've got the book of Numbers that opens with the people of God journeying toward the Promised Land. But right when they get to the precipice of it, they get afraid and they turn away from God. They don't believe that God can give them victory over the peoples and the nations who are in that land. So they turn back. And God in His judgment of them sentences His people to wander in the wilderness for 40 years, basically until an entire generation passes away and a new generation comes on the scene. They will be the ones who will go into the Promised Land.

And the leader of God's people from Exodus through Leviticus into Numbers is Moses. And so the scene we come to in Deuteronomy is of Moses standing before the people, now once again on the precipice of the Promised Land. They've wandered for 40 years, an entire generation has just about passed away, and now this new generation was ready to take the Land. And so the book of Deuteronomy records how Moses recounts God's law from before as they prepare to now enter the Promised Land.

So picture it like this. I'll use an analogy that may be familiar to many of you. Just think college football. So in college football season, a team gets together on Sunday or Monday, the beginning of the week, to come up with a game plan for their opponent the following Saturday. And that game plan guides them all week long. But then on Friday night, the team assembles back together and says, "Okay. We're going to look over the game plan one more time, just to make sure we've got it." So that's what the Israelites were doing. Moses—head coach—saying, "Okay. Forty years ago God gave us this Law that was to be our guide when we came into the Promised Land. So here we are. It's game time. You're about to go into the Land, so remember the game plan."

What that means is for the most part, there's really nothing new here in Deuteronomy that they haven't already seen in the Old Testament. This is not new information as much as it's review of old information that God had already given. The word Deuteronomy means, "second law." So it's basically a restating of the Law God already gave at Mt. Sinai, but this time in a new way as the Israelites were preparing to go into the Promised Land.

So the book is structured around three speeches that Moses gives to the people--basically like sermons as they're preparing to go into the Land--in which he outlines God's Law to them. Moses was a prophet, which means he was God's spokesman. God revealed His Word and His will to Moses, and then Moses communicated the Word and the will of God to His people. So that's the setting behind what we're about to read.

Now let me pause here for a second, because I can see it on your face. Some of you are wondering, "Okay, thanks for the Old Testament history lesson. Ah, David, but what in the world does that have to do with us?" You may be wondering, "David, are you so out of touch with our lives in the 21st century that you don't realize that I've got this going on in my life, I've got that going on in my family, I've got this going on at work, and you're sitting here talking about Moses and the people of Israel standing on the plains of Moab a few thousand years ago, with your seminary Old Testament history stuff--like, why does this matter to me today?"

And I am glad you have that look on your face. And you're wondering what the answer is to that question. Because what this book recounts is a record of the way God relates to His people. And as a result, what we're about to read has everything to do with the way God

relates to you, and me, and us. I can't think of anything more important to talk about over the next few moments than the way God relates to you, right where you are.

So, what I want to do is I want to show you four primary commands that we read in Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy is filled with laws and statutes and commands from God—but I want to summarize the book by looking at four primary commands, and along the way, I want us to think about how these commands to these people, on the edge of the Promised Land thousands of years ago, help us understand our lives, our families, our work this week.

So, let's start by reading. So hear the Word of God through Moses to His people at the edge of the Promised Land. Deuteronomy 6:1:

"Now this is the commandment—the statutes and the rules—that the LORD your God commanded me to teach you, that you may do them in the land to which you are going over, to possess it, that you may fear the LORD your God, you and your son and your son's son, by keeping all his statutes and his commandments, which I command you, all the days of your life, and that your days may be long. Hear therefore, O Israel, and be careful to do them, that it may go well with you, and that you may multiply greatly, as the LORD, the God of your fathers, has promised you, in a land flowing with milk and honey.

"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

"And when the LORD your God brings you into the land that he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give you—with great and good cities that you did not build, and houses full of all good things that you did not fill, and cisterns that you did not dig, and vineyards and olive trees that you did not plant—and when you eat and are full, then take care lest you forget the LORD, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. It is the LORD your God you shall fear. Him you shall serve and by his name you shall swear. You shall not go after other gods, the gods of the peoples who are around you—for the LORD your God in your midst is a jealous God—lest the anger of the LORD your God be kindled against you, and he destroy you from off the face of the earth.

"You shall not put the LORD your God to the test, as you tested him at Massah. You shall diligently keep the commandments of the LORD your God, and his testimonies and his statutes, which he has commanded you. And you shall do what is right and good in the sight of the LORD, that it may go well with you, and that you may go in and take possession of the good land that the LORD swore to give to your fathers by thrusting out all your enemies from before you, as the LORD has promised.

"When your son asks you in time to come, 'What is the meaning of the testimonies and the statutes and the rules that the LORD our God has

commanded you?’ then you shall say to your son, ‘We were Pharaoh’s slaves in Egypt. And the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand. And the LORD showed signs and wonders, great and grievous, against Egypt and against Pharaoh and all his household, before our eyes. And he brought us out from there, that he might bring us in and give us the land that he swore to give to our fathers. And the LORD commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the LORD our God, for our good always, that he might preserve us alive, as we are this day. And it will be righteousness for us, if we are careful to do all this commandment before the LORD our God, as he has commanded us.’”

The Commands in Deuteronomy

Ah, there’s so much here. We’re going to turn to a bunch of places in Deuteronomy. I want to give you a picture of the whole book, but it’s really summarized here in Deuteronomy 6. So, this one chapter summarizes four primary commands. You might write them down in the blank space you have in the worship guide that’s intended there for notes.

Love the Lord.

So number one: Love the Lord. Love the Lord. This is the first command, and it’s the primary command from God to His people. Love the Lord. Verse five, “*You shall* (this is a command)... *You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.*” So from the very beginning, see that God intends to relate to His people on the basis of love. This is the title of the devotional we’re using, that accompanies this Bible reading over these two years: “For the Love of God.” And one of my prayers for this journey that we’re walking through as a church is that God might instill in us—in you, in me—a deeper, higher, wider, truer love for God. More than you love your wife or your husband. More than you love your kids or your grandkids. More than you love your job, or your home, or your possessions, or your achievements, or your reputation, or your safety or your security. More than you love your own life, that you would love God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your might. Jesus said later in the New Testament, in one of those places that references Deuteronomy, “This is the first and greatest commandment: love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength.”

Do you love God? Wherever you’re sitting, do you love God? I mean, really. Not, do you love His gifts? Because God has given many, many gifts to us, many, many good things in each of our lives. But if we’re not careful, we all fall into the temptation of loving the gifts more than we love the giver. And God knew this was a temptation for these Israelites. Amidst His promises of these things He’s going to give to them—descendants, land—He knew they would be tempted to get focused on those things in such a way that they would forget Him.

Which is why He says what He says in verse 12, “*Take care lest you forget the Lord.*” Do you notice that tendency in your own life? We need to constantly remember that the greatest gift God gives us is not our spouse or our kids, our friends, or our family, our health or our wealth. No, the greatest gift God gives us is Himself. He is His greatest gift to us. A relationship with God revolves around supreme love and affection for Him alone. No one, nothing else. Whenever we give affection or attention to someone or something else that God alone deserves, the Bible calls this idolatry. Deuteronomy calls this idolatry. It’s exactly what God is warning about here in Deuteronomy 6:14, “*You shall not go after other gods.*” Verse 15, “*For the Lord your God in your midst is a jealous God.*”

Now, that's not a picture we usually associate with God—jealousy? For that matter, jealousy is not an attribute that we picture positively at all. Now, there's good reason for that, for jealousy in our lives is most often wrong. It's often driven by pride, or covetousness, or insecurity. But there is a good sort of jealousy that's driven by love, which is exactly what we see in God. God is not insecure. He knows that He is infinitely good, and He loves His people, so much so that He wants them to experience His good. And He knows that when His people wander after other gods, they will experience evil and destruction, and He wants to keep His people from that.

Remember God's covenant with His people is like a marriage relationship. I think about my marriage. I love my wife. I want her good. And she and I both know that God has designed our marriage and our affection for one another to be good, to find goodness in showing affection to each other. Which means that I'm jealous for her affection. And even the thought of her giving her affections to another man is not good. Consequently, anyone or anything that threatens to steal her love from me as her husband will be met with the strongest of oppositions.

This is good, right? It's the way marriage is supposed to be. This is what our relationship with God is supposed to be. He's infinitely good. He's infinitely loving. And so He calls us to love Him, for in so doing we will experience our greatest good. Love the Lord.

Now, who is the Lord that we love? Who is this God that we love? And Deuteronomy gives us a potent portrait of God in His many attributes. But reading through Deuteronomy, one attribute seems to stand out, or maybe summarize all the others here. You might write it down in your notes. Deuteronomy makes clear that God is all-sovereign. He is all-sovereign.

That may be a word that you're familiar with, or maybe not. And the reason I use that word "sovereign" here is because this is a word that emphasizes God's power and authority over all things, including other supposed gods. This is one of the clear things in Deuteronomy. You see it here in Deuteronomy 6:4, "*The Lord our God, the Lord is one.*" In other words, there's only one true God. There's no one like Him. And Deuteronomy emphasizes this over and over again.

So let's start turning...go back to Deuteronomy 4:32. Look at Deuteronomy 4:32. In the beginning of chapter 4, we see God forbidding idolatry, the worship of other gods among His people. And here's the reason. He says in Deuteronomy 4:32:

For ask now of the days that are past, which were before you, since the day that God created man on the earth, and ask from one end of heaven to the other, whether such a great thing as this has ever happened or was ever heard of. Did any people ever hear the voice of a god speaking out of the midst of the fire, as you have heard, and still live? Or has any god ever attempted to go and take a nation for himself from the midst of another nation, by trials, by signs, by wonders, and by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, and by great deeds of terror, all of which the Lord your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes? To you it was shown, that you might know that the Lord is God; there is no other besides him. Out of heaven he let you hear his voice, that he might discipline you. And on earth he let you see his great fire, and you heard his words out of the midst of the fire. And because he loved your fathers and chose their offspring after them and brought you out of Egypt with his own presence, by his great power, driving out before you nations greater and mightier than yourselves, to bring you in, to give you their land for an inheritance, as it is this day, know therefore

today, and lay it to your heart, that the Lord is God in heaven above and on the earth beneath; there is no other.

Just think about what God is teaching us about Himself in Deuteronomy. God is showing us that He is sovereign. Think about His sovereignty, His power, His authority. He is sovereign over all history. So verse 32, He's the creator of the world. All things began and begin with Him. We won't turn there now, but chapter 10, verse 14, says, *"To the Lord your God belong heaven and the heaven of heavens, the earth with all that is in it."* All the earth and all the heavens belong to God. Chapter 10, verse 17, says, *"The Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God."* I love that verse, because one of our ministry partners in India, whenever he prays, he always quotes that verse, Deuteronomy 10:17, to God. Every time he starts to pray, he says, "Oh God, You are God of gods and Lord of lords." A fundamental confession of faith in the one true God by a man who lives and serves in a land of a million gods that are being worshipped all over the place in India. And every time he prays, he prays, "You're God over all these gods. You're Lord over all these lords." God's sovereign over all history—but then, take a step further. Bring this down. One of the clearest things in Deuteronomy is not just the sovereignty of God in general, but the sovereignty of God specifically in the way He saved the people of Israel. So God is sovereign over all history, and God is sovereign over His people's salvation.

Did you hear it in verse 37?

"He loved your fathers and chose their offspring after them, and brought you out of Egypt with his own presence, by his great power, driving out before you nations greater and mightier than yourselves, to bring you in, to give you their land for an inheritance, as it is this day, know therefore today, and lay it to your heart, that the Lord is God in heaven above and on the earth beneath; there is no other."

Did you hear that? In His sovereign authority, Deuteronomy 4:37 says the Lord God over heaven and earth chose to save the people of Israel from the nation of Egypt.

Which begs the question, why? Why did God love Israel's fathers—Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—like He did? Why did He choose to bless their offspring? Why did God choose to bring them out of slavery in Egypt? And the answer is: clearly not because Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, or the people of Israel in Egypt deserved it. God makes that clear from the start of this book. Let's go back to chapter one. Keep turning to the left there.

Look at how the book starts. The whole book starts with Moses recounting...well, look at verse 26. We'll start with verse 26, recounting all the ways God's people had turned away from Him. In verse 26 he's recounting what happened at Kadesh-barnea the last time they were at the edge of the Promised Land. He says, "Remember this?" Verse 26:

Yet you would not go up, but rebelled against the command of the Lord your God. And you murmured in your tents and said, "Because the Lord hated us he has brought us out of the land of Egypt, to give us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us. Where are we going up? Our brothers have made our hearts melt, saying, 'The people are greater and taller than we. The cities are great and fortified up to heaven. And besides, we have seen the sons of the Anakim there.'" Then I said to you, "Do not be in dread or afraid of them. The Lord your God who goes before you will himself fight for you, just as he did for you in Egypt before your eyes, and in the wilderness, where you have

seen how the Lord your God carried you, as a man carries his son, all the way that you went until you came to this place.” Yet in spite of this word you did not believe the Lord your God, who went before you in the way to seek you out a place to pitch your tents, in fire by night and in the cloud by day, to show you by what way you should go.

Then in verse 34 God talks about His holy anger toward His people. Verse 43 reiterates how stubborn the people of Israel were, unwilling to listen to God, living in rebellion against God. And this continues throughout the rest of the book. This is the first chapter.

Now remember, this is Moses speaking to the people, but he’s speaking God’s word. This is God saying to His people, “I want to make clear from the start—you don’t warrant my blessing.” It’s like God’s putting it in their face over and over and over again. In Deuteronomy 9:6—you don’t have to turn there now—but when God was talking about the Land that He was going to lead them into and how He was going to bless them in it, He makes clear why He’s not leading them in. He says, “*Know, therefore, that the Lord your God is not giving you this good land to possess because of your righteousness, for you are a stubborn people.*” Then He goes on in the rest of the chapter to recount how stubborn they’ve been. This is strange, isn’t it? Just over and over and over again—“Hey, I just want to make sure you haven’t forgotten. You don’t deserve my blessing.” So God’s going out of His way to make sure they know what is NOT the reason for God’s blessing in their lives.

Which then leads to the question, what is the reason? Turn over to Deuteronomy 7. You’ve got to see this. Deuteronomy 7, let’s start in verse six. Right after what we read in chapter six, we read these words. Deuteronomy 7:6:

For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. (That means set apart, holy.) The Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the Lord set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but it is because the Lord loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers, that the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

So why did God choose to love the people of Israel, to lead them out of slavery in Egypt? It wasn’t because they were righteous. They were rebellious. We’ve seen that. It clearly wasn’t because they were a large nation. They were a small, puny nation. But despite these things, the sovereign God of the universe chose to set His affections on them. Why? Clearly there was no merit in them. All of this was grounded in God’s mercy toward them. He loved them. That’s the only explanation Deuteronomy gives for the people of Israel’s salvation. Why did He love them? Because He loved them. This is the pure, sovereign choice of God to love them.

And these are words that are used over and over again in Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy 10:15, “*Yet the Lord set his heart in love on your fathers and chose their offspring after them, you above all peoples.*” Chapter 14, verse two, “*For you are a people holy to the Lord your God, and the Lord has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.*”

Now, I want to be clear. There is mystery behind God’s sovereignty in His people’s salvation. Because we know from all of Scripture that God’s sovereignty does not deny or thwart human responsibility. All men and women everywhere have a choice in their lives—in

our lives. We choose to trust in God, or we choose to turn away from God. We're going to talk about that in a minute.

But suffice to say at this point, this is important—no man or woman will ever be able to stand before God and say, "I didn't trust in You because You didn't choose me." No. No one will be able on that Day to blame their own rebellion against God on God. We are responsible—every one of us—for whether we trust in God or turn away from God. Yet when we trust in God, there's also no denying that it's God sovereign grace at work in our lives to bring us to that point.

Let me ask you a question, Christian. Why are you a Christian? You might say, "Well, because I have repented and believed in Christ." And that would be true. But how did you know that you needed to repent and believe in Christ? "Well, the Bible told me so." Well, how did you even know about the Bible? "Well, somebody shared it with me—my parents, or my family, friend, maybe a co-worker, maybe a complete stranger." Well, why did that person in your life tell you about Jesus, when two billion other people in the world have not had anyone tell them about Jesus?

And even among other people who have heard about Jesus, why have some of them not believed in Jesus while you have? Is it because you are smarter than they are? Better than they are? Maybe more righteous than they are? Do you see where this is going? Even with our choice—based on our responsibility to repent and believe in Christ—when you stop and think about it, you realize that the only reason you're saved is because a sovereign God has saved you.

Charles Spurgeon writes similarly:

When I was coming to Christ, I thought I was doing it all myself. And though I sought the Lord earnestly, I had no idea the Lord was seeking me. I do not think the young convert is at first aware of this. I can recall the very day and hour when I first received these truths in my own soul, when they were, as John Bunyan said, "burned into my heart as with a hot iron." And I can recollect how I felt, that I'd grown all of a sudden from a babe into a man, that I made progress in Scriptural knowledge through having found, once for all, the clue to the truth of God.

And here's how he describes it:

One weeknight when I was sitting in the house of God, I was not thinking much about the preacher's sermon. (I love that. Just pure honesty—something you can identify with, and I can identify with as well. He said,) The thought struck me: "How did you come to be a Christian?" I sought the Lord. "But how did you come to seek the Lord?" The truth flashed across my mind in a moment. I should not have sought Him unless there had been some previous influence in my mind to make me seek Him. I prayed, thought I, but then I asked myself, well, "how came I to pray?" I was induced to pray by reading the Scriptures. "How came I to read the Scriptures?" I did read them, but what led me to do so?

Then in a moment I saw that God was at the bottom of it all, that He was the author of my faith. And so the doctrine of grace opened up to me, and from that doctrine I have not departed to this day, and I desire to make this my constant confession: I ascribed my change wholly to God. (Spurgeon went on

to say,) I believe this, because I'm quite certain that if God had not chosen me, I should never have chosen Him. And I'm sure He chose me before I was born, or else He never would have chosen me afterwards. He must have chosen me for reasons unknown to me, for I never could find any reason in myself why He should have looked upon me with special love. So I'm forced to accept this great biblical doctrine.

Oh, Christians, can't you identify with this? No Christian congratulates himself or herself on their conversion. We don't say, "I saved myself." We say, "I was saved." We say, "God saved me. God did this in my life." Malcolm Muggeridge, follower of Christ, said:

However far and fast I've run, still over my shoulder I catch a glimpse of You on the horizon. Then I'd run faster and farther than ever, thinking triumphantly, 'Now I've escaped.' But no, there You were, coming after me. There was no escape." He said, "I've never wanted a God or feared a God or felt under any necessity to invent one. Unfortunately, I am driven to the conclusion that God wants me.

And why does God want you? Why does God want you? The answer is: not because of anything in you, but solely because of His love for you. This is humbling, isn't it? Yet it's so clear. Deuteronomy teaches with abundant clarity that God is sovereign over all things, including His people's salvation. History, salvation.

And He's sovereign over every nation. Deuteronomy 7 continues, based on God's sovereignty, to assure the people of Israel of His guidance as they go into the Land. He's going to lead them into the Promised Land. They will overtake the nations that were there, because God's sovereign over those nations. He's in control of them. Remember, this is why—we read it just a second ago—the previous generation disobeyed God, because they didn't believe God could defeat the nations in the Promised Land. They didn't trust in the sovereign power of God over those nations.

And so in this review of the game plan, God says to them—look at chapter seven, verse 17—

If you say in your heart, 'These nations are greater than I. How can I dispossess them?' you shall not be afraid of them but you shall remember what the Lord your God did to Pharaoh and to all Egypt, the great trials that your eyes saw, the signs, the wonders, the mighty hand, and the outstretched arm, by which the Lord your God brought you out. So will the Lord your God do to all the peoples of whom you are afraid.

Oh see it, church. See it, people of God. This is the Lord we love, the one who is all-sovereign—sovereign over all history, sovereign over our salvation, sovereign over every nation. And follow this. Because God is all-sovereign, it necessarily follows that He is worthy of all surrender. Because God is all-sovereign, He is worthy of all surrender.

He has authority over all things, right? History, the nations of the earth, even your salvation. It necessarily follows that He has authority over your life, and my life. It is exactly what we see throughout Deuteronomy. This command in Deuteronomy 6:5 to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, is accompanied by other commands to worship God. Deuteronomy 8:19, "...don't turn aside to worship other gods." Worship the one true God. To love Him is to worship Him, to worship Him with holy fear.

Did you hear that in Deuteronomy 6:2, “...that you may fear the Lord your God...”? Chapter 6:13, “It is the Lord God you shall fear...” Verse 24, “...the Lord commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the Lord our God, for our good always...” I love that. Fear God—for your good. Ah, see the application of this to your life. Worship Him with fear, for—what does the rest of the Bible say? The fear of the Lord is the beginning of what? Of wisdom.

Anybody need wisdom? You might need some wisdom in marriage. You might need some wisdom in parenting. You might need wisdom in relationships. You might need some wisdom at your workplace. Anybody need some wisdom in big decisions you may be facing in your life? You need wisdom, you want wisdom? It starts with fearing God. It starts with...so going to the root here, the core. You won’t have wisdom if you don’t fear God. Love Him. Worship Him with holy fear.

And serve Him with wholehearted obedience. Back again in chapter 6:13, “It is the Lord your God you shall fear. Him you shall serve.” Chapter 10, verse 12 says:

And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you, but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul (So it uses that language: heart, soul. Serve Him) and to keep the commandments and statutes of the Lord, which I am commanding you today for your good.

Again, for your good. Serve God with wholehearted obedience for your good. This is what it means to love God with all your heart, soul, and mind, to see that He’s all-sovereign over all things, including your salvation, He’s set His affection on you, and so to respond with the surrender of your life, to worship Him in holy fear, and to serve Him with wholehearted obedience.

This is the essence of what it means to relate to God, and I am zealous for you not to miss it, for me not...for us not to miss this. We are so prone in this culture to go through our routines, amidst the busyness of our lives—all the things we need to do, including coming to church and doing this and doing that—and if we’re not careful, our love for God can grow cold, can’t it? Your love for God can grow cold.

I’m guessing that there are many people right now whose love for God has grown cold. Even though you’ve been a Christian for many years, it’s more mechanical and monotonous than it is fueled by affection and passion for God. And if that’s you in particular, hear God saying to you through His Word, as a Christian—I hope in a fresh way that sinks deep into your heart right where you are sitting—hear God saying, “I love you. I love you.”

And you say, why? He says, “Because I love you. I’ve set my affection on you.” This is God speaking. God. The God of the universe, over all history, saying to you right where you are, “I set my affection on you, and I want your good. And your good is found in setting your affection on me.” The Word of God is saying to us today very clearly, “Love Him. Love Him. Love Him with all your heart, with all your soul, and all your mind. Worship Him with holy fear, and serve Him with wholehearted obedience, for your good—always for your good.” So I’m zealous for this to be a reality in my life, this to be a reality in your life, our life together as a church, because God says this is good for us. It’s a central command in Deuteronomy.

Hear the Law.

And it’s taken most of our time, I believe for a good reason. Let me just list three other primary commands that accompany it. We’ll go through these quickly, all based back in Deuteronomy 6. So, one: Love the Lord. Two: Hear the Law. The second commandment:

hear the Law. Deuteronomy 6:4 begins with, “Hear, O Israel.” Just like verse three said, “Hear therefore, O Israel.” “Listen. Listen. Listen. Hear this.”

That’s exactly what this book is about. It’s about the people of God listening to the Word of God. The whole is framed with people listening to God’s Word coming through Moses. Chapter 6:6 says:

These words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

So put them everywhere. This is so interesting. God does not tell His people to make an image of Himself to focus on. Instead He says, “Write down my words and put them everywhere, because my words will reveal to you who I am.” That’s what these laws are. In general ways at the start, including a restatement of the Ten Commandments in chapter five, and then in more specific ways throughout the book. In the center section of Deuteronomy we see laws from God that individually and collectively come together to reveal Who He is and how He relates to His people.

When we read these laws in light of this command to love God that we just saw, we begin to realize that the law of God in Deuteronomy is not intended to be a burden to bear. Nor is God’s law intended to be a means of merit. That’s the whole point we just saw in God’s sovereign salvation. Israel’s standing before God was not based on their merit, but on His mercy, and by His mercy. So see this. God had already set them apart as His people. They belonged to Him. They were His people, holy people, treasured possession, set apart by God.

And so as that people, this is how they were to live. So in this way we need to see that the law of God here is not a burden for the people to bear, it’s not a means of merit—the law of God is a gift of grace. He doesn’t leave His people in the dark regarding how they’re to live in relationship to Him, how they’re to experience such good, how to love Him, and worship Him, and serve Him and obey Him. He clearly specifically outlines how they are to relate to Him—and to each other, for their good.

Ah, do you see this gift of grace, even right now in your life, Christian brother or sister, with the Book you hold in your hand? The Bible is not a burden to bear, nor is it a means of merit. The Bible is a gift of grace. In Christ, church, we have been set apart by God, and He has not left us. He’s not left you, He’s not left me, us, He’s not left us in the dark when it comes to how to relate to Him and to each other. He’s given His Word and He’s given it to us for our good. Do you realize what a treasured possession we have in the Law of God?

So listen to it. Listen to it. Put these words in your heart. Hide them in your heart, as we’re going to read about even this week in Psalm 119. Teach them diligently to your children. Teach these words systematically and intentionally to your children. Talk about it all the time when you sit down in your house, when you’re walking along the way. Post them in all kinds of places. Hear the Law.

Take the land.

Which then leads to the third primary command in Deuteronomy: Take the land. It’s very simple. Love the Lord, hear the Law, take the Land. Obviously, behind all these commands

is a context. God is telling His people how to live in a place, the Land that He's promised to them. We read in Deuteronomy 6:10, *"When the Lord your God brings you into the land that he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give you—with great and good cities,"* which are described as flowing with milk and honey back in verse three. Deuteronomy 11 says it's *"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."*

And that language is key because God is talking about His presence and His provision in a powerful way in this Land—which is what makes this Land so great and good. God's presence is there. God's provision is there in a particular way. Remember that God's greatest gift that He gives to His people is what? It's Himself. And that's what makes this Land so special, because God will dwell among His people in a powerful way there. It's why you see language all over Deuteronomy talking about the place where God will make His name to dwell among His people, the place where God will choose to dwell among His people.

Ah, I wish we had more time to dive into this. But just suffice it to say, this Land was an earthly inheritance for the people of God. So it was a literal land where God would dwell in a powerful way among His people. But even this earthly inheritance was established by God to foreshadow an eternal home that awaits all of God's people. I love Pastor Jim's sermon on Psalm 95 with a picture of rest there in the beginning of Hebrews, and how we can enter into God's rest by fulfilling the purpose of God's presence in our lives now, as we look toward the future.

This is the way the Bible later describes those patriarchs—Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses—in the end of Hebrews. And their lives, Hebrews 11 says, they made it clear that they were seeking a homeland—but this isn't the homeland they were seeking ultimately. They desired a better country that is a heavenly one. Going on to Moses and other men and women in the Old Testament, Hebrews 11:39-40 says, *"And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect."*

Even in the song "By Faith," talking about those who've gone before us by faith—even in going into the Promised Land, they were looking for another land, a heavenly one. And don't miss it. What is it that makes heaven so glorious? It's the fact that God dwells there in a powerful, perfect way. The whole picture we have of heaven in the Bible, in the end—Revelation 21—is a place where God is dwelling perfectly among His people.

So even this earthly inheritance of a Promised Land in Deuteronomy—what we're going to read about in Joshua and Judges in the days ahead—is only a foreshadowing of an eternal home for the people of God, where everybody who has turned from themselves and trusted in Him will dwell with God forever.

Choose life.

And that leads ultimately to the last primary command in Deuteronomy. So, love the Lord, hear the Law, take the Land, and finally, choose life. Choose life. This is where I want you to turn with me to Deuteronomy 30, which I mentioned earlier. This is a passage we're actually going to read this week in our Bible reading, but I want to go ahead and look forward to it by reading the last 10 verses of it now. So this is the end of Moses' last speech in Deuteronomy, and this is what he says. Verse 11, at the end of his last speech. These are his words:

For this commandment that I command you today is not too hard for you, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven, that you should say, 'Who will ascend to heaven for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?' Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, 'Who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?' But the word is very near you. It is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can do it.

Then verse 15. This is the conclusion:

See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil. If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God that I command you today, by loving the Lord your God, by walking in his ways, and by keeping his commandments and his statutes and his rules, then you shall live and multiply, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to take possession of it. But if your heart turns away, and you will not hear, but are drawn away to worship other gods and serve them, I declare to you today, that you shall surely perish. You shall not live long in the land that you are going over the Jordan to enter and possess. I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live, loving the Lord your God, obeying his voice and holding fast to him, for he is your life and length of days, that you may dwell in the land that the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them.

What a conclusion. There is so much we could say here, but don't... Let me just point out the obvious. God is not the only one doing the choosing in Deuteronomy. He commands His people to choose Him. Again, there's mystery here, but there's an urgency to this command. It's as if God is speaking to every single person—to every individual Israelite, and then all of Israel collectively. And He's saying, "You have a choice to make. The choice is simple, it's clear. You can turn away from God, and in so doing you can choose death and evil. Or you can put your trust in God, and in so doing you can choose life and good.

The Key Difference

Now, what happens next in Deuteronomy is really strange. Because right after this, in chapter 31 and 32, God instructs Moses to write a song that testifies to the fact that God's people will choose to disobey Him. In other words, God tells Moses to write a tune about how once they get into the Land they're going to choose death. They're not going to follow the game plan. Can you imagine that conversation between the coach and his team on Friday night before the football game on Saturday? "Okay, we've recounted the game plan. Now, I've written a little song that I want to sing to you guys, and the song is all about how you're not going to follow the game plan we just outlined, and as a result you're going to lose the game."

And then to make matters worse, we realize that the coach who's recounting the game plan—Moses here—is not even going to be at the game. What's going on here? Moses, because of his anger toward the people and his distrust of God back in Numbers in one particular instance, God told him that as a result of his sin then he would not enter the Promised Land now. Chapter 34, God takes Moses up to Mt. Nebo. I've stood there before. I can only imagine standing there; you can see the whole land of Canaan in front of you,

starting with the city of Jericho right there in front of you. So God takes him up there; God shows him the Land and says, "You can't go in."

This prophet Moses was unable to pay for Israel's sin.

And then Moses dies. And that's how the book ends. Moses dies, why? Because he's a sinner. Because he's a sinner. Even though he was a prophet, he couldn't escape the sin that plagued his own heart. And because of his sin, this prophet Moses was unable to pay for Israel's sin. Which leads to a depressing end to Deuteronomy. A nation of rebellious sinners about to enter into the Promised Land, where they would inevitably rebel against God in their sin, and the book ends with their leader in his sin—the prophet of God—dying.

But, amidst the sadness—let me just show you—three semblances of hope. Really quick, just three verses. You've got to see these.

The first is Deuteronomy 32:43. Look at it with me. Chapter 32, verse 43. So at the end of Moses' song, listen to the last verse, last line in the song, Deuteronomy 32:43, "*Rejoice with him, O heavens; bow down to him, all gods, for he avenges the blood of his children and takes vengeance on his adversaries.*" Then listen to this last line. "*He repays those who hate him and cleanses his people's land.*" Now, if you're reading the ESV, you've got some numbers in your Bible in that verse right there that take you to the bottom, because there are notes there. It says this could be translated "God atones for his people's land," or, "atones for his land and his people." Some other translations like the NIV say God will "make atonement for his land and his people." So here at the end of the song that's talking about how the people of Israel are going to disobey, we've got this promise that that's not the end of the story. That's not the final word. God is going to make a way to atone for His people's rebellion, to provide for their cleansing.

So that's one semblance of hope. Then keep turning back to the left. Go back to Deuteronomy 30, which we read just a second ago, starting in verse 11. If we look back at verse six before that...verse six in Deuteronomy chapter 30. God's talking about bringing His people into the Land, and verse six says, "*The Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.*" In other words, God says, "I'm going to bring about a change in your heart that will cause you to love me." That's a semblance of hope.

And then the last one, Deuteronomy 18. This is the last place we'll turn. Deuteronomy 18. Because all this we just read, these semblances of hope, beg the question: how? How is that going to happen? How is God going to atone for His people's sin? And how is God going to change His people's hearts? And the answer is promised back in Deuteronomy 18:15. Read what Moses says there:

The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen—just as you desired of the Lord your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly, when you said, 'Let me not hear again the voice of the Lord my God or see this great fire any more, lest I die.' And the Lord said to me, 'They are right in what they have spoken. I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him.'

Ah, see it right here in the middle of Deuteronomy, we have a promise of another Prophet to come, a Prophet who is different from Moses. Moses was a good leader, but he was a sinful leader, leading a sinful people. And as a result he was unable to atone for Israel's sin.

He was unable to change their hearts. He was unable to represent the Word of God perfectly to the people.

The greater prophet Jesus is uniquely able to pay for our sin.

But one day another Prophet would come, who would perfectly represent and reveal the Word of God to His people. He would not sin once. He would never rebel against God, and as a result, He would be uniquely able to pay the price for sinners. Don't miss it. The prophet Moses was unable to pay for Israel's sin, but the greater Prophet Jesus Christ is uniquely able to pay for our sin. This is the good news of the gospel even here in Deuteronomy.

Non-Christian friend, we invite you in particular to hear this. Hear this: God has sent His Son, Jesus Christ, the perfect Revelation of who He is, and He has lived a sinless life. And though He never sinned, though there was no sin to warrant the curse of God—death in His life—He died. The reason He died is to provide salvation for sinners. Romans 3 says that God presented Jesus as a sacrifice of atonement, which means that God poured out the death due sinners on His Son so that sinners like you and me could be saved.

To use language from Deuteronomy, even what we've read, Christ took the curse of sin on our behalf, in our place, so that sinners like you and me who do not deserve God's blessing can receive it. And this Prophet changes the ball game altogether. Because—follow this—Jesus makes it possible to carry out the game plan. For when we repent and we believe in Christ, when we turn from our sin and put our trust in Him He enables us to love the Lord. He changes our hearts. He puts a new heart, a new spirit inside of us, that now desires God, that loves God, that longs for God. He enables us to do what Deuteronomy commands us to do: to love the Lord.

And He gives us a new law. He inaugurates a new covenant based on His words that He speaks for our good. So we obey the commands of Christ, not as a burden to bear or a means of merit, but as a gift of grace. God has shown us how to relate to Him through faith in Christ, and so we joyfully walk in His ways.

He enables us to love the Lord. He gives us a new law. He leads us into a new land. Before He left the earth He told the people of God, "Now go," to all His followers, "make the love of God known among the nations. Don't go to war against the nations. Instead, give your life to winning the nations with the love of Christ." We're going into new lands, after new peoples, all led by Christ. And we say to people there, peoples everywhere, "God loves you."

God has sent His Son to die for sinners, and for all who trust in Him He will give eternal life. So choose life. This is the invitation for every single person. Every single person who hears this has a choice. You have a choice. Right where you are you have a choice today. You can turn away from God, and in so doing, choose evil and death. Or you can put your trust in God and in so doing choose good and life. Can I urge you to choose life, if you've never put your faith in God, today to trust in what Jesus has done to cover over your sins, to enter into relationship, a love relationship, with God—the God who created you and defined life in following His good law?

And for all who have trusted in Christ, you are in a relationship with God—love the Lord. Choose every day to live and love with all your heart and your soul and your might given over toward Him. Love the Lord. Hear His law. Every day, may it be central in your life to put it everywhere. Fill your mind, fill your heart, with His law. And take the land. Go and make disciples—here, this week, go and make disciples of all nations, and all in anticipation

of the Day when the sovereign God who saves will gather men and women from every nation around the throne in the eternal home where we will dwell with Him and He will dwell with us forever.

Choose life today. Choose life every day. Choose to love Him, listen to Him, to worship Him in holy fear, serve Him wholeheartedly. This is what Jesus came to do: He came to make it possible through His body and through His blood for you and I to have life, and for you and I to be in a love relationship with the God of the universe.

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