

## Careful Attention

Deuteronomy 4:1-10

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What do you pay the most attention to? Is it your favorite sports team, your car, your house, your investments, or your relationships? Are you obsessed with God the same way you are obsessed with these things? Do you intentionally spend time in God's word so that you may know and follow Him more? We are in a relationship with God, just as Israel was. In Deuteronomy, Moses calls Israel to pay careful attention to God and obey His commands. But Israel so often was unfaithful to God and gave into the world and sin. They paid attention to other things more than their God. Let us not make the same mistake.

Moses makes 3 points about paying careful attention to God. First is that we should not cut corners when following God's word. We must accept what He says, whether it is easy or not. For Israel, obedience to God is critical because Israel is in a relationship with God, who wants to bless them. Moses alludes to the Abrahamic covenant in Deuteronomy 4:1, in which God promised to bless Israel and bless the nations through Israel. When Israel disobeyed, they walked away from God's blessing and were unfaithful in their relationship with God. They were supposed to be a light to the Gentiles, but when they disobeyed they abandoned God's purpose for them. Therefore Moses must exhort Israel once again to keep God's commands in v. 2. The word "keep" is the word *shamar*, which literally means to pay careful attention. This word is used 65 times in Deuteronomy, strongly emphasizing obedience to God's word. In addition Moses tells Israel not to add or subtract from God's commands. Israel must keep God's commands constantly, but also in their entirety. Likewise we must keep paying careful attention to God's word, in its entirety. If we cut corners with our health, diet, and exercise, then we will reap physical ailments later on. Likewise if we cut corners on the word of God, we will reap spiritual sickness. If we cut corners on the gospel or on theology, then we will get heresy and false doctrine. If we cut corners on morality, then we will get broken families and relationships. We will miss out on the spiritual blessing and joy God wants for us now and for eternity. The path isn't easy, but it is for our ultimate good, to draw us closer in our relationship with God. So let us be vigilant about His word.

Second, covenant obedience walks in God's abiding love. We obey not because we have to, but because we get to. It is our privilege to belong to God. Jesus obeyed for us, and His grace

and love compels us to obedience. In vv. 3-4 Moses reminds Israel of their sin at Baal Peor (Numbers 25). Israel fell into idolatry, worshipping the false god Baal. So God punished them with a plague. God's wrath towards sin is a necessary result of His complete holiness and righteousness. And we want a just God that addresses sin rather than letting it continue unchecked. God disciplined Israel so they would not walk further down the path of destruction. But we see in Deuteronomy 4:4 that those who had faith in God lived. Likewise, Romans 6:23 says that sin leads to death, but through God's grace we live by faith in Jesus. We know what Israel didn't, that all the wrath of God was taken by Jesus on the cross (Philippians 2:6-8). Jesus obeyed unto death so we don't have to fear punishment. We don't obey out of fear or in order to merit God's favor. We are already accepted by God because of Jesus' obedience. Our obedience flows naturally from the relationship we have with God through Jesus. And we obey not with our own strength, rather we obey in Jesus, with His power.

Finally, covenant obedience influences others toward God. The first kind of influence is missional influence, which causes others around us to be attracted to God. In vv. 5-8 Moses says that when Israel obeys, the nations will be drawn to them and to God. Are people drawn to you because you are a Christian? Do people consider you holy or holier-than-thou? Do they consider you upright or uptight? Do they see you as righteous or needing to be right all the time? If you walk with Jesus and let His love overflow from within you, others will notice. The second kind of influence is familial influence. Verses 9-10 talk about teaching children God's word, which they received at Horeb (see also Deuteronomy 6:4-7). Are you teaching your children God's will or your will? Do you focus more on their spiritual development or on their worldly education and success? Parenting should be rooted in the gospel. But this is not just for parents. Within the church we all have a responsibility for setting a good example and teaching the children God's ways.

In the story of the rich young ruler from Luke 18, a man walks away from Jesus because he loves money more than Jesus. We all are in danger of putting other things before Jesus. We must remember that Jesus paid careful attention to us and obeyed unto death for us. We should respond in kind. Let us therefore continue to follow Jesus wholeheartedly and not be led astray.