

LOVE AND OBEY THE LORD FOR YOUR OWN GOOD

Deuteronomy 10:12-11:32

Key Verses: 10:12-13

And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God ask of you but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in obedience to him, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to observe the Lord's commands and decrees that I am giving you today for your own good?

When our three children, Daniel, Sarah and Esther, were growing up, they had piano lessons every week. They like it, but they weren't excited about the daily practice. They would ask, "Why do we have to do this everyday, when we can do other fun things?" Only now, as adults, they appreciate the opportunity they were given to learn the instrument. It was for their own good.

After the exodus from their slavery in Egypt, God gave his people many laws to obey. He wanted them to overcome their slave mentality and become a holy nation people. But they felt burdened by the laws. They complained a lot against God and against Moses who delivered the laws to them. They didn't know it was for their own good.

In today's passage, Moses reminds us that God asks of us to love him, obey him, and observe his commands and decrees for our own good. May the Holy Spirit convict our hearts to know how deep the love of God is!

I. FOR YOUR OWN GOOD (10:12-22)

Look at verses 12-13. *And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God ask of you but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in obedience to him, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to observe the Lord's commands and decrees that I am giving you today for your own good?* In Horeb, Moses went up on the mountain to have a 40-day fasting prayer, pleading God's mercy on his people who had committed the sin of worshipping the golden calf. God heard Moses' intercessory prayer and restored his covenant with Israel. Now, God asked them to do five things: (1) fear the Lord; (2) walk in obedience to him; (3) love him; (4) serve the Lord with all your heart and with all your soul; and (5) observe the Lord's commands and decrees. Wow. The Israelites began to feel burdened again when they heard this. They probably felt like children who are told to practice piano everyday.

We should notice, however, that Moses added these words at the end—"for your own good." God asked them to do these things, not for him but for the good of his people (Dt 6:1-2; 24). Essentially, God wanted a loving relationship with his people. In Genesis 2, God blessed Adam and Eve by providing the Garden of Eden with everything they needed to be happy. Then he told them not to eat from the tree in the middle of the garden. They were to remember and obey the word of God so that they could keep a

loving relationship with God. It was their Bible. It was God's love for them. But when Satan tempted them, they disobeyed God's words and sin entered into human history.

Some people today claim that if they disregard God and become totally free from him, they can be happy, because they can do whatever they want. But this is not true. That's what Adam and Eve tried to do and terrible things happened because of it. God told us to fear him with reverence and love him, and obey his commandments, for our own good. We can be truly happy if we have a loving relationship with God by loving him and obeying his words.

What is more amazing is that even before his people did any of these things, God loved them first. Look at verses 14-15. *To the Lord your God belong the heavens, even the highest heavens, the earth and everything in it. Yet the Lord set his affection on your ancestors and loved them, and he chose you, their descendants, above all the nations—as it is today.* The Lord God is the Creator God. The heavens and the earth belong to him, which means, he has sovereign authority over everything in this universe and beyond. Yet, he set his affection on Israel. He chose Israel among all nations. Why did he love them? Did they do something to deserve his love? No. He just loved them.

This is true for us. Jesus loves us. He loves us so much that he gave his life on the cross to save us. You ask why? What did I do to deserve such love? We cannot give a good answer. He loves us, in spite of ourselves. How amazing is this!

Knowing the love of God, what must we do to show our love for him? Moses gives the answer in verses 16-22. Let me summarize the key points. **First, circumcise your hearts.** God wants us to repent our pride and turn to him humbly. We are often stiff-necked (16). Our hearts are hardened because of our pride. God wants us to repent (circumcise our hearts) so that we can love him and obey his words, even though circumcision (repentance) comes with pain. **Second, love your neighbors** (17-19). We should show no partiality and accept no bribes. We must defend the cause of the fatherless and the widow. We should also love the foreigners residing among us, giving them food and clothing. **Third, fear the Lord your God and serve him** (20). To fear the Lord is to show him honor and respect. It is to respect his words more than our own ideas. We must hold fast to him and take our oaths in his name. **Fourth, praise the Lord** (21-22). He is our God, who performed for us great and awesome wonders. The biggest miracle he performed for us is that he changed a sinner like me into a servant of God. May the Lord help me to praise him all the days of my life!

II. LOVE AND OBEY THE LORD (11:1-25)

Look at verse 1. *Love the Lord your God and keep his requirements, his decrees, his laws and his commands always.* Once again Moses told his people to love the Lord God and keep his commands always. In verses 2-7, he reminded them again how much the Lord God had done for them so that they might obey the Lord with a sense of history. It was not their children but they themselves had saw and experienced firsthand how God performed signs and wonders in Egypt and through their wilderness journey.

For example, God divided the Red Sea so that his people could cross it as on dry land. When the pursuing Egyptian army tried to cross the same sea, the walls of water closed on them and they were drowned along with their horses and chariots. Archeologists are still finding the wheels of the chariots at the bottom of the sea. God also punished his own people when they became rebellious. For example, Korah, Dathan and Abiram openly challenged the authority of Moses and Aaron. This was a serious rebellion against God and his servants. They were swallowed up along with their family members when the earth opened its mouth right before the eyes of all Israel (Nu 16). This showed that our God is a God of righteous judgment as well as love and compassion.

God's punishments on those who rebelled against him and his servants were fearsome. But his blessings on those who love and obey him are also awesome. Look at verses 8-9. *Observe therefore all the commands I am giving you today, so that you may have the strength to go in and take over the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess, and so that you may live long in the land the Lord swore to your ancestors to give to them and their descendants, a land flowing with milk and honey.* God would give them the strength to enter the Promised Land, a land flowing with milk and honey. The expression of "the land flowing with milk and honey" includes not only abundant human blessings but also the abundance of life when we have a loving relationship with God. Do you want to be truly happy? You should love and obey the Lord with all your heart.

The Promised Land would be different from the land of Egypt. Look at verses 10-12. *The land you are entering to take over is not like the land of Egypt, from which you have come, where you planted your seed and irrigated it by foot as in a vegetable garden. But the land you are crossing the Jordan to take possession of is a land of mountains and valleys that drinks rain from heaven. It is a land the Lord your God cares for; the eyes of the Lord your God are continually on it from the beginning of the year to its end.* The land of Egypt was irrigated from the Nile River. But Canaan was a land of mountains and valleys. They would have to depend on God totally. If God didn't send rain, they would not have anything to harvest. Humanly speaking, depending on the irrigated water is better than relying on unpredictable nature. I remember how my parents (who were farmers) sighed a lot when rain did not come in time. They had to suffer a lot because of draught as well as flood. No one likes this kind of uncertainty. But the Promised Land was a special land, because it was a land the Lord cared for. His eyes were continually on the land. God wanted his people to depend on him rather than the things of this world or their own abilities. This applies to us as we live a life of faith in this world.

God promised an abundant life for his people if they depended on him. Look at verses 13-15. *So if you faithfully obey the commands I am giving you today—to love the Lord your God and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul—then I will send rain on your land in its season, both autumn and spring rains, so that you may gather in your grain, new wine and olive oil. I will provide grass in the fields for your cattle, and you will eat and be satisfied.* On the other hand, what would happen to them if they would turn away from God and worship other gods? Moses warned in verses 16-

17. *Be careful, or you will be enticed to turn away and worship other gods and bow down to them. Then the Lord's anger will burn against you, and he will shut up the heavens so that it will not rain and the ground will yield no produce, and you will soon perish from the good land the Lord is giving you.*

In order to love and serve the Lord, God's people must pay close attention to his words. To love the Lord is to love the word of God! To what extent should God's people love the word of God? Let us read verses 18-21. *Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds; tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates, so that your days and the days of your children may be many in the land the Lord swore to give your ancestors, as many as the days that the heavens are above the earth.* Moses had given the same admonishment earlier in Deuteronomy 6 (Dt 6:6-9). He repeats it here, indicating its importance. The word of God is his gift to us. Our love for God begins with loving the word of God. A person who loves the Lord would begin each day with the word of God and ends it with the word of God. Their heart and mind is totally focused on the word of God. Their delight is in the word of God, as they meditate on it day and night (Ps 1:2). God wants us to be men and women of his words so that the word of God may be ready to come out from our hearts and mouths. Some young men in our society are into football or baseball so much that they remember even small details of games, players, and statistics. But as God's people, we must know the details of his words more than the batting average of Derek Jeter. I want each of us to think about this. How much do you love the word of God? Is the Bible study a source of your joy or burden? Is your Bible study like eating a delicious chocolate cake? All of us are concerned with the current state of our ministry. But as long as we love the Lord and the word of God, we don't have to be worried. God will do his work among us. Only when we find ourselves with a lukewarm attitude toward the word of God, then we must be worried--a lot.

How would God bless the Israelites if they would love the Lord and walk in obedience to him and hold fast to him? Their days would be as many as the days that the heavens are above the earth (21). The Lord would drive out all the nations that were larger and stronger than they (23). He would extend their territory (24). No one would be able to stand against them as the Lord would put the terror and fear of them wherever they would go, as the Lord promised (25). In other words, their future would depend on how much they loved the Lord and obeyed his words. Israel was special. Other nations depended on their military strength. But Israel had God who was on their side. This is true for us. All blessings flow from the Lord. Our future depends on how much we love the Lord and obey his words.

III. TWO CHOICES FOR US: BLESSING OR CURSE? (26-32)

To sum up what was at stake for their future, Moses told his people that there were only two choices set before them. They had to choose between a blessing and a curse. Look at verses 26-28. *See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse—*

the blessing if you obey the commands of the Lord your God that I am giving you today; the curse if you disobey the commands of the Lord your God and turn from the way that I command you today by following other gods, which you have not known. The choices were very clear. They would receive a blessing if they obeyed the commands of the Lord, but a curse if they disobeyed and turned from the way by following other gods. There was no middle ground. There would be no riding the fence. They had to make a choice. In fact, once they entered the land, they were to proclaim on Mount Gerizim the blessings, and on Mount Ebal the curses (29; Dt 27:1-14; Jos 8:30-35). The two mountains rise within sight of each other, with the city of Shechem between them. Mt. Gerizim is to the north of Shechem. Mt. Ebal is to the south with a barren appearance. The people of Israel had to proclaim what their choice was—to obey the Lord to stand on the mountain of the blessings or to turn away from the Lord to be on the mountain of curses. Moses of course encouraged them once again to make a better choice. Look at verses 31-32. *You are about to cross the Jordan to enter and take possession of the land the Lord your God is giving you. When you have taken it over and are living there, be sure that you obey all the decrees and laws I am setting before you today.*

In conclusion, God gave us his laws to obey for our own good and for our happiness. The Israelites were burdened when God told them to obey his laws to become a holy nation people rather than following the idol worshipers in the Promised Land. They complained and rebelled against God because they didn't know the heart of God. We have been saved by the grace of God. Jesus came to die on the cross to take away our sin and death. If we truly know how much God loves us, we can obey the word of God with awesome thanks and reverence. Let us remember that God wants to have a loving relationship with us. That's why he wants us to love him and obey his words. And it is for our own good. Let us read our key verses together (10:12-13): *And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God ask of you but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in obedience to him, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to observe the Lord's commands and decrees that I am giving you today for your own good?*