

Part 6: Stubborn Grace

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We have been working our way through the book of Deuteronomy, which is a sermon given by Moses, the leader of God's people as they are about to enter the Promised Land. And on a broad level Moses is reminding Israel of who they are, what God has done, and how that should change things. In other words Moses has been constantly reminding us of God's unearned and unmerited love, and our response to it.

This book is really a book about change: how it happens, why we need it, and what threats there are to it. I'm sure each of you have wrestled with the burden and task of change in your own life, which is why this book, written over 4,000 years ago is still so incredibly relevant today.

Moses has been reminding God's people of all the faithful and wonderful things God will do if only they keep his covenant. A covenant which Deuteronomy 6 prescribes that God's people love the Lord their God with all their heart, with all their soul and with all their might.

That's the enduring change that needs to happen even in our own hearts. Last week Moses warned the people of the first threat to such an affection: a forgetfulness of heart. And this week he is going to highlight the second threat to godly affection: a stubborn heart.

Moses wants Israel to see the problem of their stubbornness and God's response to it. What we are going to see this morning are three points as it relates to our hearts: **The Stubbornness of Sin, The Stubbornness of Grace and The Liberty of Love.**

Last week we saw Moses give the people of God grounds for confidence and for concern. Confidence that God will do what he has promised, and concern that you might not obey him. That general theme is going to continue today as Moses opens up by reminding the people of God's great power moving forward, but the danger of their response to such success.

Read with me: **Deuteronomy 9:1-8.**

You see Moses knows the universal problem of over confidence. Did you notice the language he used: you are going to fight greater and mightier nations, you will defeat cities great and fortified up to heaven, you will conquer people great and tall, people of legend. And then he goes on to say that you will defeat them by the power of the one who goes over before you, the one who is a consuming fire, he is the one who will destroy and subdue, and all you will do is clean-up duty.

And he knows that tendency for us to lose our perspective. In times of conquest we can often mistake our own role, we begin to see ourselves as the great and powerful consuming fire, we are the ones mightier, greater, taller, stronger and faster. And in those moments Moses says to his people that they will be tempted to boast in their righteousness.

In other words they might think that the reason God has given them this land is because God saw how pure and wonderful Israel was and he wanted to reward their performance with a good land and good promises.

We are naturally prone to a sort of arrogance aren't we? Last year the Chicago Bear were knocked out of the NFL playoffs because their kicker missed a 43 yard field goal, and all of Chicago rioted. They put all the blame on the kicker because "Anyone could have made that kick." But one Chicago brewery held a completion the next week and offered a year supply of beer. No one made it. Instead the internet is now full of over-confident couch kickers, falling on their faces and pulling their hamstrings while trying to make the kick.

It is this kind of humility that Moses is now beginning to apply to Israel. You are only here because God has taken possession of you. And he gives three reasons why God isn't giving them the land because of their moral or spiritual superiority: Reason #1, because part of Israel's conquest was God's divine judgment on the wicked nations that were in the land. Reason #2, God was going to keep his covenant he made to Abraham to give his people a land. And Reason #3, your heart is stubborn.

The reality Moses wants them to know is that on their own they are far from righteous, in fact they stubbornly resist God's righteous rules whenever they get the chance.

Presuming the arrogance that Israel might have, Moses now begins to point out: **The Stubbornness of Sin.**

Assuming the arrogance to boast in their own performance, Moses begins to remind them of some of the issues they have had as a people. Remember there are two important places that Moses has been talking about so far in this book. The first was Mount Horeb (Mount Sinai) where God took Israel after he brought them out of slavery, the second was Kadesh Barnea which was the first time the Israelites were brought to the Promised Land. Both of those are important to remember as we read this text.

I'm going to read a relatively long passage because I want you to perhaps feel the weight that Moses wanted the Israelites to feel at this time. **Deuteronomy 9:8-21.**

So Moses speaks of this pretty terrible scene at Mount Horeb, but again he knows our hearts. He knows that stubborn hearts act stubbornly. It's as if Moses knows the people are going to say, "We'll that was once!" But look at how Moses continues: **Deuteronomy 9:22-24.**

Moses wants the people to see that they have a problem. Repeatedly, and consistently, these people have provoked their God to anger due to their unrighteousness.

And Moses uses the specifics of the sin at Horeb to define for the people the nature and the problem of their stubbornness.

You see Horeb was so important because it was the place where after God had already delivered Israel, he made a covenant with them. God didn't need to make a covenant with them. God could have just left them there in the desert. He could have said, I brought you out of Egypt, don't screw it up again. But God made a covenant with them because he loved them. The covenant was basically this, if Israel stays faithful to God, God will bless them eternally, he will take care of them, provide for them, and protect them. It was first and foremost a covenant of undeserved mercy.

And it was the scene of this covenant that Moses describes for the Israelites in slow motion. Pay close attention to the covenant language in this text: **Deuteronomy 9:9-17**.

Moses goes up the mountain and speaks with the great God who has brought them out of slavery, he graciously gives Moses rules which Nehemiah calls, right rules, true laws, and good statutes.

And Moses is on the mountain with God for 40 days and 40 nights. During which time Aaron the priest and the people begin to get antsy, and as a result they panic and make for themselves a new leader and a new god in the form of an idol. And before Moses can even get down to share this wonderful covenant of grace, the people have already broken the covenant.

This is why Moses threw the tablets onto the ground, it was partly to show the grievousness of their sin, but primarily it was to introduce the immense problem the people of Israel now face: the covenant was broken. Their hope shattered.

These people just saw ten plagues flow from the hand of God, they watched the Angel of the Lord pass-over before them, they saw a sea stand on its head, they watched a pillar of fire lead them at night and pillar of cloud guide them in the day, they heard the audible voice of God thunder from the mountain, they saw the presence of God consume a mountain in fire and smoke, yet even as their faces were warmed by a mountain aflame, they turned their back in stubborn rebellion.

Moses defined this rebellion and also made clear the result of their rebellion. Their rebellion was sin: in **Deuteronomy 9:16**. And the punishment of their rebellion was judgement, God was ready with true just judgement to destroy them.

It's one thing to see this in history, it's another thing to see such a stubborn rebellion in your own heart. Yet, this is what we must see today. Sin is, as defined by Moses, a turning from the commands of God. And this is what each and every one is born into. We are by nature covenant breakers.

Moses just told us a bit ago that the greatest commandment is this: Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your mind and with all your strength. Which means to not love this God is to break his law and find yourself under his judgment.

You see our world is right. If only we had love, we would cure everything. But the problem is this: we cannot love as we ought because our hearts are poisoned by the stubbornness of sin. Because Adam, the first man, rejected God's love in the garden, all people are born with a stubborn rejection of this God: **Romans 5:12-14**.

We introduced my kids to the old TV show, the Andy Griffith Show. We watched an episode yesterday where Opie and his friends pushed his dad's sheriff car in front of a fire hydrant as a joke so that the sheriff would have to write himself a ticket. Later Opie came and told his dad that he and his friends did it and he said, "You can go throw my friends in jail if you want dad."

His dad said, "Well Opie if you helped them, shouldn't I throw you in jail too?" To which Opie replied, "Well Pa, I wasn't pushing very hard."

Yet how many of us try to justify our own heart and our own standing by God with such boasting. To have pushed at all is to join the punishment of the rebels.

This is not a great grounds for anyone to boast in their own righteousness. We are born under the law, but instead of being under its blessing we are under its burden.

For Israel, and for us, something needed to give.

And this is where we realize that the solution to our own stubbornness could never be our own efforts. This is where we see our second point: **The Stubbornness of Grace.**

Read with me **Deuteronomy 9:25-10:5, 10:10-11.**

Remarkably in light of all the sin of the people of Israel, in light of Horeb, in light of Taberah, in light of Massa, in light of Kibroth-hattaavah, in light of Kadesh-Barnea, God gave grace. Have you ever come to God and wondered if there would be grace for you?

Many times in Deuteronomy Moses tells us that we should fear God. The “fear of the Lord” that the Bible talks about is a fear that drives us to God, but for many of us our sins have left us with a fear that distances us from God. We don’t think God can give us grace.

I know for myself on the broad scale of salvation I understand I need God’s grace, but when it comes to smaller sins, repentance inside of salvation, I often feel like true repentance will only be granted when I’ve shown enough righteousness on my own to earn it.

But here before Israel could earn it, God gave grace. And what did that grace look like? God rewrote the covenant on new tablets. The same hope was reoffered as before.

If you’ve ever broken a contract before you know that typically breeches of covenant equal more words. But here God doesn’t add any more, he keeps his faithful covenant in place.

This shouldn't be surprising to us at this point. All Moses has spoken about so far in the book of Deuteronomy is God's faithfulness to his people, and here we see how faithful is to his covenant: faithful enough to endure the sinful violation of it.

Look at how God speaks of this event in **Isaiah 54:7-8.**

God gave grace, everlasting, lovely grace. As stubborn as the people were, God’s mercy was more. But what stood between the just and right God who rose up in judgment against sin and the God who chose for a moment not to punish sin? In other words, what makes grace so stubborn? A mediator.

You see as much as the wilderness tested Israel to see what was in their heart. The events on Mount Horeb tested Moses to see what was in his heart. What would Moses do in an instance where the offer was given to him to become the new head of God's people? Would Moses rest in his righteousness, would Moses assume that this would be a good career move for him moving from prophet to patriarch?

In the Bible we see the humanity of Moses. We see him sometimes as the masterful mediator, and other times we see him as the whiny, fickle, angry sinner. And it was at this moment, perhaps because Moses

had just spent 40 days in the presence of God, that Moses knew no man would be good enough to keep this covenant.

Instead Moses aimed higher. Look at what Moses said: **Deuteronomy 9:27-29**.

If we are not careful we can read Moses' words here as pandering, but we see all throughout Deuteronomy God's ability to discern the heart of people. When Moses here is saying to God, "Lord if you destroy this people know, what will the people of Egypt think of you? What will the Canaanites think of your mercy?" he is not pandering. He is sincerely occupied with the glory of God's name.

Moses knew the only way in which this covenant would be met would be God keeping a faithful covenant for a faithless people for the fame of his name. Moses knew that at the heart of God's covenant was the hope of God's glory. That in keeping his covenant, God would be seen as more glorious.

Moses knew as a mediator and also as a man that the only thing big enough to breach the gap in this covenant was the glory of God.

And it's here where Moses showed the powerful role of mediator that God wanted him to be. Look at this incredibly important shift. On Horeb look at the language God uses when speaking to Moses: **Deuteronomy 9:12**. But now look at the language Moses uses when speaking to God: **Deuteronomy 9:27-29**.

It was Moses who took a people who were no longer God's people, and brought them back to God. That's what a gospel mediator does, he takes those who due to sin are no longer God's people, and he brings them back through his intercession.

He reminds God of his covenant, a covenant which needed for a moment to overlook the sin of the people. And Moses in fulfilling this role pointed forward to a new mediator. The mediator that we need if we too are to find ourselves inside of God's stubborn and enduring grace.

Look with me at **Hebrews 7:22-28**.

Jesus became the mediator who brought his people back to God not by asking God to overlook their sin, but by becoming the punishment for it.

If you've ever bought a new car, you've noticed an odd phenomenon. As soon as you buy your new car, you begin to see the same color and model of that car everywhere you drive. That's how it is with Jesus in this text. As soon as we see what God is really doing here, we learn to see Jesus everywhere.

It is Jesus who is the faithful mediator and true intercessor. It is Jesus who spent 40 days in the wilderness as a preparation to be our covenant keeping King. It was Jesus who became the "sinful things" and was crushed for our deliverance. It is Jesus who takes those who are far off and brings us back to God.

How can we have a hope for stubborn grace? How can we know that even when our sins abound, even when we see our own track record of rebellion that we can come to God and experience a covenant of mercy? Because Jesus eternally stands in defense of those who have faith in him.

As Paul says **Romans 5:15-17**.

You see Moses, the great mediator has already reminded this people multiple times that he is not going to see the Promised Land. Why? Because Moses sinned. Moses died for his sins, but Jesus has come to die for yours. God didn't keep his covenant even to Moses because Moses was righteous, God kept his covenant to Moses because even Moses needed a better mediator. Moses needed the righteousness of Jesus.

It's not because of our righteousness. It's because of God's grace in Jesus Christ.

Now having shown God's grace in the face of stubborn sin, Moses now asks a really important question to his people: **Deuteronomy 10:12a**.

Have you ever asked yourself that question? We certainly ask ourselves that question in so many other spheres don't we? What does my crush require of me? What does culture require of me? What does success require of me?

But in light of God's stubborn grace have you ever asked yourself what God requires of you?

Moses is clear that God's grace still requires a response from us, but behind all the commands which Moses is about to give are astounding grounds for worship: **Deuteronomy 10:12-22**

Did you notice the interesting command which Moses gave in that text? The first and third set of commands are nothing new, calls to love God, keep his law, fear him and serve him. But in the middle Moses commanded God's people to circumcise the foreskin of their hearts.

And it's here we see our last point today: **The Liberty of Love**.

Now there is context here which Moses assumes us to know, and that is that the first sign of belonging to God's covenant during the days of Moses was circumcision. But here Moses goes to show that the true markings of God's covenant people must go deeper than the mere cutting of flesh. It must cut the heart.

You see unless the heart is changed, the problem of stubbornness will continue. You can keep all the external laws that make you look like a follower of God, but the external laws can't make you love God.

Only a circumcision of the heart can do that. But there is a problem here isn't there. A stubborn little problem. Who can do this and live?

But look at what the author of Hebrews says: **Hebrews 8:6-12**.

Jesus makes a new covenant. A covenant which finally changes our heart. A new covenant which deals with our sins because Jesus became the final sacrifice for them. A new covenant which brings with it a radical liberty to return to the commands to love God.

Can you imagine if you could take a pill which would make you love low-fat foods? Or wear a patch that created in you a compulsion to diet and exercise? Can you imagine if your heart were changed in such a way that for the first time you could actually desire what is good?

This is what Jesus does. Colossians 2 says that Jesus cut off the stubborn portion of our heart so that through the gospel we can obey God's commands with radical liberty.

If you want relief from the burden of your performance, come to this Jesus. If you want relief from the failures of your heart, come to this Jesus. If you want to experience the stubbornness of this grace, come to Jesus.

Now we see in Deuteronomy it was through Moses intercession, we see in the New Testament that it was through Jesus as the true mediator that grace was given. But as we leave here I just want us to set aside the "how" grace was given part for just a minute, and I want us to see the "why" of grace.

If you want that liberty of love to be jump started towards worship and obedience, just look at Moses' words in closing this passage: **Deuteronomy 10:12-17**

Why would God save us? Because he loves us. Because he is God, the great and awesome God, the God who makes multitudes out of the few. Because he is our praise, he is our God.

You see if we want our hearts to be changed for radical affection and worship filled obedience we must see that our salvation is not a theological equation, it is the application of a divine emotion: it is the love of God which changes our hearts through Jesus and calls us to follow him with everything we have.