

Circumcise Your Hearts

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[0 : 01] Before the preaching of God's word, let's turn to Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy chapter 10. We follow on from the passage that Pastor Colin preached on last week in chapter 9.

The Israelites about to cross into the land that God was to give them thought they didn't need to listen to God. They also thought they deserved good from God because they were special. They also needed to be reminded of their sin and their offense it is to God.

And we continue with this remembrance. And we see God's mercy in chapter 10, verses 1 through 11. Deuteronomy chapter 10, verse 1. This is the word of God.

At that time the Lord said to me, Chisel out two stone tablets like the first ones and come up to me on the mountain. Also make a wooden chest. I will write on the tablets the words that were on the first tablets, which you broke.

Then you are to put them in the chest. So I made the ark out of acacia wood and chiseled out two stone tablets like the first ones. And I went up on the mountain with the two tablets in my hands.

[1 : 08] The Lord wrote on these tablets what he had written before, the ten commandments he had proclaimed to you on the mountain, out of the fire on the day of the assembly. And the Lord gave them to me.

Then I came back down the mountain and put the tablets in the ark I had made, as the Lord commanded me. And they are there now. The Israelites traveled from the wells of the Jaconites to Moserah.

There Aaron died and was buried. And Eliezer, his son, succeeded him as priest. From there they traveled to Godar and on to Jotpatah, a land with streams of water.

At that time the Lord set apart the tribe of Levi to carry the ark of the covenant of the Lord, to stand before the Lord to minister and to pronounce blessings in his name, as they still do today.

That is why the Levites have no share or inheritance among their brothers. The Lord is their inheritance, as the Lord your God told them. Now I had stayed on the mountain forty days and forty nights, as I did the first time, and the Lord listened to me at this time also.

[2 : 15] It was not his will to destroy you. Go, the Lord said to me, and lead the people on their way, so that they may enter and possess the land that I swore to their fathers to give them.

Amen. Let's hear the word of God preached. There are times in life that this question presents itself. What's required of me?

What do I need to do? You arrived to help somebody move, and the question asked, What's needed of me? You walk in to find your wife dealing with a diaper blowout.

What's required of me? What do you need me to do? Your boss calls you into his office and says, I have a new project for you. And you say, What do I need to do? We need to ask that question this morning.

And we need to come before our Lord humbly, eagerly, willingly asking, Lord, what is required of me? We've started this short three-week series in the book of Deuteronomy.

- [3 : 25] And this is really just a book in which we're presented with three sermons that Moses preached to the people of Israel. He was exhorting them. He was encouraging them.
- He was reminding this new generation of what God had said to the previous generation. A generation before that had failed to listen and to obey what God had said.
- God had saved them out of Egypt. God had made them to be his special people. He had given them his law. He had promised to them that they would go into a land that was flowing with milk and honey.
- And their parents' generation had failed to believe and to listen to what God had said. They had rebelled against him. And so as punishment, God had made them to wander in the wilderness for 40 years until that generation had died off.
- Well, now we have this new generation. And we saw it even last week in Deuteronomy chapter 9. This new generation of Israelites. And they need to be reminded of their relationship to God.
- [4 : 31] They needed to also be reminded of how they were to live out that relationship. So we do well to listen in also. Last week in Deuteronomy 9, we saw the relationship to God clearly laid out.
- We saw that we are God's chosen, beloved people. That he has set his heart in love on us just as he did with the nation of Israel.
- And like Israel, we saw that it is not because of our righteousness that God does us good. It is in fact despite our unrighteousness that God has done us good in Christ.
- It is all of his mercy. It is all of his grace. And so last week, God was pouring cold water on our pride. If we thought that we had reason to think highly of ourselves, God was making sure to correct that thinking.
- Despite our unrighteousness, God has made us to be his people. And he did it by sending his son to die in our place. We just heard it read, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God.
- [5 : 42] That is a glorious reality. What a standing we have before God because of the shed blood of Christ, because of his merits.
- How then should we respond? What then is required of us in this relationship? How should God's people live?
- Lord, what would you have me to do? Well, we need Deuteronomy chapter 10 to answer that question. What in chapter 9 was a call to stop and to listen and to consider, in chapter 10 is a call to now get up.
- It is a call to action. Now that you remember who God is, now that you remember who you are, now that you remember what he has done on your behalf, now let's live as God's people.
- So let's read our passage together in its entirety, and we're going to pick up the reading right where Sam left off in verse 12. This is the word of the Lord.
- [6 : 50] 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, and to keep the commandments and statutes of the Lord, which I am commanding you today for your good.
- Behold, to the Lord your God belong heaven, and the heaven of heavens, the earth with all that is in it. Yet the Lord set his heart in love on your fathers, and chose their offspring after them, you above all peoples, as you are this day.
- Circumcise, therefore, the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn. For the Lord your God is God of gods, and Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who is not partial, and takes no bribe.

He executes justice for the fatherless, and the widow, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing. Love the sojourner, therefore, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt.

You shall fear the Lord your God. You shall serve him, and hold fast to him, and by his name you shall swear. He is your praise. He is your God, who has done for you these great and terrifying things that your eyes have seen.

[8 : 13] Your fathers went down to Egypt, 70 persons, and now the Lord your God has made you as numerous as the stars of heaven. So we come to this passage here in Deuteronomy 10, and how does it begin?

With requirements. With what God asks of us. And now Israel, what does the Lord require of you? So back in chapter 9, our relationship to God set forth.

Now in chapter 10, here's the response. That's demanded. What does the Lord your God require of you? So we need to see what follows in this passage.

It was given first to Israel, yes, but it is just as applicable to us today as God's people as well. And those requirements, God spells out for us.

That is a kindness from the Lord. God's requirements to us, he tells us how we are to live in relationship to him. And a job with no job description is difficult to do.

[9 : 22] A supervisor with high expectations, but who doesn't communicate with you, is a frustration. God is gracious to us here.

He isn't aloof. He isn't distant. He isn't hard to get a hold of to learn what he has for us. He comes to us right here in his word.

And he tells us, here's what I expect of you. We aren't left to wonder. We aren't left to speculate. We aren't left to try to guess or figure it out in the hopes that maybe we get it right.

And we aren't left to decide for ourselves how we would relate to God. God tells us. This is what he requires of us.

So these aren't recommendations. These aren't options. It's not like a buffet of commandments that we kind of pick and choose from as we like. It's not as though our obedience is decided by our own preferences.

[10 : 27] No. What God asks of us, we're to do. And he has that rightful authority. What does verse 17 say? He is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, the almighty, and the awesome God.

We listen to him. We answer to him. So there's no suggestion box that God is dropping his ideas into.

Maybe this would be a good way for you to live as my people. Perhaps you should try this for a change. No, here is what God requires. So we do well to pay attention to what he has to say.

And we do well to obey what he has to say. So what are God's requirements? There's many that are listed here.

The list itself is long. Look back at the verses that we've read. Verse 12, it says that we're to fear the Lord our God, to walk in his ways, to love him, to serve the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul, and to keep the commandments and statutes of our Lord.

[11 : 36] Then a little farther down, as God's character is described, we're called to imitate him. Beginning in verse 18, he executes justice for the fatherless and the widow and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing.

Love the sojourner, therefore, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt. So we're to love the weak. We're to help the helpless. We're to care for those in need.

And then verse 20, you shall fear the Lord your God. You shall serve him and hold fast to him. And by his name, you shall swear. So our allegiance is to him.

We're to be devoted to him. There are lots of requirements listed in this passage. But there is one that really captures them all.

Circumcise your hearts like a funnel. Everything flows into this central command. Circumcise your hearts.

[12 : 39] Now what does God mean by that? That is a strangely specific, not often heard command in the Bible.

It's probably not on our own minds very often. I mean, how regularly are we praying and asking God to help us to circumcise our hearts? To love him? Yes.

To love our neighbor? Yes. To live to his glory? Yes. Help me in those ways. But how often are we praying, God, help me that I might circumcise my heart?

That sounds like something Israel would do in the Old Testament. So is that something that we need to consider today? I mean, didn't Paul in no uncertain terms say, circumcision counts for nothing.

Galatians 5.6 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything but only faith working through love.

[13 : 41] So what are we doing here? In Deuteronomy 10 this seems like an Old Testament idea that we could put to bed. Again, Paul says Galatians 6.5 For neither circumcision counts for anything nor uncircumcision but a new creation.

So it sounds like Paul is saying we don't concern ourselves with the value of circumcision any longer. We need to focus on the fact that we're a new creation. So do we really need to consider this particular command in Deuteronomy 10.16 this morning?

The idea of circumcision. That was not new to the people of Israel. If we go back to the book of Genesis God had instituted that practice with Abraham the father of the nation that the whole nation of Israel would come from him.

And so we can read in Genesis 17.9 what God said to Abraham As for you you shall keep my covenant you and your offspring after you throughout their generations.

This is my covenant which you shall keep between me and you and your offspring after you. Every male among you shall be circumcised. So God had made a covenant with Abraham.

[14 : 57] He had entered into this unique special relationship that had terms with it. He made this formal relationship and he set Abraham and his offspring apart.

It's why he's having dealings with the people of Israel now in Deuteronomy 10. It's why he didn't destroy them in the wilderness on a number of different occasions. These are his people. It's the offspring of Abraham and he made that covenant with Abraham hundreds of years before.

He wasn't going to break it. And circumcision that was the outward sign of this covenant. Abraham and all of the male members of his household and all of the male members of his household and the generations to follow, they were to be circumcised, showing that they were set apart to God in this special covenant relationship.

And much like circumcision itself, God also says in Genesis 17 that those male Israelites who fail to be circumcised are themselves cut off from the people because they had broken God's covenant.

So down through the centuries, the Israelites would continue to practice circumcision as a sign between them and God that like Abraham they were set apart for God and that like Abraham they trusted and believed God's promises.

[16 : 28] Circumcision symbolized that trust. So the idea of circumcision was not new to the people of Israel but circumcision of the heart was.

nowhere before now in God's dealings with Israel had he talked about circumcision of the heart. The ESV reads circumcised therefore the foreskin of your heart.

So what's the difference then between the physical circumcision that had been practiced for centuries and the circumcision of the heart that God now speaks of here?

one was an external act and another is an internal. Now we have physical hearts but God is obviously not talking about circumcising your physical heart.

He wasn't commanding Israel to do open heart surgery on all the male members of the household and to do a little cutting away while they were at it. So what was only thought of as a physical outward act up until this point in God's dealings with Israel suddenly now there's a shift.

[17 : 41] And we're not talking about external realities but internal. To circumcise the heart is to live a life of obedience. It is to live a life of devotion and allegiance to God and to God alone.

It is the funnel that all of these requirements we see in our passage flow together into. To circumcise the heart is to live a life that is set apart to God.

You could say that Deuteronomy 10 is the positive expression of the first commandment which is given to us in the negative. You shall not have other gods before me.

That's the negative. Don't have other gods. Deuteronomy 10 is the positive. Do circumcise your hearts. Do be faithful to God.

As verse 21 says, He is your praise. He is your God. So to state the first commandment in the positive terms of Deuteronomy 10, your worship, your adoration are to be reserved for God and for Him alone.

[18 : 57] to the temptation for the people of Israel was to allow their hearts to be divided. The temptation for Israel was to share their devotion with false gods.

They were tempted to worship. They were tempted to bow down to other gods. They're commanded here in Deuteronomy 10 to hold fast to God.

But the temptation was to let their grip get loose. Kids, do you hold on tightly to your parents at the dinner table while you're eating your green beans?

Do you bear hug mom and dad when you're brushing your teeth at night? Do you give them a big old gripped hug when they're helping you out with your homework?

That would be weird. You probably aren't doing that. But if you were on the edge of a cliff, do you think you'd hold on to mom and dad really tight then?

[20 : 07] If you were in a really little boat in the middle of the ocean and a big storm came, kids, do you think that you would cling to mom and dad then? Yeah, you would not let your grip go.

Your knuckles would turn white because you're holding on to them so tight. So why in the middle of the ocean? Why on a cliff but not at the dinner table while you're eating your green beans?

Because there's danger on the cliff, isn't there? There's danger in the middle of the ocean, isn't there? Usually, there's not danger when you're eating your green beans at dinner time.

You see, we need to hold on tight when we see danger. We all see here that God had commanded Israel, hold fast to me.

Why? Because there was danger in serving false idols. There was danger in letting our grip get loose. So Israel didn't hold tight to the Lord.

[21 : 07] Israel saw little of the danger of idolatry. Israel grew lackadaisical. Israel grew relaxed. Israel stopped being diligent in their devotion to the Lord.

When God was reminding Israel to obey his commandments, he would often say, be careful to observe all that I command you. Be careful.

Don't grow careless. Why? Because there's danger. And if you grow careless in that danger, you are like a small child who's trying to stand on the edge of the boat while you're in a raging sea.

We need to hold tight. Israel failed to do that. Instead of circumcising their hearts, they turned their hearts away to other gods. Instead of holding fast to the Lord, they were drawn away to serve idols.

They didn't see the danger. And so they caved because they were not diligent in their single devotion to the Lord. They failed to obey the first commandment.

[22 : 15] They failed to remember the words of Deuteronomy 10. He is your praise. He is your God. Your worship, your affection, your devotion should be entirely given to him.

We need to hear those words too. He is your praise. He is your God. And yet how easily our hearts are wooed by the temptations of the world.

How tempting it is to look elsewhere for joy and contentment and peace. How tempting it is for us as Christians to loosen our grip on God.

Well, Deuteronomy helps us to fight this temptation by reminding us not just that God deserves our devotion, but also that we belong to God.

not just that we are to hold fast to him, but that he holds us fast as well. He has made us his own. His heart is set in love on us.

[23 : 28] Verse 14 says, Behold, to the Lord your God belong heaven and the heaven of heavens, the earth with all that is in it. Yet, the Lord set his heart in love on your fathers and chose their offspring after them above all peoples as you are this day.

Israel belonged to God. We who are in Christ also belong to God. By his name we swear. Our allegiance is to him.

Now, this is such a high standard. This is such a high calling. Cut away like the circumcision of the flesh.

Cut away your disobedience and live in humble submissive allegiance to God. Worship God alone. He is your praise.

He is your God. Remove the stubbornness from your heart. Devote yourself completely to him. Circumcise your hearts. Many requirements. How can we do this?

[24 : 37] By reading on in the book of Deuteronomy. We have to finish the story. Because in Deuteronomy 30, the only other time here, circumcision of the heart comes up again.

Turn over to Deuteronomy chapter 30 if you're open there to Deuteronomy 10. Because we must see this verse. Deuteronomy 30, verse 6.

This is how it reads. And 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.

So much of Deuteronomy 10 is repeated here in Deuteronomy 30. Circumcision of the heart. Loving God with all our heart and with all our soul.

But there's one massive difference. This isn't a promise or this isn't a command for us to circumcise our hearts as Deuteronomy 10 said.

[25 : 47] This isn't a command. This is a promise. This is God saying I'm going to do this. Here's the truth of the matter.

You can't circumcise your own hearts. I cannot. None of us can circumcise our own hearts. We can't do what is commanded of us in Deuteronomy 10.

We can't do it not in our own strength and not apart from God first circumcising our hearts himself. This is what Deuteronomy 30 says.

God will circumcise those he calls his own. If you are in Christ this morning, he has circumcised your heart. He circumcised you.

Not with a circumcision made with hands, Colossians 2 says. This was no work of man. This was not your own doing. This was God's doing. This was God's transformative work in your heart.

[26 : 50] In Christ you were circumcised. Our old identity marked by sin cut away and we are now united to Christ by faith.

By faith in his finished work on the cross. And so here's what we do now. Here is what is required of us. Here is what God says, live as God has made you to be.

He has circumcised your hearts so now brothers, sisters in Christ, what are you to do? Circumcise your hearts. Cut away your stubbornness like Deuteronomy 10 says.

And that doesn't just mean like one particular sin, the sin of being a stubborn person. No, the stubbornness here of Deuteronomy 10 speaks of going our own way.

It is like cattle that are loose and that are resistant to being corralled. Don't go your way, but now walk in God's ways.

[27 : 52] Where do we learn of God's ways that we're to walk in? But in his word. Don't follow your own path. Don't rebel, but walk the path of righteousness that God has put before you in his word.

Put off sin. Cut it away and put on righteousness. Circumcise your heart knowing that it is God who has done the surgical work of circumcising your heart in Christ already.

In fact, God took a heart of stone, Ezekiel 36 says, and he made it to be a heart of flesh. And then he says in verse 27, and I will put my spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.

So if you are in Christ, your heart has been circumcised. What then should you do? What does God require of you? Circumcise your heart. And if you are in Christ, God has given you his spirit to cause you to walk in his ways.

What are you to do? What is required of you? Walk in his ways. Do what God now enables you to do. What God commands of us, we obey knowing that it is God who has brought about the obedience in us.

[29 : 15] You could also think of it this way. The commands of Deuteronomy 10 are just one more example of the principle that we find at work in Philippians 2, verses 12 and 13.

You may be familiar with this passage. Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling for it is God who works in you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

Here's another way of saying that. From Deuteronomy chapter 10. Circumcise your hearts for it is God who in Christ has circumcised your hearts.

Work hard to live in obedience. Work hard to cut away sin in your life. Work hard to do all that God has commanded of you knowing that he provides the strength to do it.

And then we have to get this. We know that he provides the strength and we also have to know that what he commands of us what God requires of us is for our good.

[30 : 22] Deuteronomy 10 teaches us that. Deuteronomy 10 teaches us that what God commands is for our good. Listen again beginning in verse 12. And now Israel what does the Lord your God require of you but to fear the Lord your God to walk in his ways to love him to serve the Lord your God with all your heart with all your soul and to keep the commandments and statutes of the Lord which I am commanding you today for your good.

That's another kindness of the Lord to us. He has given us his requirements. That's a kindness of God that he's revealed them to us. He hasn't left us in the dark. And then it's a kindness of God that these very commandments that he gives us that he asks of us that he requires of us they're for our good.

Don't believe the lie that says God is out to make your life miserable with his commandments. That's exactly what Satan wants us to believe.

God is holding out on you. God is not giving you what actually is good for you. That was the lie that first began in the Garden of Eden. See that tree?

You should be able to eat from that tree. It is good for food. That tree is a delight to the eyes. That tree makes you wise.

[31 : 47] That tree you should be able to eat from. God is holding out on you. He is keeping you back from what actually is good for you. And here in Deuteronomy 10 we are reminded what God says is for our good.

What he says is for our good. There's a reason that James 2 calls it the law of liberty. There's a reason that 1 John 5 says that God's commandments are not burdensome.

God is not cruel to us. What he says isn't meant to stifle us. It's not meant to oppress us. It's not meant to make our lives difficult. It's not meant to make us miserable.

No, what God says is for our good. That we might flourish like a well-watered tree. truly his ways are pleasant and all of his paths are peace.

Do you believe that this morning about your God? Then let's do what God requires of us for our good. Circumcise your hearts. Cut away sin.

[32 : 56] Live in obedience to the Lord. Don't be divided in your devotion. Give yourself entirely to him. Work out your salvation with fear and trembling, knowing that it is God who works in you.

And for us whose hearts have been circumcised, this is what should follow in the Christian life. I've heard it said this way. What you ought to do and what you want to do are the same thing.

What you ought to do and what you want to do are the same thing. Those of us who have been circumcised in Christ, more and more we will see that what God asks of us, what God requires of us, that's what we're doing.

And we're doing it with gladness. What once appeared to us as harsh requirements, now with new hearts, we are joyfully obeying.

John Newton has written many hymns. And in one of his lesser-known hymns, he said this, our pleasure and our duty, though opposite before, since we have seen his beauty are joined to part no more.

[34 : 17] It is our highest pleasure, no less than duty's call, to love him beyond measure and serve him with our all.

What God requires of us should be our joy to do. And so may God give us circumcised hearts that delight in obeying him.

Let's pray together. Heavenly Father, what a wonder it is that in your grace you have saved us unto yourself, that you have made us your own, and you did that by sending your son to die on the cross for our sins, that we might believe on him, and that we might be saved from our sins and brought to you.

What a circumcision of the heart that you have accomplished in Christ. And Father, we pray for those here this morning even who don't know you, who are far from you, whose hearts are uncircumcised still, who still live a life going after their sin.

And we pray, Lord, that you would be at work even from Deuteronomy 10 to convict of sin and to draw to yourself. And Father, for us who are in Christ, we see how hard it is to obey.

[35 : 43] We see sin that still remains in our hearts that needs to be cut away. We see the ways in which we still go after our sin in our stubbornness. And so we pray and we ask that by your spirit, you would cause us to walk in your ways.

We pray that you would strengthen us, that we would find joy and delight in doing what you have required, and that we would see that what you required is for our good.

Make it our delight to do as you have said. Help us to see your goodness on display in what you say to us and what you command of us in your word.

You are a good God. You are a great God who is greatly to be praised. And we pray as we go from here this morning, we enter into a new week, that we would live lives that indeed are to the praise of your glory, that people would look upon us and say, he is their God.

He is their praise. Their hearts are devoted unto him. We pray all these things in Christ's name. Amen.