

Deuteronomy 27

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[0 : 00] While we're getting further through the book of Deuteronomy, Moses is preaching to the people of Israel, people who 40 years earlier God had rescued out of Egypt, people who had been wandering around the desert for 40 years, people who were about to go into the promised land.

Now what do explorers do? The great ancient explorers, what did explorers do when they first reached a new territory? Or when Neil Armstrong stepped onto the moon, what did he do? Planted a flag, right?

When soldiers win a battle and claim enemy territory, what did they do? Put up their flag, didn't they? Why did they put up a flag in those cases? It's a sense of achievement. This is ours, we've done it.

We're in charge now. In contrast, what did the people of Israel have to do when they reached the promised land? Look at Deuteronomy 27 verse 2.

On the day you cross over the Jordan to the land the Lord your God is giving you, you shall set up large stones and plaster them with plaster. As we read on, we discover they were to write the words of God's law, the whole commandment, the whole Torah, the fatherly instruction on those stones.

[1 : 14] Instead of a flag to show their own achievements, they were to build up stones to show this was God's gift. Instead of celebrating what they had done, they were to remember that this was God's faithfulness to them.

Instead of pride, it was expressing dependence. It was the words of the covenant, the covenant law which we've written on this. Now, what is a covenant? A covenant is a commitment between two parties.

And that commitment is expressed in mutual obligations which show their faithfulness to one another. So of course in our lives today, marriage is a great example of a covenant.

Two parties come together, make commitments, and those commitments are expressed in mutual obligations. Forsaking all others, they'll cling only to you.

And so it was with Israel. They're to forsake all others and cling only to the Lord God who had done so much for them, rescued them, given them the land that he's promised. And Moses wants the people of Israel to remember that if they're to enjoy all that God has given them, they need to be faithful to that covenant, faithful to that commitment.

[2 : 26] And so here in Deuteronomy 27 and 28, we're reading instructions about a covenant renewal ceremony that are to take place when they're in the land. A reaffirmation of their commitment to the God who was so committed to them.

So how was Israel to enjoy the land? How were they to enjoy these privileges God had given them? Answer? By being faithful to the covenant.

By being faithful to what God had said. And that faith was to be shown in obedience. As Christians, how do we enjoy all that God promises us in the Lord Jesus Christ?

The forgiveness of sins, the hope of eternal life with him. How do we get to enjoy those things?

Through faith in Christ. How is that faith displayed in our lives? Through obedience.

Jesus said, if you love me, you'll obey what I command. That doesn't change. Same dynamic as it were. Israel could not be complacent moving into the promised land.

[3 : 31] Any more than a couple getting married could be complacent that their relationship is just going to happen all right now. Israel had to show their faithfulness. And we see that here in this chapter.

First of all, verses 1 to 8, we see that faithfulness to God's covenant is the only way to enjoy fellowship with God. Faithfulness to God's covenant is the only way to enjoy fellowship with God, enjoy God's gifts.

Do you see the three things they had to do as they moved into this land? The land that they'd been destined for for so long. There were three things. Verse 2, erect this pile of stones and paint the law on it, or write the law on it.

Verse 5, they had to build an altar. And verse 8, offer sacrifices. Verses 7 and 8, 6 and 7 rather. Offer sacrifices. Why do they do all those things?

Well, the pillars, the covenant words, the commandments written on them, were a reminder of the Lord's faithfulness to them. He kept his promise. Not only were they a reminder, they were, and therefore they showed the people what a faithful response was to look like.

[4 : 32] This is how you live as God's people. Live as the people he's made you to be. And that was a permanent thing. And it was plain for all to see. You can see that if you look at verse 1 and also at verse 9.

See verse 1, it's Moses and the elders commanding the people. We call it verse 9, it's Moses and the Levitical priests. See, Moses was not going to go to the promised land.

He was reaching the end of his journey. But now the priests and the elders are taking their responsibility of exhorting and leading the people towards faithfulness. This is a permanent thing. It's a perpetual thing. All generations need to be faithful to the Lord's covenant. And the requirements are plain, aren't they? Look at verse 8. You shall write on the stone all the words of this law very plainly.

It's plain. It's there for all to see. It's permanent. It's for all generations. It's plain. It's for all people. All God's people were required to show faith in the covenant. And this pile of stones with a law written on them were going to be there as a witness to the people as well.

[5 : 38] If they started to break the law, then the law being up there was going to be a reminder to them that, oh, we're going wrong here. It's like those signs on the trains or on buses. Ticket inspectors operate in this area.

If you do not have a ticket, that's a witness against you, isn't it? That tells you I better get off and get my ticket, swipe my list of cards, whatever it is I haven't done yet. And so it was.

These pillars are there. There's a witness against them if they do go astray. To point them to their need for forgiveness. And that's where the altar comes in. Look at verse 6.

The altar was the place where they could go for forgiveness. The burnt offerings were sacrifices to make atonement, to bring forgiveness, to restore that relationship, to make them one with God again.

They were there provided by the Lord, provided in the covenant, in the law. There is mercy, there is forgiveness where people know they go astray. Through those sacrifices, rebellious people could enjoy fellowship with God again.

[6 : 45] And that's what we see down in verse 7. You shall sacrifice peace offerings. You shall eat there, and you shall rejoice before the Lord your God. A peace offering was a very special offering in the Old Testament.

It was the only one that the regular people, not just the priests, could eat and partake of. It was a picture, an enactment of a meal with God, of enjoying fellowship with Him.

Now we know in our own lives, it's great to have a meal with friends. We had some friends around last night. It was great. Our kids get on with their kids. It was brilliant. And it's lovely to enjoy a meal with friends, isn't it?

And that's what the peace offering was. Peace with God is established. You can enjoy a meal with Him. Now the Passover was a particular type of peace offering.

A particular type of meal where the whole family could eat together in God's presence. How do we have that today? What is our tangible sign of fellowship with God, of eating in His presence?

[7 : 43] What's this? As we gather around the Lord's table. As we hear Him reaffirming His covenant commitment for us. This is my body given for you.

This is my blood shed for you. This is my covenant commitment. As we hear again our Lord Jesus' love and taste it and touch it. So we affirm our commitment to Him as we embrace the benefits of the covenant by faith.

Taking the bread and wine. And so we eat together. Not just communion with one another, but communion with a triune God. This is our fellowship with Him.

This is our covenant meal. So you see, the same principle holds true for us as it did for them. For Israel to enjoy fellowship with God.

To enjoy all the blessings God had promised them. To enjoy that land. They had to be faithful to the covenant. And so do we. Paul writing to the Colossians.

[8 : 46] So a bunch of confused Christians who are thinking about trying to add things to their faith. Not just Jesus, but some spiritual experience. Not just Jesus, but some religious works.

Paul says this. Paul says this. You are in the kingdom of the Son He loves. You are redeemed. You are reconciled to God. You are holy and perfect in His sight. Colossians 1 verse 23.

If, indeed, you continue in the faith. God is not just God out in the gospel. We need to hold to the faith.

Just as Israel did, so do we. It's the same dynamic as it works with us as well. Just as the law on those pillars pointed Israel to their need for the sacrifices on the altar.

So God's law today. For those of us who aren't yet believers. It points us to our need for forgiveness. It points us to the great sacrifice. To the Lord Jesus. The sacrifice we remember and celebrate in the Lord's Supper.

[9 : 43] Even for those of us who are Christians. God's law stands there as a reminder daily of our need for the grace that is only available in the Lord Jesus Christ. Our need to be faithful to Him who has been so faithful to us.

That means if you're here, as you know, you haven't actually accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. If you know you're not trusting only on His sacrifice for you.

Then can I urge you? Come to the one who can make you right with God. The one who does buy forgiveness for us. The one through whom we can inherit eternal life.

The only one through whom we can have fellowship with God. Come to Christ. As we celebrate the Lord's Supper later on, we're not only looking back to that celebration.

That sacrifice rather. Christ dying for our sin. We're not only looking around in the present to enjoying fellowship with one another in Christ. And fellowship with God. A meal with Him. But we also look ahead.

[10 : 50] Because this is a foretaste. Just as Israel going into the promised land was just a picture of the promised land to come for all God's people. When we are finally in His presence forever in the new creation.

So this meal is just a foretaste of the great banquet to come. When our Lord Jesus serves us at the wedding feast of the Lamb. Where all God's people from across time and down through the ages join together.

And we sing His praises forever as we've just sung. So we are called to cling to Christ. To be faithful to all He has done for us. We have an advantage that Israel didn't have.

They just had the law written on the stones, didn't they? In the new covenant, God by His Spirit writes His law on our hearts. Giving us a desire to obey. And so by faith we cling to Him.

We're not complacent. But we trust in Him. As Jesus said, if you love me, you'll do what I command. We can do that because of the work of His Spirit in us. Because what He commands is written on our hearts.

[11 : 53] Well that's the message of verses 1 to 8. Faithfulness to God's covenant is the only way to enjoy fellowship with God. To enjoy all that He promises us. But what does that look like in daily life?

Is that just doing some religious things? Is coming to church, celebrating the Lord's Supper? Going through religious acts? Knowing the law written on the stones? No, the ceremony that's commanded in verses 9 to 26 teaches us that faithfulness to the covenant is shown in personal integrity.

It's shown integrity, a wholehearted commitment to the Lord's ways. But as we look at that, we need to first notice the timing of it. Because Israel is asked to respond with integrity and faithfulness because of what God has already done for them.

And that's the same for us. Just look at how everything about this ceremony, verses 9 on, points to God's prior grace, to God's goodness to them.

First of all, the location of the ceremony. Look at verse 9. Well, no, it's verse 11. It's a lot of verse 9, isn't it?

[13 : 01] They're on, they're given it on Mount Ebal, Mount Gerizim. Mount Ebal we've read about back in verse 1. And then verse 12, I found it at last.

Mount Gerizim as well. What's special about these places? Well, first of all, they were in the promised land. So this is all happening after God had given them what they'd been promised. That's the first thing.

The second thing is, if you're on Mount Ebal, Mount Ebal is a very high mountain. And it's pretty much the midpoint, I'm told, between north and south, in the territory God had promised them. So if you're up there, you can look out and kind of see the land the Lord had given them.

So not only were they in the land, they could see the land. But most importantly all about this location is there between those two mountains, between Gerizim and Ebal, there's a place called Shechem.

And Shechem is the place where in Genesis chapter 12, verse 6, God had first promised this land to Abraham's descendants. So everything about this place, everything about their standing, shouted, God is faithful.

[14:06] He has done this for you. So the timing of it and the geography of it all pointed to God's grace to them. So how were they to respond? Well then, you see their motivation for responding was to be gratitude.

They were responding to what God has done, not trying to earn what God has done. And it's really important we get this clear. There is a very big difference between legalistic obedience and gospel obedience.

Between legalistic obedience or religious obedience and gospel obedience or true Christian obedience. So what's the difference? Well, legalistic obedience, religious obedience, is about obeying so you can earn something.

Whereas gospel obedience is about obeying because you've been given something. Obeying because you've been given something. Legalistic obedience is about obeying so I get accepted. I'll do these things so God loves me. Gospel obedience, Christian obedience, is about obeying because you're loved. Because in Christ you are a beloved child of God.

[15:14] Religious obedience is motivated by anxiety in a sense by pride. I will not fail. I must not fail. Gospel obedience is motivated by gratitude.

Look what I've been given. And finally, the big difference between the two is legalistic obedience, religious obedience, is all about self-will. I will do this.

My effort. Gospel obedience is empowered by the Spirit's work. If we trust in Jesus Christ, we have the Holy Spirit in us.

Working in us. Making us different. Making us new. Making us able to obey. Making us want to obey. So we've got to get that clear in our heads. Otherwise we'll fall into pride and despair if we're just doing legalistic, religious obedience.

Whereas there's freedom and life in the Gospel obedience. So what does this Gospel obedience look like? What does this ceremony teach us about it? If you look down to verse 12.

[16:17] You see who's involved in this ceremony. It was actually all 12 tribes. I don't read all the names now. But all 12 tribes of Israel were involved in this ceremony. It was for all God's people.

All the people. And it was all the commands. There were 12 curses they had to pronounce and say amen to. Why 12? Well, 12 is a number of completeness in the Old Testament. So those 12 commandments stood as representative of the whole law.

It was all God's people. All God's will. All God's commandments. All God's commandments. And it was for all of life. As we look through these curses briefly in overview, we'll see they got into every part of life.

And these curses were gracious warnings. You may think a curse doesn't sound like it's very gracious. But actually it's the way we talk to our children a lot, isn't it? If you can sit properly through this meal and eat it nicely, then you can have a dessert.

If you do not sit properly, if you do start throwing your food around, you will not have a dessert. Now that's not a curse. You're not going to get your dessert.

[17:22] Well, it's placing the choice before them. How are you going to behave? And that's what these were for Israel. God has given you so much. What are you going to choose to do? If you choose to reject, beware.

Not just there's no dessert, but there is a curse. There is a curse. These curses are gracious warnings to motivate their obedience. Can you imagine the impact? Look at verse 15 from the first of these curses.

Curse through the man who makes a carved or cast iron image. An abomination to the Lord. A thing made by the hands of a craftsman. And sets it up in secret. And all the people shall say and answer, Amen.

Can you imagine today, instead of having our normal confession of faith, we read through all these, announcing the curses, and we all had to say Amen at the end of every one of them.

How would we feel? It would pretty quickly show us two things, wouldn't it? It would remind us we are each individually accountable to the Lord. It would also remind us we are individually accountable to one another.

[18 : 24] As God's people together. We're not just individuals. And so it was for the people of Israel going through this ceremony. It showed them they were accountable to the Lord and accountable to each other.

It also showed them the true horrific nature of sin. The first word of each of these verses from 15 through 26. What is the first word? Cursed.

Do you know where that word first appears in the Bible, who it's addressed to? Genesis chapter 3, verse 14. The Lord God speaking to the serpent. Proclaiming the judgment on God's enemy.

So the message is, if we align ourselves to the life of sin and rebellion against God, we are aligning ourselves with the devil's ways. We are fit for the judgment that he will get.

That's the message that Israel was speaking to themselves here. Saying amen to each of these. Showing them the true nature of being God's people. Accountable to one another.

[19 : 25] Accountable to the Lord. Showing them the true nature of sin. They're aligning themselves with Satan. It also shows them what covenant faithfulness looks like. As we look through these curses very briefly, you'll see they show the people the integrity that faithfulness means.

It means there's no hiding, no holidays, and no half measures. No hiding, no holidays, and no half measures. First of all, no hiding. We've seen that already in verse 15.

Anyone who makes an image in secret. Or down in verse 24, it talks about accepting a bride in secret. A lot of these things were laws which people couldn't see other people breaking them. Couldn't get evidence for other people breaking them. So there's no hiding. That's the point. God sees what goes on. It'd be very easy, wouldn't it, to be, for us today as for Israel then, to be part of public worship.

To come along on a Sunday and worship God wholeheartedly. To learn the catechism. To know the scriptures. And yet at home or at school during the week, to have some other idols.

[20 : 34] Something else that owns our affections and drives our behavior. So it might be at school. Just wanting to fit in. Just succumbing to peer pressure. It might be expressed in ganging up on other kids.

It might be expressed in joining in the gossip. Joining in the cynicism. Laughing at things we shouldn't laugh at. When that happens, why does it happen? Whether it's at school or in the workplace.

It's because we want to fit in, isn't it? It's because we want to feel like we belong to the people we're with. In that case, it's actually our idol is acceptance by people.

Instead of worshipping the living God. We can't have any carved images. Be they mental, or just things which are good, which we make our ultimate thing.

Idols of any sort. Anything that shapes our ambition. Or owns our allegiance. There can be no hiding. It's not only in worship. It's also in the area of sexual ethics. Look down to verse 20 for a moment.

[21 : 34] Verses 20 to 23 are all about sexual ethics. So verse 20. Cursed be anyone who lies with his father's wife. Again, these are things that would happen in the bedroom. Behind closed doors that most people wouldn't see.

But Israel, we're acknowledging here, there is no hiding. We are accountable to God in our daily lives for how we live. Even in this area of sexual ethics that others may not see.

Now, it's a real contrast to today, isn't it? What's most people's attitude today with what's all right? Well, isn't it that if no one sees about it, it doesn't matter.

What you do in private, that's your concern. It's the public face that matters. It's what we always hear when politicians have affairs and stuff, isn't it? Well, that doesn't matter. That's their private life. And yet that affects our attitude as well.

Or we buy into the philosophy of the day. It's, well, if no one's hurt by it, if it makes people happy, it's all right. It must be okay.

[22 : 33] It must be okay if people are happy and are so reasonably faithful to each other. But that's not God's way. That is not God's way. And that cannot be the way of God's people. There is no hiding.

Integrity demands that the covenant faithfulness, faithfulness to the Lord, requires integrity. There's no hiding. There's no saying things don't matter. The Lord cares about what you do in your bedroom.

He cares about what we look at on our phones or our computers. Sexual obedience, every bit as much as worship, is important to him. There is no hiding. As Paul says to the Corinthians, 1 Corinthians 6, verse 19, Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God.

You are not your own. You are bought with a price. So glorify God in your body. There is no hiding. Integrity is demanded in every area. But secondly, there are no holidays.

We all love holidays, don't we? One of the great things about holidays is you get away from responsibilities. You get away from work. You don't have all those emails piling up. Well, probably you do if you take your mobile phone with you.

[23 : 38] But if you can just switch it off and have a real holiday, then you're free from those responsibilities, aren't you? The danger is, as Christians, we sometimes want to have a bit of a holiday for our Christian lives as well.

And sometimes that can be literal. So we go on holiday and we don't bother to find a church to gather with other Christians on the Lord's Day. Or sometimes it can be, you know, we sort of switch off from praying and things during a holiday.

But actually it can be areas of our lives that we try to take a holiday from our Christian commitment. Very often there's still a sort of sacred, secular divide in our thinking. So, you know, church, well that's an area where I want to obey God and I'm serving the Lord.

So I serve the Lord in the things I do in church. But then work or school, well that's another thing. And so we forget that actually we're representing and serving the Lord in those areas as well. But they're not a holiday. We're accountable to the Lord in those areas. We see that here in Deuteronomy. So in verse 16, we're serving the Lord, accountable to the Lord in the area of family life.

[24 : 43] Honouring father and mother. There's no holiday in business life either. Verse 17. Cursed be anyone who moves his neighbour's landmark. There's someone who tries to make a land grab. Tries to get a bit more land from their neighbour.

There's no holiday in business life, family life, or in the public sphere. Verse 18. Cursed be anyone who misleads a blind man on the road. And all the people shall say amen.

You can't use your power to manipulate or dominate other people. There's no holiday in any area of life. You're all accountable to the Lord in all these areas.

So there's no hiding. There's no holidays. Let's look at verse 26. There are no half measures either. Verse 26. Cursed be anyone who does not confirm the words of this law by doing them.

And all the people shall say amen. It's very broad, isn't it? All the words of this law. Not just these twelve curses.

[25 : 44] But all the Torah. All the fatherly instruction. All God's covenant law. Break any bit of it. And you're under a curse, the people say. It refers to the ten commandments.

It refers to the one great commandment that Chris reminded us of earlier. As Jesus quoted it in Mark 10. Quoting from Deuteronomy 6. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your mind and all your strength.

In other words, there's no half-heartedness. The Lord has been wholeheartedly committed to us. He wants his covenant people to be wholeheartedly committed to him. But there's a problem, isn't there?

Who of us can obey that law? Who of us can possibly be perfect? The answer is none of us. But, for Old Testament Israel, as those curses were pronounced from Mount Ebal, what else was on Mount Ebal?

What did we read back in verse 5? They had to build there. Verse 5, they had to build an altar there, didn't they? They built an altar so they could offer sacrifices. So through those sacrifices, atonement

could be made, that they might not receive the curse, but it might fall somewhere else.

[26 : 57] For Old Testament Israel, they offered sheep and goats and cows on those sacrifices. But it would take a better sacrifice to truly take that curse.

All those Old Testament sacrifices pointed forward to the ultimate sacrifice, to the Lord Jesus Christ, the ultimate Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world. He was the one who took our curse.

As Paul said to the Galatians, Galatians 3, verse 10, quoting this verse, For all who rely on the works of the law, all who think they can earn their way to God, and keep in God's good books, are under a curse.

For it is written, Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all the things written in the book of the law, and do them. And yet, Galatians 3, verse 13, Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, by becoming a curse for us.

It is in Christ that we can be safe. It is in Christ we are forgiven. It is in Christ we can inherit all God promises us. It is in Christ that his law is written on our hearts.

[28 : 02] It is in Christ we have the spirit to live a new life we may want to obey. It is in Christ we can receive all the good God has for us. That is why our Lord Jesus Christ can say, If you love me, you will keep my commandments.

John 14, verse 15. We need to cling to him. We need to cling to him. See, faithfulness to God's covenant is the only way to enjoy fellowship with God.

It is the only way to have the peace sacrifices and enjoy the land as Israel had. For us, it is the only way to have peace with God now and peace with God forever. And faithfulness to God means personal integrity.

It means all of life under Christ's Lordship. No hiding, no holidays, no half measures. Our covenant Lord is completely committed to us. He died to win us.

And as we see our sin, we have to keep coming back to him for forgiveness. We cannot just ignore it, but turn to Christ in repentance and faith.

[29 : 04] As he said, I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit. Apart from me, you can do nothing. There will be no obedience unless we are in Jesus.

But if anyone does not abide in me, he is thrown away like a branch and withers. And the branches are gathered and thrown into the fire and burned. To be no complacency for us.

Rather, we cling to Christ. We must wholeheartedly cling to him to enjoy the blessings he has won for us. And the blessings that we can celebrate now are around the table if we have trusted in him. Let's pray.