

The Message of Deuteronomy

by G. Campbell Morgan

The book of Deuteronomy emphasizes the importance of God's love and its relationship to His government and man's obedience.

Scripture: Deuteronomy 4:37, Deuteronomy 5:10, Deuteronomy 6:5, Deuteronomy 10:12-15, Deuteronomy 11:1, Deuteronomy 13:3, Deuteronomy 19:9, Deuteronomy 30:6, Deuteronomy 30:15-20

Topics: "God's Love", "Obedience"

Description

G. Campbell Morgan emphasizes in 'The Message of Deuteronomy' that God's love for humanity is the foundation of His governance, while man's love for God is the driving force behind obedience. He explores how Moses, through his intimate relationship with God, articulates the importance of love in the laws and history of Israel, highlighting that true obedience stems from a heart that loves God. The sermon underscores that God's laws are expressions of His love and that love is the only sufficient motive for obedience. Morgan calls for a response to God's love through knowledge, love, and obedience, illustrating that this relationship is reciprocal and transformative.

Transcript

A. THE PERMANENT VALUES

I. God's Love of Man the Motive of His Government

This the Burden of the Retrospective and Prospective Sections.

i. The Retrospective.

a. History. Deuteronomy 4:37

b. Law. Deuteronomy 10:12-15.

ii. The Prospective.

a. The Song.

b. The Blessing.

II. Man's Love of God the Motive of His Obedience

This emphasized in the Retrospective as to Law; and in the introspective as to Covenant-keeping.

i. Law.

Deuteronomy 5:10. Quoted from Exodus.

Deuteronomy 6:5 The Comprehensive.

Deuteronomy 10:12. Relation to Love of God.

Deuteronomy 11:1, 13, 22. Thou shalt love.

Deuteronomy 13:3. Thou shalt love.

Deuteronomy 19:9. Thou shalt love.

ii. Covenant.

Deuteronomy 30:6. The circumcised heart

Deuteronomy 30:15, 16, 19, 20. The principle of choice

B. THE LIVING MESSAGE

I. The Affirmations

i. God's Laws are the Expression of His Love.

Necessarily.

Perfectly.

ii. Man's Love is demonstrated by Obedience.

Only Love will submit to their Severity.

Obedience the final Proof of Confidence.

II. The Arguments

i. The Revelations of History.

ii. The Issues of Law.

III. The Appeal

i. Know God.

ii. Love God.

iii. Obey God.

The opening and closing statements of Deuteronomy constitute the boundaries of the book, and give us the key to its interpretation. Its opening words are: "These be the words which Moses spake unto all Israel,

beyond Jordan in the wilderness, in the Arabah over against Suph, between Paran, and Tophel, and Laban, and Hazeroth, and Di-zahab." Its closing declaration, written in all probability by the hand of Joshua, is, " There hath not arisen a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom Jehovah knew face to face; in all the signs and the wonders, which Jehovah sent him to do in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh, and to all his servants, and to all his land; and in all the mighty hand, and in all the great terror, which Moses wrought in the sight of all Israel."

The book contains the final words of Moses to the chosen people, and they are words resulting from his "face to face" friendship with Jehovah. This friendship, with its intimate knowledge of God—a knowledge which gleams through all these final words—was the result of the process and progress of revelation. Moses could not have delivered these prophecies on the day after he had escaped from Egypt. He had much to learn. The messages recorded in Deuteronomy repeat things already said, but with a new tone and a new emphasis, and there is felt a new atmosphere in their utterance. The tone, emphasis, and atmosphere are due to the fact that progressively Moses had come to such full knowledge of God that the man who wrote the last page of the book of Deuteronomy had to say of him that he was a prophet who knew God "face to face." It would be an interesting theme to trace carefully the development, and to notice the progress of Moses' knowledge of God. I shall content myself with two or three brief sentences, indicating not so much his progress, as the processes which resulted therein.

When three months old, the child was committed to the Nile, by faith in God, as the writer of the letter to the Hebrews tells us. By sweet art the mother contrived to nurse the boy. How long that continued, we do not know. Quite long enough, in all probability, for her to have soothed him to 'sleep with stories of his own people, and to have implanted in his mind thoughts of God which could never be obliterated. His training in the Egyptian court played no unimportant part in his discovery of truth concerning God. It was training by contrast. In the Mosaic economy the influence of Egyptian forms of worship is to be discovered. For instance, Egypt in its religious rites made use of sacred arks, but they contained a piece of stone, a serpent, water from the Nile, or something material, and often base. In the loneliness of the wilderness God taught His servant that in all these things there were the form, the possibility, the principle; but that they needed to be corrected at the centre. When he constructed the sacred ark according to pattern, it received holy things, the symbols of a holy God, who could only be approached by sacrifice. Thus at the court of Pharaoh, he was prepared for the contrasts which were to follow.

Then came the forty years in the wilderness. I do not sympathize with those who pity Moses as he left the court of Egypt, and went down into the wilderness. There was far more grandeur in the rough, rugged mountains, and God's overarching sky, than in anything Egypt possessed. In the quiet meditation of those forty years he came nearer to God, gazing upon the wonders of nature, touching the fringes of His force, and baring his soul to the influences of His majesty. Next in order came the more direct visions and revelations which were necessary for his work. First, that at the burning bush, and the uttering of the unutterable fact, "I AM THAT I AM." For forty years he had been in the presence of God, had seen His might diffused through mountains and plains, in storms and calms, in stars and stones, until at last, in one solitary scrub bush in the wilderness, there gleamed the Glory that he had never seen—a Presence spoke, and the voice said: "I AM THAT I AM."

A little later the word "I am" was linked with the great name of Jehovah. Then Moses discovered that the God, the fringes of whose garments he had touched for forty years, and whose glory had burned in the bush, and whose voice he had heard out of the mystic splendour, was a God ready to become everything His people needed.

After a while he longed for a fuller revelation, and cried out of the depth of his heart hunger, "Show me, I pray Thee, Thy glory," and God answered, "I will make all My goodness pass before thee." Then he learned that God's glory is His goodness.

Then followed another forty years of wilderness wandering, during which he discovered that the foundation of the throne of God was righteousness and judgment, saw the goodness of God, marked His patience, learned His heart; and finally, out of that full knowledge, delivered his last messages to his people.

These discourses constitute a survey of the whole economy of God in relation to His people. There are six of them, falling into three groups. The first two are retrospective; the second two are introspective ; the last two are prospective. Through all, there runs a new note of love. The former facts are repeated ; the sovereignty of God is insisted upon; the obedience of man is called for; but these facts are now set in relation to love. This is no mere piece of imagination. The word love, as indicating relationship between God and man, occurs only once in Exodus, when God declares that He shows "mercy unto thousands of them that love Me and keep My commandments" ; and as indicating relationship between man and man, once in Leviticus: "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." The word love is a lonely stranger in the first four books.

Everything is changed in the book of Deuteronomy. Its supreme and overwhelming message is that of love. To understand this will enable us to state the permanent values, and to deduce the living message.

The permanent values are two; first, that God's love of man is the motive of His government; and secondly, that man's love of God is the motive of his obedience.

God's love of man is the motive of His government. This is the special burden of the retrospective and prospective sections. In the close of the first discourse, which was a retrospect of the history of the people, Moses declared: "Because He loved thy fathers, therefore He chose their seed after them, and brought thee out with His Presence, with His great power, out of Egypt." By that statement he revealed his conviction that the inspiration of God's government was His love.

The next discourse was a resume of laws in which there was no lowering of the standard of righteous requirement, but remarkable interpretation of the meaning of the laws upon which He still insisted: "And now, Israel, what doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but to fear the Lord thy God, to walk in all His ways, and to love Him, and to serve the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul, to keep the commandments of the Lord, and His statutes, which I command thee this day for thy good? Behold, unto the Lord thy God belongeth the heaven, and the heaven of heavens, the earth, with all that therein is. Only the Lord had a delight in thy fathers to love them, and He chose their seed after them, even you above all peoples, as at this day." Insisting upon the necessity for their obedience to the laws which he had reviewed, he declared that they were the outcome of the love of God.

Thus, as he looked back over the history, he said that it was a history of the government of love; and as he recapitulated the laws, he declared that they were the outcome of love.

The last two discourses consist of the song and the blessing. In that song, love is never mentioned; but it breathes the spirit of love from beginning to end. It is a song of God's triumph over unfaithfulness. Paean and dirge alternate throughout; the story of the Divine faithfulness, and of human unfaithfulness. Is there any love song ever sung so mighty as that which tells of love, which triumphs over the unfaithfulness of

the loved one? That is the deepest truth about God, and Moses celebrated it in his final song. These people were to be dispersed, and Moses foretold the dispersion; and then, at the command of God, wrote the song, and taught it to the people. A song will linger in the heart long after a code of ethics has been forgotten. Many a man who has broken all the laws of his country and his God, in some distant land, has been wooed back to mother and to God by some old song. So Moses wrote the song of a love that through pain, if necessary, will proceed towards the fulfillment of its own high purpose.

The last words of Moses were of blessing only. His eyes were fixed upon the far distant day when the tribes should be restored, and fulfill the first Divine ideal. In the midst of the blessing is a great declaration, "He loveth the peoples." Thus, whether it be a review of history, a resume of laws, a song for the future, or a foretelling of restoration, the last great message of the man who knew God "face to face" was that God's love was the motive of His government.

The other fact is equally true, and equally manifest. Man's love of God is the motive of his obedience. This is emphasized in the retrospective and introspective divisions of the book; and in each case in one discourse preeminently. Man's love of God as the motive of obedience is declared in the repetition of laws, "Showing mercy unto thousands of them that love Me and keep My commandments. . . . Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be upon thine heart." The tremendous truth which Israel was destined to teach the world was that of the unity of God: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord." The outcome of that truth of the unity of God is the command, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might." The nation and the individual were to be unified by the love of one God. Further on in this discourse promises are made, and the condition was ever, "If ye shall . . . love the Lord your God." The expression of love is obedience to law. Man's love of God is the only sufficient motive for his obedience to the laws of God.

In dealing with the covenant, Moses declared "The Lord thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live," and so revealed the secret of its keeping. Then in his last prophetic utterance he again insisted upon the fact that the only motive sufficiently strong to enable a man to keep the law of God is that of love to God.

The permanent values in this case constitute the living message. To repeat the values is to utter the message. God's love of man is the motive of His government. Man's love of God is the motive of his obedience. In order to emphasize these truths, let us hear again the affirmations of this book, listen to its arguments, and attend to its appeal.

What, then, are the affirmations? The first is that God's laws are the expressions of His love, and that for two reasons. Because God is love, He cannot make a law that is not an expression of His love; and because man needs law, God, being love must provide it. To make man, and put him down in the world without government, would be to leave him to work out his own ruin. He needs law because he is finite, and infinite issues lie all about him; and it is necessary that he should know the laws of the infinite in order to obey them. Love, then, is the inspiration of God's government of a nation, or of a man.

The affirmation of the book, on the other side, is that man's love of God is the motive of his obedience. Nothing but love will submit to the severity of God's law. It is a severe law. It besets me behind and before, and will not allow me to escape.

"O Love, that will not let me go."

There is a stern ring in that word as well as a tender tone. So severe is the law of God that nothing but love will submit to it. Obedience is the final demonstration of confidence; and confidence is never perfect unless it is the confidence of absolute love. So that obedience to law on the part of man is demonstration of his love of God; and the love of God is the motive of his obedience.

The arguments of this book are those of all human history. The historian needs an interpreter. The singers are the interpreters of history. In this song Moses argued for the love of God by reviewing His methods. In our own times, Browning has sung in other words the same great theme:

"I have gone the whole round of Creation: I saw and I spoke!

I, a work of God's God's hand for that purpose, received in my brain

And pronounced on the rest of His handiwork—returned Him again

His creation's approval or censure; I spoke as I saw.

I report, as a man may of God's work—all's love, yet all's law! Now

I lay down the judgeship He lent me. Each faculty tasked

To perceive Him has gained an abyss where a dewdrop was asked,

Have I knowledge? Confounded, it shrivels at wisdom laid bare.

Have I forethought? How purblind, how blank, to the Infinite care!

Do I task any faculty highest to image success?

I but open my eyes—and perfection, no more and no less,

In the kind I imagined, full-fronts me, and God is seen God

In the star, in the stone, in the flesh, in the soul and the clod.

And thus, looking within and around me, I ever renew (With that stoop of the soul which, in bending, upraises it too)

The submission of Man's nothing-perfect to God's All-Complete,

As by each new obeisance in spirit I climb to His feet. "

All's love, but all's law. The seers are always the singers. I have already referred to one of George Matheson's hymns. Let us not miss the strength of that hymn, while we glory in its tenderness.

"O Love, that will not let me go."

Do not let us sing that as though love only knew the method of a tender caress. We must sing all the hymn if we would know what the first line means.

"O Love, that will not let me go,

I rest my weary soul in Thee;

I give Thee back the life I owe,
That in Thine ocean's depths its flow
May richer, fuller be.

"O Light, that followest all my way,
I yield my flickering torch to Thee;
My heart restores its borrowed ray,
That in Thy sunshine's blaze its day
May brighter, fairer be.

"O Joy, that seekest me through pain,
I cannot close my heart to Thee;
I trace the rainbow through the rain,
And feel the promise is not vain
That morn shall tearless be.

"O Cross, that liftest up my head,
I dare not ask to fly from Thee;
I lay in dust life's glory dead,
And from the ground there blossoms red
Life that shall endless be."

Love, then, is law gripping me, binding me to the cross, compelling me to lay life's glory in the dust of death, and so ensuring the blossoming of red life.

The first appeal of the book is to love of God. It is objected that love cannot be commanded. That is true. Love is born when least expected. We love, because He first loved. On the other hand, love can be refused. We may not love, even though He first loves. The message then is, "Harden not your heart." Do not blind yourself to God's love. Detect it in the rainbow and in the rain, in the cross and in the red life that blossoms from the ground. Having detected it, answer it. The final appeal of Deuteronomy shows how love is answered. It is by obedience. In answer to love, and in the power of love, obey. There is a reflex action in this sacred matter. To obey in answer to love is to come to love the One obeyed; and so more perfectly to obey, out of more perfect love.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/g-campbell-morgan/the-message-of-deuteronomy/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net