

BE EXCLUSIVE

Deuteronomy 4:1-10, 15-19, 39-40

One of the key words in our culture today is diversity. Everywhere we turn, we see and hear things that encourage and tout the benefits and sing the praises of diversity. To be sure, there are places where diversity is good. Our diet needs diversity. If all we had available to eat was boiled rice and had to eat rice three times a day, then we would be clamoring for diversity such as green leafy vegetables, meat, seafood, and desserts. If we are dealing with innovation in the workplace, a variety of approaches to solving problems is sometime very helpful in accomplishing breakthroughs and in this setting, diversity can certainly be beneficial. The truth of the matter is that the world is diverse and multifaceted and there is beauty in this. However, the beauty comes from allowing that which is different to be different. If we try to make everything be uniformly diverse on a small scale, then everything takes on a boring sameness and the benefits of diversity is destroyed by taking diversity to an extreme.

In such a culture in which we live today, where does the idea of exclusivity fit? Many times we hear people criticizing Christians because we say that Christ is the **only** way to be saved. Such exclusivity is condemned as being narrow minded. Let's return to the idea of diversity in our diet where we were willing to add such things as vegetables and meat to the rice diet. While this may not seem to be exclusive, we actually have a long list of things that are excluded from the diet. We certainly do not want to have any arsenic, or pesticides, herbicides, or any other kinds of poisons or things that would harm us served up as part of a meal.

On the philosophical side, there are a lot of philosophies around and the argument is made by some that people should have the right to choose which of these philosophies they want to embrace. Total exclusivity would eliminate the option for choices by keeping people in a state of ignorance about various beliefs. This is what is done in most Islamic countries in the world. Access to other religious beliefs is limited and any display of acceptance of any other religion results in harsh penalties (such as death). This is an example of where being exclusive is a deterrent to discovering and choosing the truth. The place where exclusion is needed is after "truth" has been discovered and then embracing and accepting only the truth and excluding that which is contrary to truth. Just as poisons in your diet are disastrous to your health, false philosophies are disastrous to your spiritual well being.

In the fourth chapter of Deuteronomy, Moses instructed the Children of Israel to obey God's laws and to be exclusively devoted to Him.

Learn God's Ways – 4:1-4

¹ "Now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the judgments which I am teaching you to perform, so that you may live and go in and take possession of the land which the LORD, the God of your fathers, is giving you. ² "You shall not add to the word which I am commanding you, nor take away from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you. ³ "Your eyes have seen what the LORD has done in the case of Baal-peor, for all the men who followed Baal-peor, the LORD your God has destroyed them from among you. ⁴ "But you who held fast to the LORD your God are alive today, every one of you. Deuteronomy 4:1-4 (NASB95)

Hearing involves listening to the *message* and not just the *words*. We need to know the message and the lessons imbedded in whatever is being taught. Many listen to words but never hear the message. Applying the substance of the word of God is what allows us to appropriate the life-giving benefits and experience the spiritual and physical promises revealed in the word of God. Without these (statutes and judgments) we cannot unlock the power of His presence that enables us to take possession of our inheritance in Christ.

With regard to being exclusive we see a warning about adding to or subtracting from the decrees and laws. In many cases the laws and decrees create a dynamic tension that may appear to be dichotomous. (Example: we must forsake all and follow Jesus, yet the person who does not take care of his own family is worse than an infidel.) This tension holds us in a position of moderation or temperance on the road of life. If we add to or take from, then we run the risk of running off the road by vacillating between presumption and unbelief.

Moses referred to the incident that had occurred just months before at Baal Peor in Moab to illustrate from their own history that obeying God's Law was a matter of life and death. At Baal of Peor all the Israelites who entered into spiritual and physical adultery with the Moabite women were either put to death by the sword or died in a plague (24,000 died in the plague). On the other hand, those who held fast to the LORD lived. The wise man sees the fate of the foolish, learns from it and lives. We do not have to experience a particular sin to learn the awfulness of the consequences of it. The result of sin is destruction of some part of our lives. By holding to what we know to be the way of the Lord will prevent many sorrows. We can likely think back to times when we chose the "right thing" and that choice resulted in gain rather than loss.

The bottom line is that we need to listen with close attention to what God is saying to us. Unfortunately, we tend to tune out anything spiritual. Hearing so as to heed is essential. However, hearing is not enough, but we must go on to doing. Jesus made this same point in the Sermon on the Mount in the parable of the house built on the rock. The outcome of hearing and doing is to live.

Live By God's Ways – 4:5-8

⁵ "See, I have taught you statutes and judgments just as the LORD my God commanded me, that you should do thus in the land where you are entering to possess it. ⁶ "So keep and do *them*, for that is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes and 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 is the LORD our God whenever we call on Him? ⁸ "Or what great nation is there that has statutes and judgments as righteous as this whole law which I am setting before you today? Deuteronomy 4:5-8 (NASB95)

You probably have experienced a situation – likely in dealing with your children – where you saw that they were entering into a new experience such as getting their driver's license and you took the time to tell them some of the accumulated wisdom of your years of driving. You give them warnings and tips and then you found that they completely ignored what you told them and they wound up in some sort of trouble. You probably felt like asking them, "Why do you think I told you to do this or that (whatever it was that would have prevented the problem)?" The obvious answer is that you told those things so that they would heed the warning and do the right thing! This is essentially what Moses was telling the Israelites in verses 5 and 6 of chapter 4. The bottom line was that he had taught them certain principles and practices that they would need in living in the Promised Land and the expectation was that they should **remember** them and **do** them.

If you had a choice in the matter, would you like others to think that what you say is worth listening to because it is wise or that they would automatically tune out what you say because they think it is just a lot of foolishness? In other words, does your reputation matter? Moses saw that the long-term influence and success of this new nation would hinge on whether they made wise choices or foolish choices. Following the precepts that God had given them would result in a positive reputation.

This principle is still valid today for us as Christians. The unsaved will judge the quality of Christianity and the validity of the claims of the Bible on the basis of the way professing

Christians live. We have an awesome responsibility if we profess that we have been born of the Spirit of God.

The claim Moses made in verse eight may have sounded presumptuous at the time he made it – but history has vindicated the claim that no one has ever been able to have a better set of laws than what God gave the Israelites. Some may argue that (as Christians) we have something better; however, Jesus stated that He did not come to change the law but to fulfill it. Many times Christians think they are above the law and, therefore, they can do as they wish. Being “above the law” in what God intends for us really means that we do more than what the law requires and from a superior motive of love.

The essence of wisdom is that we choose what is right because we know that it is right and not because we have to do so from fear of consequences. As great as this is, God has more for us in Jesus Christ. Moses told the Israelites that a key to their greatness was that God was so near to them and that they could call upon Him. In Christ, we do what is right because it is Christ who is living in us and it is the (super)natural thing for us to do; that is, we do what is right because our new nature is that of righteousness because God dwells in us by the Holy Spirit.

God’s intent for Israel was that they would involve Him in every part of their lives. Our nearness to God is directly related to our involving Him in our lives. If we have never invited Him in to be Lord of our lives, then we may have made a decision to follow Jesus but have missed having Him in us and us in Him.

Center Your Whole Family on God – 4:9-10

⁹ “Only give heed to yourself and keep your soul diligently, so that you do not forget the things which your eyes have seen and they do not depart from your heart all the days of your life; but make them known to your sons and your grandsons. ¹⁰ “Remember the day you stood before the LORD your God at Horeb, when the LORD said to me, ‘Assemble the people to Me, that I may let them hear My words so they may learn to fear Me all the days they live on the earth, and that they may teach their children.’ Deuteronomy 4:9-10 (NASB95)

We have the greatest salvation (the only true salvation) of any “religion.” Yet we must be diligent to keep God’s word before our eyes (need to be conscious of what He has said) and in our hearts (our ways become His ways – the supernatural then becomes natural for us). We need to move from being “conscious” of what God desires for us to being “converted.” It is good to ask ourselves, “What would Jesus do?” But we should not stop there. It is far better to be so much under His control that we don’t have to ask or even think about it. These precepts must be taught to children or they will learn the precepts of other gods or philosophies. We must be diligent to teach not only the truth but to also repudiate the false messages they will hear at school, on the TV, etc.

Moses could have told them what Paul wrote to the Corinthian church – the message came to you not in word only but also in demonstration of the power of God. A demonstration of the power of God raises the emotions of anyone – it causes us to be intense and to listen carefully and we will remember the things that happened and what was said because of the emotional intensity. Such a demonstration raises our “awe” so that we have healthy fear of this awesome God. It is one thing to sing, “Our God is an awesome God.” It is quite another thing to witness the manifestation of His power. We sometimes forget that our God is also a consuming fire and He is certainly shrouded in mystery so that we will never be able to fully comprehend the totality of His being.

The Israelites needed to be constantly on guard to not let the things of God slip from the place of prominence in their lives. The place for this is in our hearts (the seat of our emotions),

in our wills and in our personalities. We speak of inviting Jesus into our hearts. We sing “Come into my heart, Lord Jesus.” The heart is the place of prominence – whatever is in your heart will influence your behavior. As a man thinks in his heart, so is he.

Israel was to have the word of God enthroned in their hearts. We are to enthrone the Living Word, Jesus, in ours. However, we need to keep our soul diligently lest we forget all that God has done and drift away into something else having first place in our lives.

One of the ways of remembering is to tell others about our relationship with Jesus. We will talk about whatever is in first place in our hearts. Part of telling is to teach our children and grandchildren. We greatly need a revival of this practice today. The instructions God gave to Israel was that fathers were to be responsible for this critically important duty. If fathers fail to bring their children up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, then many times it will not happen.

Moses thought it particularly important to teach about the giving of the Law. Pivotal points are important. For us the pivotal point is the Cross. It is, therefore, important to keep the Cross in proper focus as we share our faith with others.

Let Nothing Else Have God’s Place – 4:15-19

¹⁵ “So watch yourselves carefully, since you did not see any form on the day the LORD spoke to you at Horeb from the midst of the fire, ¹⁶ so that you do not act corruptly and make a graven 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 sky, ¹⁸ the likeness of anything that creeps on the ground, the likeness of any fish that is in the water below the earth. ¹⁹ “And *beware* not to lift up your eyes to heaven and see the sun and the moon and the stars, all the host of heaven, and be drawn away and worship them and serve them, those which the LORD your God has allotted to all the peoples under the whole heaven. Deuteronomy 4:15-19 (NASB95)

Moses returned to the warning he began earlier regarding “not being able to see God.” We are so focused on the physical and the material and the tangible things that we will gravitate to these rather than the spiritual. Our tendency is to trust in what we can see, feel, and sense with the five natural senses. That tendency leads to idolatry. God had allowed the heathen nations to worship animals, the planets, etc. Paul mentioned this in his encounters with Gentiles to whom he was preaching the gospel. He said in Acts 17:29-30 “Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man’s device. And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commands all men everywhere to repent.” But this permission would not be permitted for His people. He had brought them out of Egypt where they were being refined from being a group of tribes into a nation. In bringing them out, He had set them apart as a holy people unto Himself. This is what exclusion is all about and is captured in the concept of being holy.

Recognize God’s Lordship Every Day – 4:39-40

³⁹ “Know therefore today, and take it to your heart, that the LORD, He is God in heaven above and on the earth below; there is no other. ⁴⁰ “So you shall keep His statutes and His commandments which I am giving you today, that it may go well with you and with your children after you, and that you may live long on the land which the LORD your God is giving you for all time.” Deuteronomy 4:39-40 (NASB95)

When it comes to exclusivity, there is nothing more exclusive than being the one true God. As Moses stated so appropriately, “there is no other.” Moses admonished the Israelites to walk in the ways of this one true God since it was to their benefit to do so. God’s ways are beneficial because of His very nature. If we look for reason of why God does things, we will trace the basic motive back to love. Because of His love, He initiated action on behalf of mankind. We can see the action initiated by God. He loved, He chose, He brought, He gave.

He was able to do all of this because of His great power.

In the case of Israel, God had a purpose to create a special possession, a kingdom of priests, a holy nation. You would think this would be motive enough for the people to remain faithful to God. We tend to lose sight of how long all this took. These people had been in Egypt 400 years. It was nearly 600 years since God had called Abraham. God had given Abraham, then Isaac, and finally Jacob a goal or a vision. They had kept it alive. However, it had been hundreds of years since all that happened. Hundreds of more years would pass as the people lived in the land God was giving them. As the years went by, their vision of the purpose faded and they drifted away and no longer experienced God's presence in their lives.

We would do well to consider why our nation was developed. We say it was because of a desire for religious freedom. But what did God have in mind. What cosmic significance in the overall plan to accomplish God's will is this nation to fulfill? A purpose that is consistent with the heart of God and the commission Jesus gave to the church would be to evangelize the world by carrying out the Great Commission. Much has already been done, but so much more is needed. We have developed tools such as electronics, rapid travel, and global networks of communication. There is wealth that has been generated beyond that needed for survival that can be used to reach people with the gospel message.

We can experience God as He reveals Himself to us and as He chooses us for the work He has for us to do. However, we can continue to experiencing Him and the joy that this experience brings only through obedience. There are benefits of obedience. “. . . that it may go well with thee, and with thy children . . .”