

April 1, 2018  
Sunday Evening Service  
Series: Deuteronomy  
Community Baptist Church  
643 S. Suber Road  
Greer, SC 29650  
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## GUARD YOUR HEART Deuteronomy 4

For all my harping about the importance of reading the Bible, we do relatively little public reading of it. Of course we always read a somewhat lengthy passage during the Scripture reading in the morning service. And it is common for us to study long chapters like the one before us during which study we will actually read most if not all of the verses. However, there is no particular rule that says I have to expound every verse in every chapter of the Bible.

In light of this, it will be beneficial for us to read through the first half of Deuteronomy four, noting multiple themes that lay the foundation for the application found in the last half of the chapter. So, let's read through the first twenty-four verses noting the emphasis on the LORD'S **commands**, the people's **experience**, the need to **do and teach the commands**, the alternative which is **idolatry** and an **example of God's chastening** by Moses himself.

First we come face to face with the issue of commands. 1) *"And now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the rules that I am teaching you, and do them, that you may live, and go in and take possession of the land that the LORD, the God of your fathers, is giving you.* 2) *You shall not add to the word that I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God that I command you.*

Next is the people's experience. 3) *Your eyes have seen what the LORD did at Baal-peor, for the LORD your God destroyed from among you all the men who followed the Baal of Peor.* 4) *But you who held fast to the LORD your God are all alive today.*

Then there is the challenge to do and teach the commands. 5) *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, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.'* 7) *For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the LORD our God is to us, whenever we call upon him?* 8) *And what great nation is there, that has statutes and rules so righteous as all this law that I set before you today?* 9) *"Only take care, and keep your soul diligently, lest you forget the things that your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. Make them known to your children and your children's children.*

Beginning with verse ten, we find experience again. 10) *How on the day that you stood before the LORD your God at Horeb, the LORD said to me, 'Gather the people to me, that I may let them hear my words, so that they may learn to fear me all the days that they live on the earth, and that they may teach their children so.'* 11) *And you came near and stood at the foot of the mountain, while the mountain burned with fire to the heart of heaven, wrapped in darkness, cloud, and gloom.* 12) *Then the LORD spoke to you out of the midst of the fire. You heard the sound of words, but saw no form; there was only a voice.* 13) *And he declared to you his covenant, which he commanded you to perform, that is, the Ten Commandments, and he wrote them on two tablets of stone.*

Based on that experience, we would expect the challenge to teach and do the commands. 14) *And the LORD commanded me at that time to teach you statutes and rules, that you might do them in the land that you are going over to possess.*

That brings us to the warning about the antithesis, the opposite of obedience which is idolatry. 15) *Therefore watch yourselves very carefully. Since you saw no form on the day that the LORD spoke to you at Horeb out of the midst of the fire,* 16) *beware lest you act corruptly by making a carved image for yourselves, in the form of any figure, the likeness of male or female,* 17) *the likeness of any animal that is on the earth, the likeness of any winged bird that flies in the air,* 18) *the likeness of anything that creeps on the ground, the likeness of any fish that is in the water under the earth.* 19) *And beware lest you raise your eyes to heaven, and when you see the sun*

*and the moon and the stars, all the host of heaven, you be drawn away and bow down to them and serve them, things that the LORD your God has allotted to all the peoples under the whole heaven.*

Then a reminder that the people are God's people and, therefore, He will chasten them. 20) *But the LORD has taken you and brought you out of the iron furnace, out of Egypt, to be a people of his own inheritance, as you are this day.* 21) *Furthermore, the LORD was angry with me because of you, and he swore that I should not cross the Jordan, and that I should not enter the good land that the LORD your God is giving you for an inheritance.* 22) *For I must die in this land; I must not go over the Jordan. But you shall go over and take possession of that good land.*

Which ends with another warning about idolatry. 23) *Take care, lest you forget the covenant of the LORD your God, which he made with you, and make a carved image, the form of anything that the LORD your God has forbidden you.* 24) *For the LORD your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God.*

That leads us to the last half of the chapter which is an application of the principles Moses just stated. Verses twenty-five through forty will explain to the people how these truths such as God's commands, our experience with God's work, the need to obey God's commands, and what happens if we don't, will work in their lives. It is a good application to our own circumstances and our own walk with the LORD.

### **Warning of Judgment for Idolatry (vv.25-28).**

The warning from Moses was quite plain. Be careful to guard your heart because you might provoke the LORD to anger (v.25). How could that happen? By doing evil. *When you father children and children's children, and have grown old in the land, if you act corruptly by making a carved image in the form of anything, and by doing what is evil in the sight of the LORD your God, so as to provoke him to anger (v.25).*

The road to the Promised Land, the Celestial City is long. Moses challenged the second generation Israelites regarding two future generations. Life is not just about my walk with the Lord or my

experience in His grace. I am responsible to impact future generations who God brings into my sphere of influence.

We must guard our hearts diligently because the next generation and the next generation is watching us. Our children learn most from what they observe. Much of their sin and failure is not inherited but are learned traits. That is the essential teaching of this repeated principle: *You shall not bow down to them or serve them; for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me (Deuteronomy 5:9; Exodus 20:5; Numbers 14:18).* The sins of the father are typically picked up by the children and often expanded. It is not magical, but practical and to be expected. Only the miracle of God's grace breaks the chain of repetition.

We must teach our children that giving precedence to anything over God will provoke God's anger. Make no mistake, the God of love can also be the God of anger. That sounds almost sacrilegious until we remember that God's anger is always righteous, always appropriate. Our anger, on the other hand, is almost never righteous and seldom acceptable to God and others. We respond in anger when our will is thwarted, our desires blocked, our pride injured. God's anger is an intentional, premeditated response to His creature robbing Him of the glory about which He is passionate. Because God is perfect, His glory is rightly His and must not be misappropriated to self or to our creations or to our imaginations.

To do evil in God's sight will draw out His anger against us. Evil is whatever does not conform to His righteousness. Because we are born in sin, our natural propensity is to think evil and do evil all the time. In particular, here (and through most of Israel's history) the evil was giving to self and other created things, the worship, attention and glory that was rightly God's. It is idolatry when a person created in God's image for God's glory, worships an inanimate object, an object of their own creation and credit it for doing only what God can do.

Human history is replete with examples of people creating images of animals, stars, moons, suns, and angels that they worship and pray to as if those inanimate objects were able to intervene in human affairs. It is really not that the people worship the object, but they are worshipping a spirit that is behind the object. The spirit that

replaces God is Satan. That is why Paul warned the Corinthians to stay out of the temples of idolatry because behind the idol was Satan who was stealing God's glory. That same principle applies to every false religion in which human ideas replace God's truth which alone brings glory to Him. That is the same principle behind anything that takes our adoration over God. To that end, the most common idol is "ME" as I worship my desires, my plans, my will.

Moses certainly knew what he was talking about when he issued this warning because Moses was experienced in that problem. *Furthermore, the LORD was angry with me because of you, and he swore that I should not cross the Jordan, and that I should not enter the good land that the LORD your God is giving you for an inheritance. For I must die in this land; I must not go over the Jordan (vv.21-22).*

God responded in anger when Moses robbed Him of His glory. Let's review the story as it is written in Numbers 20.

*1) And the people of Israel, the whole congregation, came into the wilderness of Zin in the first month, and the people stayed in Kadesh. And Miriam died there and was buried there. 2) Now there was no water for the congregation. And they assembled themselves together against Moses and against Aaron. 3) And the people quarreled with Moses and said, "Would that we had perished when our brothers perished before the LORD! 4) Why have you brought the assembly of the LORD into this wilderness, that we should die here, both we and our cattle? 5) And why have you made us come up out of Egypt to bring us to this evil place? It is no place for grain or figs or vines or pomegranates, and there is no water to drink." 6) Then Moses and Aaron went from the presence of the assembly to the entrance of the tent of meeting and fell on their faces. And the glory of the LORD appeared to them, 7) and the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 8) "Take the staff, and assemble the congregation, you and Aaron your brother, and tell the rock before their eyes to yield its water. So you shall bring water out of the rock for them and give drink to the congregation and their cattle." 9) And Moses took the staff from before the LORD, as he commanded him. 10) Then Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly together before the rock, and he said to them, "Hear now, you rebels: shall we bring water for you out of this rock?" 11) And Moses lifted up his hand and struck the rock*

*with his staff twice, and water came out abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their livestock (Numbers 20:1-11).*

What was God's assessment and verdict to Moses' and Aaron's action? *And the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, "Because you did not believe in me, to uphold me as holy in the eyes of the people of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land that I have given them" (Numbers 20:12).*

Okay, so why exactly was God angry with Moses? The story informs us that Moses and Aaron were privileged to communicate with the glory of the LORD, just like we are when we read the Bible. In that communication, the LORD gave very clear and specific instruction. *"Take the staff, and assemble the congregation, you and Aaron your brother, and tell the rock before their eyes to yield its water. So you shall bring water out of the rock for them and give drink to the congregation and their cattle" (Numbers 20:8).* That instruction is as clear as we find God's words when we read the Bible. Did God tell Moses to strike the rock? We don't know that we have all the words of God here. Back at Mt. Horeb when the people needed water, God told Moses to strike the rock with his staff (Exodus 17:6).

The issue is what Moses and Aaron did, having just come from God's presence with God's specific instruction. *10) Then Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly together before the rock, and he said to them, "Hear now, you rebels: shall we bring water for you out of this rock?" 11) And Moses lifted up his hand and struck the rock with his staff twice, and water came out abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their livestock (Numbers 20:10-11).*

I can imagine that at this point Moses was pretty angry, but not necessarily. Notice in our text that he put blame on the people (*the LORD was angry with me because of you*). This might have been a grudge with Moses since we find the accusation repeated (Deut. 1:37; 3:26). But the people were at fault! Years later, God inspired a psalmist to implicate the people in the problem. *They angered him at the waters of Meribah, and it went ill with Moses on their account, for they made his spirit bitter, and he spoke rashly with his lips (Psalm 106:32-33).*

Moses spoke rashly, robbed God of His glory, brought God's anger on himself, and paid the consequences of his sin. When he

warned the second generation not to do that, you better believe it was a deep-seated, heartfelt warning that the people would do well to take to heart. And the warning is still applicable to us today, especially in light of the ultimate consequences of robbing God of His glory.

Warning: the Lord will destroy you (vv.26-28). 26) *I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that you will soon utterly perish from the land that you are going over the Jordan to possess. You will not live long in it, but will be utterly destroyed.* 27) *And the LORD will scatter you among the peoples, and you will be left few in number among the nations where the LORD will drive you.* 28) *And there you will serve gods of wood and stone, the work of human hands, that neither see, nor hear, nor eat, nor smell (vv.26-28).*

These are some pretty serious words describing judgment. Moses warned that if the people robbed God of His glory by worshiping idols, *You will utterly perish from the promised land (v.26a)*. The people were on the verge of entering and possessing God's promise. But that was not a guarantee that the battle with the flesh was over.

Furthermore, Moses warned that the result of idolatry would be, *You will not live long but will be destroyed (v.26b)*. There are historical examples of individuals who proved this like Achan and his family. Ultimately, God drove the entire nation out of the land and destroyed all their cities and the temple.

And as a result of idolatry, *The Lord will scatter you among the nations (v.27)*. We know from Bible history that Israel was scattered throughout the Assyrian Empire. Later the nation of Judah was scattered throughout the Babylonian Empire. For centuries the Jews were scattered all over the world. It has been relatively recently that God is gathering the nation back together to complete His promises.

In those far away lands, *You will serve idols (v.28)*. The end result has been that most Jewish people today are avowed atheists. They worship the idols of wealth, possessions, the arts, and human wisdom. They don't think they need God. It is all the result of God's anger.

Is there any modern application of these truths? Yes, there is certainly application to religious folks who are like most ancient Israelites. Consider the nations of Europe where true Christianity

devolved into pagan religion. The true church and great revivals of Europe gave way to false religion, modernism, and complete abandonment of the Bible. God was angry with professing Christians who embraced "higher criticism," "Catholicism," "Humanism," "Rationalism," and all the other "isms." Multiple wars devastated the nations but they have rebuilt in their own strength. America is not an exception to the rule. Rest assured that God is angry with America and one day we will experience His destructive judgment. Ultimately, millions of religious people will stand before God the Son the eternal judge and plead for Him to change His mind and purpose.

We can also apply this warning to true believers. True believers can slip into sin. Even true believers can become captive to worshiping something or someone who robs God of His glory. As a result, God can become angry with His children. As a result, God will chasten His children like a loving father. True children of God are always very responsive to the Father's chastening and will repent, confess, and return to His loving arms.

#### **Promise of Forgiveness and Blessing (vv.29-40).**

When God's people fall into sin, they cry out to God for help (vv.29-31). Trapped in the sin of idolatry, God's people search for Him (vv.29-30). The promise is that if you are God's child, you will seek the LORD. *But from there you will seek the LORD your God and you will find him, if you search after him with all your heart and with all your soul (v.29).*

Faltering in the pit of God's judgment and punishment, His people will turn to Him. We see this cycle time after time in the book of Judges. It is repeated during the period of the kings. Every time the people repented and sought after God, they discovered like the prodigal son that the Father was waiting for them.

Child of God, acknowledge your sin, search for God with all your heart and you will find Him. Learn the wonderful promise from Micah, *Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance? He does not retain his anger forever, because he delights in steadfast love (Micah 7:18).*

You will return to the LORD. *When you are in tribulation, and all these things come upon you in the latter days, you will return to*

*the LORD your God and obey his voice (v.30).* This is the doctrine of perseverance of the saints. People who are truly God's people will experience His hand of chastening when they sin and they will always return to Him. Real Christians hear the voice of God and obey His voice. As we grow in Christ through sanctification, God's voice becomes louder, His words clearer, and our obedience more responsive.

God's people have this confidence because we know God is merciful. *For the LORD your God is a merciful God. He will not leave you or destroy you or forget the covenant with your fathers that he swore to them (v.31).* God responds to our sin in anger because He is merciful. God chastens us when we rob Him of His glory because He takes pity on us. God draws us back to Himself because He never gives us what we really deserve. God must love us everlastingly because He keeps His covenant. Listen to the testimony of God's people who have wandered off into sin and were disciplined when God became angry with them. No one likes to experience God's discipline, but we rejoice in it because it corrected us, brought us back into fellowship with God, and reminded us of His mercy and steadfast love.

This is all the case because God has made His mercy known (vv.32-38). How? God has spoken. 32) *“For ask now of the days that are past, which were before you, since the day that God created man on the earth, and ask from one end of heaven to the other, whether such a great thing as this has ever happened or was ever heard of. 33) Did any people ever hear the voice of a god speaking out of the midst of the fire, as you have heard, and still live? 34) Or has any god ever attempted to go and take a nation for himself from the midst of another nation, by trials, by signs, by wonders, and by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, and by great deeds of terror, all of which the LORD your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes? (vv.32-34).*

God speaks to us plainly in His word. The Bible reminds us over and over of God's amazing work of redemption through Jesus Christ. Did ever a pagan, make-believe God deliver His people from the power of sin that is so prevalent in the flesh, the world, and the devil? No. But the LORD has revealed Himself so that we can know Him. 35) *To you it was shown, that you might know that the LORD*

*is God; there is no other besides him. 36) Out of heaven he let you hear his voice, that he might discipline you. And on earth he let you see his great fire, and you heard his words out of the midst of the fire. 37) And because he loved your fathers and chose their offspring after them and brought you out of Egypt with his own presence, by his great power, 38) driving out before you nations greater and mightier than yourselves, to bring you in, to give you their land for an inheritance, as it is this day (vv.35-38).*

Therefore, keep God's commands in your heart (vv.39-40). That will happen when we know God! *Know therefore today, and lay it to your heart, that the LORD is God in heaven above and on the earth beneath; there is no other (v.39).* The command is not for us to know more about God. The command is for us to go deeper and deeper into intimate fellowship with God. In that fellowship, we begin to understand the relationship between God's word and His works among us.

When we know God, we will desire to keep God's commands. *Therefore you shall keep his statutes and his commandments, which I command you today, that it may go well with you and with your children after you, and that you may prolong your days in the land that the LORD your God is giving you for all time (v.40).* In light of all of this teaching, we conclude that keeping God's commands is not burdensome. It is simply a matter of knowing the person and character of God—seeking to give Him His due glory—which causes us to order our lives in conformity with what He has give us in the Bible.

Sanctification is a wonderful experience. In it we outgrow foolish selfishness, spiritual immaturity, and the desires of the flesh. In it we grow to know God intimately more and more. Because of this growth, we not only see the reason why we must guard our hearts, but we learn how to guard our hearts more closely and we gain great desire to guard our hearts. All of this is due to God's mercy toward us.