

## **Deuteronomy 11**

### **Loving the Lord:**

#### **A degree of separation by a chosen people**

Song:           1 A mighty fortress is our God  
               329 We are a chosen people

Reading:       Deuteronomy 7:1-11

We are going to look at the whole of chapter seven this morning. As we have said this follows from the *shema*, to love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your strength. We have also seen how on this hang all the law and the prophets. In fact the whole of the post-amble is about the importance of the *shema* which rephrases the first two commandments and Moses then went on to elaborate on what it is to hear the words and to obey them. To love the Lord your God and the way this is to be applied is set out in the subsequent chapters, the postamble or addendum. So we will continue to hear more of the *shema* as we look at these following chapters of Deuteronomy.

We need to step back to take a look at this important early structure of the book of Deuteronomy. We have seen the preamble and now the postamble. Together they form a frame over the Ten Words and that framework is important. We are not looking at different topics, but at the *shema* which is the rephrasing of the first two commandments and indeed these first two and the last are the pillars on which the Ten Words stand. It is all about loving the Lord and Moses was spelling out the different aspects of what this love involves. The *shema* is central to scripture and that is why Jesus said on this hang all the law and the prophets.

There are two issues here in this passage of Deuteronomy. The first is a warning not to have anything to do with the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites, etc. The other is the grace of God to an insignificant band of people, a chosen people which is another reason why we should keep the word. We like the second but I think we may not be too comfortable with the first. Both have to do with what it is to love the Lord. The chapter then continues to talk about the blessings of God.

#### **A degree of separation**

We have been talking about loving God and loving our neighbour. That is an important part of our worship. Loving our neighbour also involves denying our rights as Paul so eloquently points out in drawing from the *shema*. Yet loving our neighbour does not involve going all the way with everybody. Our modern thinking is set in universalism, i.e. we have to treat everybody the same. Australia has universal health care, something that the USA is just trying to set up. During the GFC years ago, everyone on the pension got almost a thousand dollars to stimulate the Australian economy, whether they were living in Australia or not. Should there not be a distinction?

There is a degree of separation given here. Not everyone in the land was treated in the same way. While we may not want to exercise our rights in relating with our brother or sister in Christ, there need to be a clear demarcation in relating to those who have no regard for God and His word. This passage makes it clear.

<sup>1</sup>When the LORD your God brings you into the land that you are about to enter and occupy, and he clears away many nations before you—the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations mightier and more numerous than you—<sup>2</sup>and when the LORD your God gives them over to you and you defeat them, then you must utterly destroy them. **Make no covenant with them** and show them no mercy. <sup>3</sup>**Do not intermarry with them**, giving your daughters to their sons or taking their daughters for your sons, <sup>4</sup>for that would turn away your children from following me, to serve other gods. Then the anger of the LORD would be kindled against you, and he would destroy you quickly. <sup>5</sup>But this is how you must deal with them: break down their altars, smash their pillars, hew down their sacred poles, and burn their idols with fire.

This is a difficult issue. On the one hand we are to love all people and to bring to them the gospel of Jesus Christ. On the other hand, we are not to associate with evil. Therein lies our dilemma. There are issues in this passage that I do not want to discuss here and that is the extermination of the inhabitants of the land. War and the atrocities of war are difficult issues even with our armed forces today. We can talk about that at another time. But the issue raised here is the separation from the inhabitants of the land. They did not acknowledge the Lord and continued with evil practices. We have talked about that earlier on when the Israelites were entering the Promised Land. What is our degree of separation from these people?

We need to know what we are really doing. You might remember the movie, *Mickey Blue Eyes*, featuring Hugh Grant. You may have your morals in the association, but bit by bit, little by little, you get drawn closer and closer to the underhanded actions and before you know it, you are well in the midst of it and very much a part of the crime. Jesus said,

“No one can **serve** two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot **serve God** and wealth. (Matt. 6:24)

Yet I have read of a group of missionaries who dedicated themselves to work among the prostitutes in an attempt to deliver them from that slavery. Obviously in their mission, there has to be a degree of separation in what they were doing. The key in this passage is this.

<sup>2</sup>...**Make no covenant with them** and show them no mercy. <sup>3</sup>**Do not intermarry with them**, giving your daughters to their sons or taking their daughters for your sons, <sup>4</sup>for that would turn away your children from following me, to serve other gods.

Israel was not to make any covenant with the inhabitants of the land. The word ‘covenant’ is the same word used when reference is made to the covenant that God made with the Israelites. In other words, Israel is bonded to the Lord. They are His people and a special possession of God. Israel cannot be bonded to another. If they were to do that, they would eventually turn from God to follow other gods. Covenant makes them one and marriage also makes them one. They must avoid both in dealing with the inhabitants of the land. In having said that, I am aware that in our world we have work contracts and so forth. We cannot avoid that, but it is what we call ‘arm’s length’ contract. That is not what is endangered here. It is the kind of engagement that demands our heart and soul whether it be work or hobby or even social engagements.

We do not give too much consideration to the evil that surrounds us. Yes, we have become very rational and got rid of much of superstition and that is a good thing, but we cannot think that we can in our own strength maintain our loyalty to God and defeat the evil around us. Martin Luther understood that fallacy in his well-known hymn, *A mighty fortress is our God*. In the first verse, he pointed out that we are not his equal on earth. In the second verse he wrote,

Did we in our own strength confide,  
Our striving would be losing  
Were not the right Man on our side,

The Man of God's own choosing.  
 Dost ask who that may be?  
 Christ Jesus, it is He;  
 Lord Sab-a-oth His name,  
 From age to age the same,  
 And He must win the battle. (Martin Luther)

Martin Luther was well aware of our weaknesses and failures. If we were to march straight into enemy territories we are no match for the evil that surrounds us. It is only Christ who will win that battle and that is why we need to stay close to God and His word, and to maintain a degree of separation from those who do not acknowledge the Lord. At first that association may not seem too threatening, but bit by bit we will be drawn right in before we know what is going on.

We are so full of ourselves today that we disregard the potency of evil. C. S. Lewis' *Screwtape Letters* is still relevant for us today as it was when he wrote it over fifty years ago. Amos warned Israel of this kind of togetherness.

"You only have I chosen  
 of all the families of the earth;  
 therefore I will punish you  
 for all your sins."  
<sup>3</sup> Do two walk together  
 unless they have agreed to do so? (Amos 3:2-3, NIV)

Paul put it plainly,

<sup>14</sup> Do not be mismatched with unbelievers. For what partnership is there between righteousness and lawlessness? Or what fellowship is there between light and darkness? <sup>15</sup> What agreement does Christ have with Beliar? Or what does a believer share with an unbeliever? <sup>16</sup> What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said,  
 "I will live in them and walk among them,  
 and I will be their God,  
 and they shall be my people."  
<sup>17</sup> Therefore come out from them,  
 and be separate from them, says the Lord,  
 and touch nothing unclean;  
 then I will welcome you,  
<sup>18</sup> and I will be your father,  
 and you shall be my sons and daughters,  
 says the Lord Almighty." (2 Cor. 6:14-18)

Paul is making a reference here to Deuteronomy as he often does.

### **Why do we need a degree of separation? A chosen people.**

<sup>6</sup> For you are a people holy to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on earth to be his people, his treasured possession. <sup>7</sup> It was not because you were more numerous than any other people that the LORD set his heart on you and chose you—for you were the fewest of all peoples. <sup>8</sup> It was because the LORD loved you and kept the oath that he swore to your ancestors, that the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. <sup>9</sup> Know therefore that the LORD your God is God, the faithful God who maintains covenant loyalty with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations, <sup>10</sup> and who repays in their own person those who reject him. He does not delay but repays in their own person those who reject him. <sup>11</sup> Therefore, observe diligently the commandment—the statutes and the ordinances—that I am commanding you today. (Deut. 7:6-11)

God did not choose the rich and the powerful on earth. There is a good reason for that. They have the ability to make things happen and God does not need them. We will talk more about that in another session. We love to associate with the rich and the powerful because they can be the springboard for our journey. However, God chose an insignificant wandering Aramean, Abraham. He chose the nation of Israel, who for most of their time as a nation was subservient to the other nations around. It was only for a brief period with David and Solomon that they controlled the known world then.

Moses was continuing to emphasise to the Israelites the importance of the word and the need to know and to acknowledge the word. Firstly, they were not to make any covenant with inhabitants of the land when they got there. Secondly, they are the special people of God, and so are we today as people redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ.

Moses kept reminding them that 'the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt'. This line was repeated again and again not only in the book of Deuteronomy but also in the rest of the Old Testament by the psalmist and the prophets.

<sup>9</sup> Know therefore that the LORD your God is God, the faithful God who maintains covenant loyalty with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations,

We are the people of God. It is God who keeps the covenant with us, not we with God. Thus we are not to enter into any covenant relationship with others, certainly not with those who do not acknowledge God. Yes, there is a covenant relationship of family and friends in Christ. That is part of the work of Christ in incorporating us into His body. However, we need to watch that we do not become too pally with those who are not in Christ. I am not saying that we should not have friends outside of the Christian community, but we need to know the word which has the power to keep us in the covenant of God. I have friends who are not Christians and they are nice people. However, I do not want to be locked in with them because though they are morally upright, they have different value system. Very often sitting around the dinner with them, the conversation was all about where to make more money. I find it hard to engage that conversation. We need to know where we stand.

We need to keep a degree of separation because we are the chosen people of God. This separation is also the expression of our love of God.

We have taken the commands out of the context of the relational. You see, the five books of Moses are also called the Torah, meaning law. Now there is little law in Genesis, Exodus and Numbers. Yet they constitute the Torah. In Jewish thought, the law is understood in the context of their history and that history is the loving God who acts. That is why the historical books in the Old Testament are referred to as the prophets because what God has spoken is already accomplished. We do not think that way. We separate words and deeds in our culture. We have put the law in a sterile non relational environment. Therein lies our problem in coming to scriptures.

You see, all the commands in the scriptures have the basis first in what God has done. What we have done is to remove that and make ourselves the first mover. It is the problem with the 'I'. Well we may worship God, but if it is not the result of what God has done, it is not good enough. We can do a bit better by acknowledging what God has done, but it is still not good enough. It lacks communion. God has intervened in our lives through Christ and His Spirit. There is now communion in the God who became man.

We do not trust or do in order for God to act. We trust and we do because God has acted in our lives. We must not put the cart before the horse.

**Blessings for obeying the law or linked to trust?**

(Is there a difference?)

Deuteronomy 7:12-26

We have a particular difficulty in coming to the second half of this chapter. Moses, having demanded that degree of separation from the inhabitants of the land, then moved to talk about the blessing of God. It would appear that he was tying the two together, i.e. obedience and holiness leading to the blessing of God. We need to examine this passage carefully.

We are looking at the postamble to the Decalogue and this next passage of Deuteronomy continues the exhortation by Moses to love the Lord with all our heart, with all our soul and with all our strength. We saw the exhortation following the Decalogue started off with the emphatic statement of the authority, finality and permanence of the Words. This is followed by the *shema* to love the Lord which consists of loving the word firstly by us and secondly teaching it to our children. To love the Lord also involves a separation from those who do not acknowledge the Lord because slowly through a process of adaptation we will be drawn into their way of thinking and living if we are not careful. Here we are going to look at the nature of the blessing of the Lord to us. We should not see this as an unrelated section, but connected to the whole of the postamble in loving the Lord. How should we then understand this passage?

Context, context, context. We have to read these sections of Deuteronomy in its context. We talked about the degree of separation from the inhabitants of the land. If we were to read that without its context then we will certainly turn it into a contractual separation like the Pharisees. What I mean is this. If we come to the text with a contractual framework, we will read the separation from the inhabitants of the land as a condition for obtaining the blessing of God. If we were to read the section regarding the blessing of God without its context, then it would simply mean for us a straight forward formula. Obey and obtain the blessing. Disobey and face the curse. That is the sequence of our contractual framework, or the sinful framework.

There is a different sequence here, the sequence of the covenantal framework and that is – God blesses, humanity obeys, God continues to bless (McConville, *Law and Theology in Deuteronomy*, p. 17). However, what we have done is to reverse the order of things, making God's blessing the result of our obedience. Yes, scripture talks about the blessing of obedience, but it does not start there. It starts with the unconditional blessing of God to His creation for God sends the rain on the just and the unjust. That is the creational blessing. That is God's covenant with His creation. Yet the unjust, though receiving the creational blessing of God, will not come into the full blessing that is in Christ. Our response is not our own but it comes through the creational blessing of God and the redemption He offers to us. Our response or non-response does not alter the covenant of God.

It all starts with God and from Him as Paul says. What eventually returns to God must firstly have come from Him, otherwise it is an offering that God does not accept.

For from him and through him and to him are all things.  
To him be the glory forever. Amen. (Romans 11:36)

The blessing of the Lord must not be seen as an optional extra in our lives conditional on our responses to the Lord. This creates a great amount of stress and often guilt in our lives. The question we then ask ourselves is whether we have done enough for the Lord to merit His blessings. That is not the way God wants us to live.

However, there are problems in our understanding of the blessing of God. I will mention two. One is our expectation. This is because we are not in tune with the Lord. We are often like the child who wants more and more lollies and if the lollies are not given, then there is anger against the parents. We expect God to bless in the way we expect and God does not do that.

Another problem is that we are not aware of all that God has already given to us. We tend to think of what we have not got and not appreciate the vast amount that the Lord has already blessed us with.

### **The first blessing**

<sup>26</sup> Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth."

<sup>27</sup> So God created humankind in his image,  
in the image of God he created them;  
male and female he created them.

<sup>28</sup> God **blessed** them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth." (Gen. 1:26-28)

God blessed humanity at creation. What had Adam and Eve done at this stage to merit the blessing of God at creation? Nothing. This is the gift of God to humanity, not because of merit but because of His grace to the creation He created and loves. What is it that God expects of them? It is to be the custodian of the creation that God has given to them.

Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.

God did not then leave them on their own to fulfil this mandate. Instead, the blessings need to be understood as the enabling of the Lord to fulfil what He has commanded. In other words it is the trust in God that is expected of Adam and Eve. Instead, they doubted God through the deceit of the serpent. Today we are under the same predicament. The sin of Adam and Eve was not anything that they did. Yes, they did eat the fruit that was forbidden, but that was the result of doubting what God said. It was because they did not trust what God said.

A key to this passage is the veiled reference to the incident at Kadesh-barnea mentioned in chapter 1.

<sup>17</sup> If you say to yourself, "These nations are more numerous than I; how can I dispossess them?" <sup>18</sup> do not be afraid of them. Just remember what the LORD your God did to Pharaoh and to all Egypt, <sup>19</sup> the great trials that your eyes saw, the signs and wonders, the mighty hand and the outstretched arm by which the LORD your God brought you out. The LORD your God will do the same to all the peoples of whom you are afraid.

The problem with the Israelites was not in the doing, but in the matter of faith in God. Remember what happened after they were judged for not going into the land. They took up arms and went in on their own without the blessing of God. They were trounced. We may be doing things for God, but faith is the pre-requisite, without which we will only be acting on our own and many Christian endeavour have been of that ilk. The opening of the book of

Deuteronomy was about the lack of faith in God and here is another reminder of that. The writer to the Hebrews put that plainly.

And without faith it is impossible to please God, for whoever would approach him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him. (Heb. 11:6)

The blessing of God is linked to our faith in Him and not to our deeds. It is trusting in the covenant of God. However, you may want to point out that the first word in the passage today is the word 'if'. It is what we may call the problematic 'if'.

<sup>12</sup> If you heed these ordinances, by diligently observing them, the Lord your God will maintain with you the covenant loyalty that he swore to your ancestors;

This passage commences with the word 'if' – 'If you heed these ordinances, by diligently observing them ...'. It would appear from a superficial reading that the blessing is conditional on their obedience. Here I am grateful for the observance of Prof. James Torrance who identified two contexts or uses of the word 'if'. The two uses are conditional and relational (or obligatory). In other words, is it used in reference to a relationship already established or is it used as condition to establish a relationship? Is the use of the word 'if' a condition for what follows or is the use of the word 'if' a statement of the relationship that has already been established? Is this a conditional 'if' or a relational 'if'?

The answer is clear from the context of the book of Deuteronomy. It is of course a relational 'if'. This is supported by what follows. There is a shift in the emphasis from what Israel can do to what God will do for them. After having told the Israelites the things they have to do, Moses now shifted the emphasis to what God has done and will do for them. This blessing must not be seen as something new at this stage of their journey and conditional on their obedience. This blessing is the flow on from the creational blessing. In fact, what Moses was saying mirrors the creational blessing.

The rest of the passage is about what God did or will do for His people.

<sup>12</sup> If you heed these ordinances, by diligently observing them, the LORD your God will maintain with you the covenant loyalty that he swore to your ancestors; <sup>13</sup> he will love you, bless you, and multiply you; he will bless the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your ground, your grain and your oil, the increase of your cattle and the issue of your flock, in the land that he swore to your ancestors to give you. <sup>14</sup> You shall be the most blessed of peoples, with neither sterility nor barrenness among you or your livestock. <sup>15</sup> The LORD will turn away from you every illness; all the dread diseases of Egypt that you experienced, he will not inflict on you, but he will lay them on all who hate you. <sup>16</sup> You shall devour all the peoples that the LORD your God is giving over to you, showing them no pity; you shall not serve their gods, for that would be a snare to you.

<sup>17</sup> If you say to yourself, "These nations are more numerous than I; how can I dispossess them?" <sup>18</sup> Do not be afraid of them. Just remember what the LORD your God did to Pharaoh and to all Egypt, <sup>19</sup> the great trials that your eyes saw, the signs and wonders, the mighty hand and the outstretched arm by which the LORD your God brought you out. The LORD your God will do the same to all the peoples of whom you are afraid. <sup>20</sup> Moreover, the LORD your God will send the pestilence against them, until even the survivors and the fugitives are destroyed. <sup>21</sup> Have no dread of them, for the LORD your God, who is present with you, is a great and awesome God. <sup>22</sup> The LORD your God will clear away these nations before you little by little; you will not be able to make a quick end of them, otherwise the wild animals would become too numerous for you. <sup>23</sup> But the LORD your God will give them over to you, and throw them into great panic, until they are destroyed. <sup>24</sup> He will hand their kings over to you and you shall blot out their name from under heaven; no one will be able to stand against you, until you have destroyed them. <sup>25</sup> The images of their gods you shall burn with fire. Do not covet the silver or the gold that is on them and take it for yourself, because you could be ensnared by it; for it is abhorrent to the LORD your God. <sup>26</sup> Do not bring an abhorrent thing into your house, or you will be set apart for destruction like it. You must utterly detest and abhor it, for it is set apart for destruction.

The highlighted verses say it all. So often we cannot see beyond what we can do and unable to see anything beyond ourselves and our actions. There is loss of transcendence.