



TRUTH APPLICATIONS

Sermon Notes

Holiness: Three Things We Must Remember (1)

Deuteronomy 10:12-11:32

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Holiness and the Way We Live

- Writing to Christians who had converted to Christ from the pagan world, Peter summed up what it means to be “Christian” (1 Pet. 4:16) by a call to the highest standard: be holy as God is holy (1 Pet. 1:15-16).
- The statement is at the same time breathtaking and penetrating.
 - Breathtaking: because it calls us to match the essential nature of God himself!
 - Penetrating: because it is a standard that applies to *all* conduct.
- Three other passages in 1 Peter help us see the concrete application of that concept in the midst of a culture given to all manner of vice and evil: 1:14; 2:11-12a; 4:2-3.
- Significantly, 1 Pet. 1:16 quotes Lev. 11:44, reminding us that *both* testaments connect God’s holiness and our conduct (see e.g., Lev. 19:1-4, 9-18, 29-37).

The Discomfort of Ethical Holiness

- The real challenge is not understanding the idea that God’s holiness and our conduct are connected, but applying it.
 - Some have stressed the specific commands (“the rules”) that spell out how God’s holiness will look in real life to the point of practically devaluing people.
 - In extreme forms, some see it like a set of scales in which we try to get enough rule-keeping conduct on one side to outweigh the rule-breaking behavior on the other; the side with the most on its scale wins (or *earns* the outcome).
 - Others resist that overly zealous rule-orientation, elevating the value of people. While an important corrective to the above emphasis, some go too far, positing subjective ethical systems (based on intent, the most loving thing to do, the shared wisdom of a culture, etc.) that in practical terms dismisses the place of any rules.
 - The question is further complicated by related questions of free will versus oppression, whether the Old Testament or New Testament view of God is the real God, and what to do about ethical dilemmas not specifically mentioned in any law.
 - And then there is the human tendency to go our own way, either by just ignoring the commands or finding creative ways around them.
- What we want to begin to see in today’s study is that both testaments present the same framework for working through the sometimes messy questions of applying holiness to ethics.

Today, we'll narrow our study to a short section of Deuteronomy to illustrate the core principles that are at the heart of lived holiness.

What Deuteronomy Is About

- Deuteronomy (*deutero*, second; *nomos*, law) is Moses' review of Israel's deliverance and the giving of the law for the second generation about to enter the promised land.
- Our text concludes a section comprised of Moses' second speech, a review of general covenant stipulations (see the outline in the *ESV Study Bible*, pp. 328-329).
 - Introduction to Moses' second speech (4:44-49).
 - The Ten Commandments (5:1-21).
 - Israel requests Moses to mediate God's law (5:22-33).
 - The greatest commandment (6:1-25).
 - Exclusive relationship worked out in conquest and worship (7:1-26).
 - Learning the lessons of the wilderness (8:1-20).
 - Recounting the golden calf incident (9:1-10:11).
 - Exhortation (10:12-11:32).
- The principles we are about to emphasize are found throughout this section (and Deuteronomy and the Pentateuch generally).

Principle # 1: It's Grace

- God's call for his people to be holy is first, foremost, and always by *GRACE*.
- As we will note momentarily, 10:12-11:32 includes several words like *require*, *commandments*, *statutes*, and *fear of the LORD*.
- But, these words are always used in terms of the *response* the people were to make to God's nature and gracious actions.
 - 10:14 — remember whose universe this is; that can be spun in a way that depicts God as arbitrary, tyrannical, and even malevolent.
 - But, 10:15 will not allow such an interpretation: God *loved* their fathers, *chose* them, *especially* above all others (see 7:6-8; 9:4-6).
 - 10:17-18 returns to God's awesome nature; but notice the emphasis on his fairness and concern for the ones most likely to be abused by despots.
 - 10:21 reviews what God had done for them: great and terrifying things (the latter especially applicable to the Egyptians and many Israelites in the wilderness).
 - 10:22 summarizes the principle in concrete terms: their ancestors went down to Egypt as starving refugees, submitting to the monarchy which later turned to oppression because of their fear of Israel's growth (Ex. 1:7-10).
 - Significantly, the theme of grace becomes even more pronounced throughout chapter 11, the culmination of the exhortation (see 11:2-7, 10-12, 14-15, 22-25).

Principle # 2: God Means What He Says

- God does give rules, and means what he says; but he does so with the knowledge of consequences and in the interest of our good.
- Our text demonstrates both sides of this point.
 - 10:12-13 use six rule-words: *require*, *fear*, *walk (in all his ways)*, *serve*, *commandments*, and *statutes*.

- 10:16 calls for inner transformation, not just external compliance; notice the charge to “be no longer stubborn.”
- 10:17 emphasizes God’s nature in a way that says neither he nor his commands should be taken lightly; God’s fairness is the basis for expecting human fairness.
- 10:18 also stresses God’s justice and implies people should do the same; notice his concern for orphans, widows, and foreigners (see NET). “Treat them right for their good” is the message. (On the latter group, see v. 19.)
- The following exhortation expands this emphasis, focusing on rules and commands designed to help them in the promised land (11:1, 8-9, 13-15), and stressing that there will be consequences for non-conformity (11:16-17).
- Notice how often Moses expands on the last phrase in 10:13: “for your good.”

Principle # 3: It’s Always Personal

- Holiness expectations are from a *person* and for *people*.
- Notice how often Moses stresses that they are obeying the *LORD*, not the rules.
 - 10:12 - “fear the LORD your God.”
 - 10:12 - “to love him” (see 11:1).¹
 - 11:8 - the command is the one “I command you today” (also 11:13).
- Notice also how often the reason given for obedience is that doing so was for their own good or for the good of others: it is *better* for people to live the way the omniscient God has said.
 - 10:13 - the commands are “for *your* good.”
 - 10:19 - loving the foreigner not only imitates God (11:18), it also is done from a motivation of empathy.
 - 11:8-9, 14-17 - living by the commands will result in a better life than not following them; it will maintain the goodness of the land (11:10-12).

What If . . . ?

- What might Israel have experienced if they had consistently taken God’s teaching to heart? We both wonder (given the promised blessings) and don’t wonder (given the self-centeredness of people) why they didn’t.
- Perhaps an answer is found in Deuteronomy 11:18-21. In a repetition of 6:6-9, they were to make sure that the ways and commands of God were taught and instilled into their children, and their children, and their children, etc.
- But, first they were to reflect on and internalize the teaching themselves. Clearly, that did not happen. Could it be that we’ve not done it either? Might that be the reason we sometimes struggle with holiness?
- God blesses us by grace, tells us what’s best for us as we live, and seeks our personal response in relationship with him. How are we responding?

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¹ The Hebrew *ahab*, “love” in 10:12, occurs 528 times in the Old Testament. Only Psalms (102) and Proverbs (69) use it more than Deuteronomy (60), Next closest are Hosea (37), Isaiah (27), Jeremiah (26), and Genesis (25).