

Living as God's Covenant People
Studies in Deut. 1-11, #7

"The Grace of the Covenant"
Dt. 9:1-10:11

--CEFC 8/6/17;

"You deserve a break today," says MacDonald's.

"For someone who deserves only the very best," says one jewelry firm.

"Go ahead. You deserve it." says a vender of chocolates.

"Every American has a right to a quality car," once said by a Chrysler CEO.

It's yours by right.

You deserve it.

That's how advertisers seek to lure you to buy their product.

It's a subtle appeal to our vanity, our pride,
our sense of self-importance.

It fuels a sense of entitlement.

But think for a moment--

What do you *deserve*?

That's a profound question--

involving much more than how you will spend your money.

The answer to that question reflects your view of yourself--

it reflects even your view of God.

Think for a moment what you deserve, say, from your employer.

--your paycheck, certainly--you earned it.

But at what wage?

what do you deserve to be paid?

We would all agree that Washington Nationals star Bryce Harper, who is batting .325
deserves to be paid more than catcher José Lobatón who's only hitting .158.

That's pretty obvious!

But does Bryce Harper really deserve \$13 million a year for hitting a baseball,

while, for pouring out her life to care for the dying souls in Calcutta,
Mother Theresa got paid nothing?

Shall we talk of comparable worth?

But what do you deserve?

not just on your job, if you have one--

but in your life?

Do you deserve to own your own car or a house?

Do you deserve to enjoy health?

a life free from disease or tragedy?

Do you deserve to experience happiness in life?

Do you deserve to go to heaven?

The question we come to ultimately is this--
What do you deserve from the hand of God?

We all carry within us some assumption
about the way we think we deserve to be treated by God.

When we suffer, we quickly ask,
"What did I do to deserve this?"--
though rarely when do ask the same question when we prosper.

But think about it--
What did we do to deserve to live in the United States of America
and not in the floodlands of Bangladesh
or in the wastelands of Siberia?

Do we deserve the advantages of birth or family or opportunity
that we've all enjoyed in one way or another?

What do you deserve from the hand of God?

It's a question faced by the Israelites
as they stood on the east side of the Jordan River,
about to take possession of the promised land.

Moses knew the natural inclination of the human heart--
and he warns the Israelites of the temptation that they will surely face
in coming to answer this question.

He sets out the issue in the first 6 verses of our text--

I. In vv. 1-3 he gives the Covenant Promise--
The promise of God's goodness to his people.

II. In vv. 4-6 he states the Covenant Principle--
The principle of God's grace to his people.

Then in the rest of our passage this covenant principle is illustrated
in the life of these people--

as Moses recounts to the Israelites--
1. How through their own rebellion, the covenant was broken--9:7-24
2. How through his own intervention, the covenant was mediated--9:25-29
and 3. How through God's grace the covenant was renewed--10:1-5,10,11

What did the Israelites deserve from the hand of God?
They had to face this question--and so must we,
for the way we answer it will have a profound influence
on the way we relate to God
and to other people.

May our passage this morning help us to face this issue—

so that we might better live as God's covenant people.

Turn with me to Deut. 9.

I. First, the Covenant Promise--

vv.1,2--"Hear, O Israel. You are now about to cross the Jordan to go in
and dispossess nations greater and stronger than you,
with large cities that have walls up to the sky.
The people are strong and tall--Anakites!
You know about them and have heard it said:
"Who can stand up against the Anakites?"

Ah yes, the Anakites!

Everybody knew about the Anakites—
for forty years they've been talking about the Anakites.
In fact, the very reason they had been wandering in the desert the last forty years
was because of the Anakites.
The ten spies sent out by Moses hold had warned them about the Anakites—
how big and strong and invincible they were.
"Forget about what God had promised," they said,
"There was no way to overcome the Anakites.
"Who can stand up against the Anakites?"

It would be like the Annandale H.S. football team
going up against the Washington Redskins.
They may put their pants on one leg at a time, just like you do--
but what does it matter when their one leg
is bigger than two of yours!

But in the face of these 1000 to 1 odds of defeating the Anakites,
look at the promise of v.3--
"But be assured today that the Lord your God
is the one who goes across ahead of you like a devouring fire.
He will destroy them;
he will subdue them before you.
And you will drive them out and annihilate them quickly,
as the Lord has promised you."

This is the promise of God's goodness—demonstrated in the gift of a good land—
The Lord had promised his power to overcome any opponent.
That land is yours for the taking.

But notice the interesting interplay between God's role and Israel's role

in the fulfillment of this promise--
The Lord your God is the one who goes across ahead of you
like a devouring fire.

He will destroy them;
he will subdue them before you.
And you will drive them out and annihilate them quickly, Moses says.

God's promise works itself out
as the recipients of that promise receive it in faith
and in obedience, act upon that promise.

The Lord will destroy them;
you will drive them out and annihilate them.
Who's doing what here?

When the battle takes place and Israel comes out the winner,
it would be very easy for them to fall in to the error
that we talked about back in chap. 8--

They could see what they had done and say--
**"My power and the strength of my hands
have produced this [great victory] for me."**

They would think that could take credit for what they had accomplished,
forgetting that their success was only the result of God's power.

No need to thank God for what happened—
We did it all by ourselves.

How easily we forget the goodness of God in our lives.

So when you as a Christian believer begin to grow in godliness—
as the Spirit of God does his good work in your heart,
and you begin to do some good things you wouldn't have thought of doing before,
don't start congratulating yourself for all your good works.

No, thank God for his good work in you.

That's what the Apostle Paul does—

1 Cor 15:10—"But by the grace of God I am what I am,
and his grace to me was not without effect.

No, I worked harder than all of them—

yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me." /

But there is another error, equally dangerous, that could result,
even when the Israelites recognized God's great power--

It's mentioned here by Moses in v.4--

**"After the Lord your God has driven them out before you,
do not say to yourself,**

**"The Lord has brought me here to take possession of this land
because of my righteousness."**

II. No. The promise of the covenant must be coupled with
the underlying principle of the covenant--
It's the principle of God's grace--

which Moses outlines in vv.4-6--

You may think that it is because of your righteousness
that the Lord is giving this victory, Moses says--
but **"No, it is on account of the wickedness of these nations
that the Lord is going to drive them out before you.
It is not because of your righteousness or your integrity
that you are going in to take possession of their land;
but on account of the wickedness of these nations,
the Lord your God will drive them out before you,
to accomplish what he swore to your forefathers,
to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.**
Understand then, that it is not because of your righteousness
that the Lord your God is giving you this good land to possess,
for you are a stiff-necked people."

Can he say it any more clearly or emphatically?!

I am destroying the Canaanites because their society
is an abomination in my sight, God says--
We talked about this several weeks ago--
Canaanite religion glorified sexual immorality and it cheapened human life.
The Lord saw their temple prostitutes making illicit sex a form of worship;
and the Lord heard the cries of the young children
sacrificed on the sacred altars.

He had had enough--
These people were ripe for judgment--
and he was using the Israelites as his instrument
to accomplish his righteous purpose.

In experiencing God's wrath,
The Canaanites got what they deserved.
Make no mistake about it.

But on the other hand,
in experiencing God's love,
the Israelites didn't deserve what they got.

Just because God used them as his instruments of judgment
didn't mean that they were therefore righteous in God's sight.

Do you see this?

The Canaanites were sinful,
but the Israelites were hardly pristine in their purity.

Quite the contrary--
"you are a stiff-necked people."

You are not receiving this land because of your righteousness,

but because of my gracious promise which I swore to your fathers,
Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

God's gracious purpose was to call out a people for his own possession--
a people who would learn to live
as his instruments of glory and grace to the world.
These would be his covenant people.

And here is the covenant principle--
God's judgment is just,
but God's goodness is gracious—
it is undeserved, unmerited.
It is a gift that we have no claim to--none at all.
All we can do is receive it in humble faith.

There is no place for spiritual pride among God's people.
The Israelites could look at the destruction of the Canaanites and say quite honestly,
"There but by the grace of God go I."

**"Understand then, that it is not because of your righteousness
that the Lord your God is giving you this good land to possess,
for you are a stiff-necked people."**

This covenant principle of God's grace
is now illustrated in the rest of the passage--
as the true character of these people is made clear.

So you think you are deserving of God's goodness?--
Perhaps I could refresh your memory for a moment, Moses says--

vv. 7,8—

**"Remember this and never forget how you provoked the LORD your God to anger
in the desert.**

**From the day you left Egypt until you arrived here,
you have been rebellious against the LORD.**

At Horeb you aroused the LORD'S wrath so that he was angry enough to destroy you."

"Think about it," Moses says to them,

"Mt. Horeb—also called Mt. Sinai—

it was that sacred place where God himself was present,

where God himself was giving to me his holy law—

even there, you rebelled against the Lord"--

vv.11-13,16—

**"At the end of the forty days and forty nights,
the LORD gave me the two stone tablets, the tablets of the covenant.
Then the LORD told me, "Go down from here at once,
because your people whom you brought out of Egypt have become corrupt.**

**They have turned away quickly from what I commanded them
and have made a cast idol for themselves."**

And the LORD said to me, "I have seen this people,
and they are a stiff-necked people indeed!
When I looked, I saw that you had sinned against the LORD your God;
you had made for yourselves an idol cast in the shape of a calf.
You had turned aside quickly from the way that the LORD had commanded you."

You turned aside quickly.
quickly--at the very moment of the greatest revelation of God's holiness,
you turned your back on him.
You were making for yourself a golden calf to worship.

And this was no isolated incident--
vv.22,23—

**"You also made the LORD angry at Taberah, at Massah and at Kibroth Hattaavah.
And when the LORD sent you out from Kadesh Barnea, he said,
"Go up and take possession of the land I have given you."
But you rebelled against the command of the LORD your God.
You did not trust him or obey him".**

The history of Israel to this point is one of total failure—
again and again they have failed to respond to the Lord in faithful obedience.
Moses' conclusion?--

v. 24--"You have been rebellious against the Lord
ever since I have known you."

And you dare to think that it is because of your righteousness
that the Lord is giving you this good land to possess!

You are a stiff-necked and stubborn people indeed--
to go on believing that when all the evidence
points in the opposite direction.

But the story of Israel is simply the story of all humanity projected onto a big screen.

And what would the Lord have to say to you
when you start to think as the Israelites did?--
When you say, "I'm glad I'm not like that tax collector—
or that Islamic terrorist
or that militant atheist
or that right-wing Conservative
or left-wing Progressive—
depending where you line up politically.

It's because of my own righteousness
that I am now in the right with God."

But are there not a few skeletons in your closet
that could be brought out as evidence against that assessment?

You may think the politicians have it bad--
 having their live opened to the intense scrutiny of the press.
 That is nothing!
 Your life is laid bare by the all-seeing gaze of Almighty God.
 I dare say he would not have to go too far back to find something on you.

Imagine for a moment having all your thoughts, just from yesterday,
 projected onto an 80mm IMAX big screen with Dolby stereo
 for all the world to see and hear.

We wouldn't feel guilt so much as shame.
 Everyone of us would be so ashamed we would have to leave town--
 the arrogance, the greed, the envy, the lust, the critical thoughts--
 who of us has not been rebellious against the Lord?
 deep within our souls--
 that sinful nature still clinging to us would disqualify us in a second
 from the presence of a holy God.

When he became a Christian, C.S. Lewis says that he found inside himself
 "a zoo of lusts, a bedlam of ambitions,
 a nursery of fears, a harem of fondled hatreds."¹

Sin is much deeper than simply disobeying some command of God—
 at its essence it is a refusal to acknowledge that God is God.

I think of the powerful words of J. I. Packer--
 Sin is "Playing God;
 and, as a means to this, refusing to allow the Creator to be God
 as far as you are concerned.
 Living, not for him, but for yourself;
 loving and serving and pleasing yourself without reference to the Creator;
 trying to be as far as possible, independent of him,
 taking yourself out of his hands,
 holding him at arms length,
 keeping the reins of life in your own hands;
 acting as if you and your pleasure,
 were the end to which all things else, God included,
 must be made to function as a means –
 that is the attitude in which sin essentially consists.
 Sin is exalting oneself against the Creator,
 withholding the homage due to him,
 and putting yourself in his place as the ultimate standard of reference
 in all life's decisions."²

When you think of sin like that,
 how can think that it is because of your righteousness

¹ Cited in Brian G. Hedges, *Christ Formed in You*, p. 79.

² J.I. Packer. *God's Words* (Grand Rapids, MI, Baker Book House, 1981), 73

that you have received so abundantly of the Lord's goodness--
that's not it at all.

When Moses came down from the mountain
and he saw what the Israelites had had done,
he says, "**I took the two tablets and threw them out of my hands,
breaking them to pieces before your eyes.**" --v.17

This act signified that God's covenant with Israel was broken,
smashed by her disobedience and sin.

Her relationship with the Lord was ruptured;
Israel was in desperate need of a mediator
to overcome her alienation with the Lord.

And this is the role that Moses assumed in vv. 25-29--
"**I lay prostrate before the Lord those forty days and forty nights
because the Lord had said he would destroy you.
I prayed to the Lord . . .**"

What I want you to look at the way Moses prayed here—
notice the basis of Moses' appeal to God on Israel's behalf--
Four justifications for his prayer emerge here--

1. Moses appeals to God's love--v. 26--
"**O Sovereign Lord, do not destroy your people, your own inheritance
that you redeemed by your great power
and brought out of Egypt with a mighty hand.**"

Back in v. 12, the Lord, in speaking to Moses,
had referred to Israel as "**your people whom you brought out of Egypt.**"
Here Moses says, "No, Lord. These are your people--
You had set your love upon them--you had chosen them,
you had rescued them.
Don't forget that love;
don't forsake that love."

Moses appeals to God's own love.

2. Moses appeals to God's promise--v. 27--
"**Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.**"
You had promised them a great nation that would be a blessing to the world.

Remember your promise.

3. Moses appeals to God's mercy—again in v.27--
"**Overlook the stubbornness of this people,
their wickedness and their sin.**"

In your wrath, remember mercy--forgive their sin.

4. Finally, Moses appeals to God's honor--v. 28--

**"Otherwise, the country from which you brought us will say,
'Because the Lord was not able to take them into the land he had promised them,
and because he hated them,
he brought them out to put them to death in the desert."**

Lord, if you destroy your people,
the Egyptians may have reason to doubt your power and your love--
It would undermine the truth that you are great and that you are good.

For the sake of the honor of your name, do not destroy your people.
Hallowed be thy name among the nations.

God's love
God's promise
God's mercy
God's honor

This was the basis of Moses' appeal--
It was based on who God was,
and not one who Israel was.

He didn't say,
"Lord, they're trying"
"Lord, they're not so bad"
"Lord, they'll do better next time--just one more chance"
"Lord, these people deserve better."

No--
The basis of Moses' intercession was fully and completely God's goodness and grace
and the glory of God's name.

Do you pray like that?
I would challenge you to--
When you pray, ask yourself, "What is the basis on this prayer?
Why should God answer it?
How would the answer to this prayer
result in glory to God?"

And on this basis,
as we move to chap. 10,
we see that Moses' prayer was heard--

10:1,2--

**"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."

v.11--"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.'"

Through Moses' mediation, the covenant--
the covenant based solely on the grace of God--
the covenant had been renewed.
This good land was now theirs to possess.

So what did the Israelites deserve from the hand of God?---NOTHING!!

Can't you see it--Nothing at all.
It was not because of their righteousness
that the Lord was bringing them into that good land--
That land was a gift of his grace.

Yes, they had believe God's promise,
and they had to act on that promise to actually take the land,
but the land was still a gift—a gift of God's grace.

They had this most important lesson to learn,
and so do we.

And we need to learn this lesson most importantly,
because it is the first step in coming into a relationship with God--

We must first recognize who he is and who we are--

He is the holy King,
and we are his rebellious subjects.

He is the righteous Lord,
and we are his guilty debtors.

He is the author of all life,
and without his saving work we are spiritually dead--
infected with the dreadful disease of sin
that affects every aspect of our being--
heart, soul, and body.

We must come to him as beggars,
with no claim upon his goodness.

We must recognize that he is under no obligation
to extend a loving hand toward us.

We deserve nothing but his righteous wrath.

But you may say--

"I'm as good as the next guy.
Why should I deserve anything less than anybody else."

That sounds reasonable--
Anyone can look around and find those who can make them appear
more moral or ethical or righteous on a sliding scale.

But what if the next guy happens to be Jesus Christ.
Would it still be true?
Would you still be as good as the next guy?
I don't think so.

And doesn't Jesus himself show you what you deserve--
when he died on the cross,
bearing the penalty that is due to anyone
who has broken God's law,
and who has refused to worship God as God.

The cross--that's what you deserve;
that's what we all deserve.

No, if we are to come to know the Lord we must know him as he is,
and ourselves as we are in his sight.

Thus, the need for spiritual humility--
"This is the one I esteem:" says the Lord,
"he who is humble and contrite in spirit."

**"Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."**

**"God opposes the proud
but gives grace to the humble."**

As the Scottish preacher James Stewart Stewart put it,
"No one who is too proud to be infinitely in debt
will ever be a Christian."

That's the first step--the first indispensible step--
recognizing your utter and desperate need of God's grace in your life.

**"Humble yourself before the mighty hand of God,
and he will exalt you at the proper time."**

But there's another reason that we need to learn Israel's lesson--
For if we develop this spiritual humility that comes through a right understanding of grace

we can expect two tangible consequences in our lives
qualities that the world desperately needs to see--

1. First, spiritual humility leads to what I call "**interpersonal grace**"--
As we recognize the extent of God's grace in our lives,
we develop the power to show that same kind of grace to others.

We become less judgmental, less critical of others' faults,
more patient and more forgiving.

Jesus made this attitude of "interpersonal grace" a necessary sign
of our own grasp of God's grace toward us, and a necessary expression of it.
**"Father, forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us."**

The world needs to see this kind of grace at work in our lives,
if they are to understand the grace of God.
Often we experience the grace of God first
through the grace we receive from other people.

2. Second, spiritual humility leads to "**material contentment**"--

We realize that contrary to what all the advertisers are telling us--
we don't deserve more and more.
We deserve nothing--but all that we have is a gracious gift of our God.

With this attitude we can receive what we have with thankful hearts--
whether great or small.

Henry Ward Beecher said--
"a humble mind is the soil out of which thanks naturally grows.
A proud man is seldom a grateful man,
for he never thinks he gets as much as he deserves."

Gratitude begins where a sense of entitlement ends.

Are you humble enough to be thankful?
For in thankfulness is great contentment.

What do you deserve from the hand of God?
What do you think you've got coming to you?

Let me tell you what the Lord offers you--
He doesn't offer you congratulations,
He offers you forgiveness.
He doesn't offer you a return on your investment,
the wages of your labor--

He offers you a free gift.

The Lord offers you a relationship with himself,
he offers you eternal life.

That is the message of the gospel--
Though entrusting your life to Jesus Christ,
you can be a member of his covenant people.

There's the offer--how will you respond?

Take this offer and you will get what you don't deserve.
Refuse it and you will deserve what you get.

Prayer--
What do you deserve from God?

Prayer of salvation.

Prayer of thanksgiving.

Communion--

We come to this communion table as covenant breakers,
but as those who have a divine mediator—the Lord Jesus Christ.

1Tim. 2:5 **For there is one God and one mediator
between God and men,
the man Christ Jesus,**

Heb. 9:15 **"For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant,
that those who are called
may receive the promised eternal inheritance—
now that he has died as a ransom
to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant."**

And as a risen Lord, our divine mediator intercedes for us—

Heb. 7:25 **Therefore he is able to save completely
those who come to God through him,
because he always lives to intercede for them.**

Living as God's Covenant People
Studies in Deut. 1-11, #7
Aug. 3, 2017

The Grace of the Covenant
Deut. 9:1-10:11

The Israelites would overcome incredible odds to defeat enemies much more powerful than themselves. As a result, they would be tempted to think much more highly of themselves than they ought. Don't we all? In our passage, the Lord seeks to humble them with the reality of his grace.

- I. The Covenant Promise (vv. 1-3)--
 The Promise of God's Goodness.
- II. The Covenant Principle (vv. 4-6)--
 The Principle of God's Grace.

The Covenant Principle Illustrated--

- 1. The Covenant Broken (9:7-24)
- 2. The Covenant Mediated (9:25-29)
- 3. The covenant Renewed (10:1-5,10,11)

Our need of a Mediator

Our need for spiritual humility.

Resulting in:

"interpersonal grace"

"material contentment"

What do you deserve from the hand of God?

Sermon Discussion:

**"The Grace of the Covenant"
Deut. 9:1-10:11**

- What do you think you deserve in life? What are you entitled to? On what basis are you entitled to anything?
- What was the basis of the Lord's covenant promise to Israel?
- What do you take credit for in your life, when the credit really belongs to God? What can prevent you from doing that?
- How can God's goodness toward us foster a sense of self-righteousness in us? Why does the covenant principle of grace require humility?
- On what basis do you pray to the Lord? Why should He answer your prayer? How does your prayer align with the promises, purposes and priorities of God?
- What is the link between our grasp of God's grace toward us and the way we treat other people?
- How does an understanding of grace lead to greater contentment?