

This Sunday I begin a new sermon series preaching through the first eleven chapters of the book of Deuteronomy, and in my first sermon I plan on “apologizing” for choosing to do so. No, I don’t mean that I’m going to say, “I’m sorry.” Rather, I use the word “apologize” in the Greek sense of “make a defense, defend.” The unfortunate truth is that for many Christians today, preaching from the Old Testament is a practice that needs to be defended, justified, and explained. The prevalent thought among the church as a whole is, “We’re Christians – what possible relevance could the book of Deuteronomy have in our lives?” If you look at the New Testament, though, you’ll see that the answer to that question is, “All the relevance in the world!”

Jesus and His apostles had a very high view of the Old Testament, and they particularly valued Deuteronomy. Paul is clear on several occasions of the usefulness of the Old Testament: “For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope” (Romans 15:4); “Now these things happened to [the Israelites] as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come” (I Corinthians 10:11); “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work” (II Timothy 3:16-17).

From these verses we see that the Old Testament instructs us, encourages us, gives us examples to follow and avoid, reproves and corrects our ungodliness, trains us in righteous living, and equips us for every good work. Deuteronomy does all this in several ways. First, it depicts for us our great and good God. Through the recounting of the Exodus and His dealings with Israel, we see His holiness and compassion, His unconditional electing grace, His covenant love, His longsuffering, His justice, His jealousy.

Second, it points to and prophesies of our Savior Jesus Christ and His work. Jesus told us that the Scriptures that Moses wrote testify about Him (John 5:39, 46), and certainly Deuteronomy does, especially in chapter 18 when it speaks of the prophet like Moses who would come to God’s people and reveal to them the will of God for their salvation (see Acts 3:22ff.). Paul understands the cross of Jesus from Deuteronomy 21:23; it is Jesus bearing the curse of the law in our place (see Galatians 3:13).

Third, Deuteronomy teaches that salvation is by grace. Paul did not make up the truth of election, but finds it clearly stated in Deuteronomy 7 and 9: “The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any of the peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but because the LORD loved you and kept the oath which He swore to your forefathers, the LORD brought you out by a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt...Know, then, it is not because of your righteousness that the LORD your God is giving you this good land to possess, for you are a stubborn people” (7:7-8; 9:5-6).

Fourth, Deuteronomy teaches us how we are to live in covenant with God. The entire book asserts that our obedience is a grateful response of love from the heart to the God who has first loved us when we didn’t deserve His love. That obedience manifests itself in concrete ways. When Jesus was tempted by the devil in the wilderness, what book did He use to combat Satan’s fiery darts? Deuteronomy, chapters 6 and 8 (see Luke 4:1-13). Jesus knew and meditated upon Deuteronomy in order to withstand the assaults of His enemy, and to steel Himself for obedience and trust in God. If Jesus so valued Deuteronomy that He quoted it to the devil, then it stands to reason that we should use Deuteronomy in this way as well. The law of God – summarized in the great commandment of Deuteronomy 6 to love God with all our heart, soul, strength, and mind – is expounded in Deuteronomy as in no other book. To be sure, many of the provisions pertain to the ceremonial and civil life of the old covenant people of Israel, and have been fulfilled by and in Christ and His church. Yet the way Jesus and His apostles employ Deuteronomy shows us that even these

passages apply to us in the new covenant in a variety of ways. There are vast riches to be mined in this last book of Moses; we ignore them not only to our spiritual poverty, but to our spiritual peril, as Jesus' temptation and Hebrews 3-4 demonstrate.

I encourage you to read the book of Deuteronomy, especially if it's been some time since you last read it. And come join us as we journey through this book together, learning about our God and Father, His Son Jesus Christ, the grace of salvation, and the call to loving obedience in response to grace.