

How to Disciple a Nation

Deuteronomy 6:1-9

One of the most dramatic ways in which God revealed Himself to mankind occurred in Exodus 19. After delivering the Israelites from Egypt, God met with them at Mt. Sinai – which became engulfed in smoke before God descended upon it in fire – accompanied by a loud trumpet blast. All of this marked the occasion when God entered into a sacred covenant with Israel. God’s part of that covenant was to love and bless His people. Israel’s part was to love and obey God. By doing so, Israel would become a kingdom of priests, a holy nation [Exodus 19:6]. Another way of saying that is that Israel would become a nation of disciples – known for following the true and living God. To help mold Israel into a nation of disciples, we are told in Exodus 20, that God gave Moses the Ten Commandments, engraved on stone by the finger of God. Engraved on stone means these were not ten temporary suggestions for Israel to consider. They were essentials to the covenant.

The events of Deuteronomy 6, take place forty years after Exodus 20, when Israel was about to enter into the land God had promised to Abraham’s descendants. Let me further set the context of Deuteronomy 6, by referring to some important truths Moses told the people of Israel in

Deuteronomy 4:5-6,

“See, I have taught you statutes and rules, as the LORD my God commanded me, that you should do them in the land that you are entering to take possession of it. ⁶ Keep them and do them, for that will be your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples [the Gentile nations], who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, ‘Surely this great

nation is a wise and understanding people.”

The more I have pondered and meditated upon God’s commands and statutes, the more I have marveled at their wisdom. In Deuteronomy 5, Moses repeated the Ten Commandments to the people of Israel and they pledged to obey all that God spoke. God’s response to their pledge is recorded in **Deuteronomy 5:29**,

“Oh that they had such a mind as this always, to fear me and to keep all my commandments, that it might go well with them and with their descendants forever!”

The question we seek to answer this morning is: How was Israel to become a nation of disciples? Deuteronomy 6:1-9, gives us a lot of help in answering that question. Let’s begin by reading verses 1-3,

“Now this is the commandment, the statutes and the rules that the LORD your God commanded me [Moses] to teach you [the people of Israel], that you may do them [it is not enough to know God’s statutes and rules – we must be eager to do them] in the land to which you are going over, to possess it, ² that you may fear [deeply honor and reverence] the LORD your God, **you and your son and your son's son**, [how were parents, children and grandchildren to show their reverence to God?] by keeping all his statutes and his commandments, which I command you, all the days of your life [not just on Saturday or Sunday] . . . that your days may be long. ³ Hear therefore, O Israel, and be careful to do them, that it may go well with you, and that you may multiply greatly, as the LORD, the God of your fathers, has promised you, in a land flowing with milk and honey.”

Hundreds of years before the events of Deuteronomy 6, God had promised Abraham, that his descendants would become like the stars of the heaven in number [Genesis 15:5-6] and would possess the land of Canaan [Genesis 15:18-21]. God always keeps His promises. But what

we need to recognize from Deuteronomy 6, is that God's promises to Abraham were inseparably linked to Abraham's descendants embracing God's commands. Don't misunderstand. God's promise to make Abraham's descendants into a great nation and to give them the land of Canaan, was unconditional. God took an oath that He was going to do that – and there were no “if” “ands” or “buts” about it. However, if the Jewish people were going to remain in the promised land and prosper and increase in numbers, then they had to become obedient disciples of the true and living God.

If the Jewish people turned their backs on God's laws, and refused to repent, then God said He would send devastating judgments upon them – which would result in their removal from the land. In order for Israel to avoid God's judgments, they had to love and obey Him. And when they failed, they needed to repent.

In **Deuteronomy 9:6**, Moses gave that generation of Jews a stern warning, “Know, therefore, that the LORD your God is not giving you this good land to possess because of your righteousness, for you are a stubborn people.” And may I say that none of us here this morning were saved because we were so good. **Ephesians 2:8-10**, helps to explain how and why we were saved,

“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,⁹ not a result of works [goodness], so that no one may boast [but friends, we are saved for a purpose].¹⁰ For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”

We are saved for the purpose of doing good works. But what defines good works? God's commands and laws define what is good and bad, what is right and wrong, and what is smart and stupid. God's commands also describe what genuine love for God looks like; how it behaves. Jesus states in **John 14:15**, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." Keeping God's commandments is how love behaves. And it is hard to exaggerate what a blessing God's commandments are to those who embrace them. In contrast, if God's Law is spurned, then it will condemn those who spurned it on Judgment Day. Listen to what Jesus declared in **Matthew 7:22-23**,

"On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' ²³ And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you who practice lawlessness'" [without repentance].

I John 3:4 declares that ". . . sin is lawlessness." Isn't one of the first steps in becoming a Christian – to repent of our sin – our lawlessness? Some Christians do not want to get "hung up" on God's Law, because they fear it will make Christianity into a list of "do's and don'ts". Therefore, they are just going to focus on love and not talk about rules. Friends, what if the umpires for the World Series said, "We don't want to get hung up on all the rules of baseball. It makes the game too legalistic. And so we just want everyone to play fair." But what does playing fair look like? It is following the rules of baseball which helps everyone to play fair. Without rules, a baseball game would be a chaotic mess.

The statutes and rules that are spoken of in Deuteronomy 6, come from

the Ten Commandments, which Moses just reviewed with the Jewish people in Deuteronomy 5. It was critically important for the Jewish people as a whole to embrace God’s Moral Law, summarized by the Ten Commandments, because a nation cannot live together in a peaceful, orderly way, if its people do not agree that God’s Moral Law is the standard of right and wrong. When there is no agreed upon standard of right and wrong, then “might makes right” – becomes the order of the day. That describes tyranny. The United States is losing our agreed upon standard of right and wrong – which has been the Ten Commandments. And look at the divisions we are experiencing.

But it is a fact, that God’s Law cannot be imposed upon people. God’s Law works best when it is freely embraced. This is the point of what Moses did in **Exodus 24:3-8**,

“Moses came and told the people all the words of the LORD and all the rules. And all the people answered with one voice and said, ‘All the words that the LORD has spoken we will do.’⁴ And Moses wrote down all the words of the LORD [it became the Book of the Covenant – between God and Israel] . . .⁷ Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it in the hearing of the people. And they said, ‘All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient’” [they voted in favor of God’s Law].

Did Israel ever obey God’s Law perfectly? No. But Israel’s hope in being a holy nation of disciples, was not in being sinless. They were to embrace God’s Laws and then repent of their sin when they failed. When they did that, they were in a place to trust in God’s gracious provision for their sin and then get back on track.

Let’s continue reading Deuteronomy 6:4-6, because these verses give

us the highest and best motivation for keeping God's Laws – and the only way to be true disciples of Christ,

“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. ⁵ You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. ⁶ And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart” [obeying God's laws should never be a mindless, heartless, empty ritual].

Verse 4, is called the Shema, which is the Hebrew word for hear. One commentator explains

“. . . to profess that the LORD our God is one, is to proclaim the unity of faith and life [reality]. Instead of a pluralistic universe with diverse loyalties and alien realms, there is one Lord, one universal realm of truth, one obvious allegiance, to the Lord God.”

And the God of both the Old Testament and New Testament is a Triune God. This is intimated by the fact that the word for God in Hebrew is plural. But it is not to be understood as gods, because the verb attached to it is singular. The LORD our God [plural] “is” [singular] one. We also see the same dynamic in the Great Commission – when Jesus says we are to baptize “in the name [singular] of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” We do not baptize in the “names” of three gods. There is only one God, eternally existing in three persons. And since God created everything, there is no truth or reality apart from Him.

How many of you think you perfectly obey the command to love God with ALL of your heart, soul and might? I am always aware that I do not love God as much as He deserves to be loved. But praise God, I am learning to love Him more all the time – as I get to know Him better.

Verses 7-9 explain a very important truth. We are not being disciples if we are not making disciples. And for parents, our primary disciples, are our children.

“You shall teach them [God’s standards of right and wrong] diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise [this is what Jesus did with His disciples. When they saw a field of flowers, Jesus used it as an opportunity to speak of God’s care for us].
⁸ You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. ⁹ You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.”

The reason Living Hope Church is using the D6 Curriculum is because it is a tool in helping us to diligently teach our children. By having a unified curriculum, where children and adults study the same Scripture texts, with devotional guides that also focus on the same texts, we can talk about these truths all week long. Although our children and grandchildren are our primary disciples, we must not limit our making of disciples to our children only. Listen to the promises and responsibilities God gave to Abraham in **Genesis 18:18-19**,

“ . . . Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him. ¹⁹ For I have chosen him, that he may command his children and his household [the servants who worked for him] . . . to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice, so that the LORD may bring to Abraham what he has promised him.”

Our daily, lifelong obedience to God’s Word, which includes the command to make disciples, goes hand in hand with God’s blessings. Deuteronomy 6:8 speaks about the Israelites binding God’s Word on their

hands – meaning God’s Word was to direct their activities and work. They were also to have God’s Word upon their foreheads, meaning God’s Word was to guide their thinking, their decisions, and their attitudes. A favorite portion of God’s Word that the Jewish people wrote on pieces of paper and carried with them and put on their doorposts and gates was Deuteronomy 6:4-5. In the evening and morning the Jews would declare that the LORD their God was One and they were to love Him with all their heart, soul and might. A reason for putting Scriptures on their door posts and gates, was so that all who walked by could see their commitment to growing in their love for God and His Word. If you haven’t put this together yet, we cannot love God, if we do not love the Bible, which is His Word.

God’s promise to Abraham was that his descendants would bless all the nations of the earth. The greatest descendant of Abraham was the Lord Jesus Christ. In Christ’s deity, He was Abraham’s maker. But in Christ’s incarnation, when He took on flesh, He became Abraham’s offspring. All who become disciples of Christ, become the offspring of Abraham, who are to bless all the nations [Galatians 3:7-9; 29].

In **Luke 9:23** Jesus tells us three important truths about being His disciples, “And he said to all, ‘If anyone would come after me [be My disciple], let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.’” As followers of Christ we must be willing to deny ourselves unlawful pleasures – whether they be activities or desires which God says are wrong. We must also be willing to deny ourselves lawful pleasures – such

as sleep and relaxation, when our service to others requires it. To take up our cross, an implement of suffering, refers to our willingness to bear reproach, mocking, and even death – in order to live and share the gospel, and make disciples of all the nations. We are not following Jesus if we shirk what He requires of us.

In Revelation 19:16, the ascended Lord Jesus is identified as the King of kings. And do you remember what Jesus declared to His disciples just before He ascended to His heavenly throne – which is above all earthly thrones? Lets listen to **Matthew 28:18-20**,

“And Jesus came and said to them, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth [that is the whole universe] has been given to me. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.’”

The pattern God lays out in Deuteronomy 6, for how the Israelites could become a holy nation, is the pattern Christians are to follow in making disciples of all the nations. We too are to love God with all our heart, soul and might. But you notice that we still have commandments to willingly embrace, which we are then to help others love and cherish. God’s Laws are the standard of right and wrong for all people, but only the redeemed in Christ find them to be the “the law of liberty” [James 2:12] whereby we are freed from the law of sin and death. Let’s pray.

