What Does God Want from Us?

Deuteronomy 10:12-22

Have you ever had to deal with hidden expectations?
They can be dangerous, can’t they?
Sometimes newlyweds find themselves angry and arguing because of hidden expectations. I heard this illustrated this way many years ago. It’s the first Saturday afternoon since John and Sally have returned from their honeymoon, and John is starting to wonder why Sally hasn’t done the laundry yet. And he’s beginning to show his frustration a little. You see, John’s mother always did the laundry early on Saturday mornings. Now in the meantime, Sally is getting a bit frustrated as well because John hasn’t taken the garbage off. After all, her father always hauled the trash off on Saturday mornings, usually no later than 10:00, and now it’s Saturday afternoon and John still hasn’t done it. And before you know it, they’re arguing.

You see, John expects Sally to do the laundry at a certain time, while Sally expects John to haul off the garbage every Saturday morning. But while John’s mother always had a set time to do the laundry, Sally’s mother did it whenever it was needed. And while Sally’s father always hauled off the garbage on Saturday mornings, it was the kids who had done it in John’s family whenever they began driving! They’re working on different sets of expectations that they’ve never discussed, but rather just assumed—hidden expectations.

Don’t you just hate hidden expectations? We’ve all experienced them—maybe it was a certain teacher in school, or an employer, or maybe a friend or family member. Sometimes churches have hidden expectations for their ministers. I don’t know about you, but I’ve always been the type of person that I want to know what’s expected of me. I want to know what those I’m responsible to want from me.

**Faulty perceptions . . .**

Have you ever wondered what God wants from us?
People seem to have a lot of different ideas about that, and those ideas are based on their understanding or misunderstanding of God and who he is and what he’s like. And I have to confess that those of us who are preachers and teachers in the church have not always been completely helpful here. God’s grace has often been preached in such a one-sided fashion that its demands—what God expects of us—aren’t clearly delineated. That leads to a view of God as a sort of a cosmic Santa Claus who is supposed to give us anything we want or a kindly old grandfather figure who just wants everybody to be happy and have a good time. And sometimes the gospel has been preached in a way that focuses so much on God’s wrath that people see him as an angry despot wielding thunderbolts, ready to zap anyone who crosses him.
The fact is that neither of these perceptions of God is accurate. In his dealings with Israel and the church, and supremely in his Son Jesus Christ, God has clearly revealed himself, who he is and what he is like. This revelation is clearly recorded in the Scriptures. And while there is still tremendous mystery about God—after all, he hasn’t revealed himself completely—he has revealed himself sufficiently for us to be able to know him and to know what he requires and wants from us. In fact, in this text we’re looking at this morning, Deuteronomy 10:12-22, Moses very clearly declared what God wants from his people. Listen to what he said . . . Read text . . .

Now the context of this passage is important. The Book of Deuteronomy gives us three farewell addresses or sermons from Moses to the people. The wilderness wanderings were almost over, and they would soon enter the Promised Land. Moses would not go in with them, though, so he had gathered the people to instruct them one more time, and to remind them of the LORD’s claims on them. In these three addresses he reaffirms the covenant between the LORD and his people Israel, and restates and expands the laws given in Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers.

Our text is part of Moses’ second address that we find in chapters 5 – 28. He begins this address by restating the Ten Commandments, then gives them the Great Commandment—“Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.” He tells them how they are to teach their children to do the same as they pass on the law and commandments of the LORD from generation to generation. He warns them never to forget the LORD, then reminds them how they did just that in the golden calf incident, when they had Aaron the priest to make an idol for them while Moses was still on the mountain with God. He reminds them of other instances as well when they angered God, including when they refused to enter the Promised Land out of fear and distrust. Later the Lord had called Moses back onto the mountain to receive another copy of the tablets of the Law. At God’s command, Moses had led them through the wilderness and they were now on the brink of the Promised Land.

God’s expectations . . .

Moses wanted the people to be clear about what God wanted from them. So while describing God’s dealings with them, Moses told the Israelites what God required of them. And he made those expectations crystal clear in 10:12-13!

And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God ask of you but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in obedience to him, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to observe the LORD’s commands and decrees that I am giving you today for your own good?¹

This was a call to a reverent lifestyle characterized by total commitment and faithful obedience. Moses called the people to fear God, to relate to him in reverence and awe and in recognition of who he is. This is not an irrational fear or a fear that the one being feared will capriciously do harm or evil to you, the way primitive people feared the spirits. It’s not, as John D.W. Watts says in his commentary on this passage, “blind terror before the unknown.” Here’s how he describes what it means:

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, New International Version®, 2011 edition.
In the language and thought form of the Near East fear expressed the basic attitude of reverence which was proper before the mighty and holy God. Its awe is the counterpart to the separate and different being of divinity which prevented anyone from drawing too near. It is the attitude of worship proper. To fear [the LORD] was to recognize him fully as God.²

God wants his people to live in this worshipful attitude. This reverent lifestyle also involves walking in obedience to God (10:12, literally, “to walk in all his ways”⁵). It involves following the ways that he has prescribed for his people, living their lives in light of who they know him to be and what they know him to be like.

For us as followers of Jesus, this reverent lifestyle is a matter of a worshipful life. It’s a life in which we come together regularly as the body of Christ to worship God corporately, a life in which we worship God personally each day, and a life in which our daily obedience as disciples of Jesus is itself an offering of worship to God. It’s a walk, a way of life, in which we deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow Jesus (Mark 8:34). How well are we doing with this worshipful walk?

This reverent lifestyle is characterized by total commitment. God wants his people to love him and serve him with all their heart and soul, from their inner being and with deepest motivation, and with everything they are. It is absolute, total loyalty to God!

When Jesus was asked which was the greatest commandment, do you remember what he said (Mark 12:28-30)?

“The most important one is this: ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’

Total commitment! This is one of the greatest problems within the church in North America today—a lack of depth in our commitment. And while many in our church are deeply committed to Christ, we are not untouched by this problem! God demands our absolute love and loyalty above all else! Jesus calls his disciples to give up everything and follow him (Luke 14:33). How deep is our commitment to Christ?

This reverent lifestyle is also characterized by faithful obedience. God wants his people to keep his decrees and commandments and do what he says!

In John 14:15, Jesus said, “If you love me, keep my commands.” For us as disciples of Jesus, obedience is the demonstration of our love. And throughout John’s Gospel, Jesus’ commands focus on two things: trusting in Jesus, the Son of God, and loving one another. It’s just that simple. How are we doing with this obedience?

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³ From The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®.
**God’s claims, our motivation . . .**

Now maybe you’re thinking, “OK, God asks these things, even requires them. But what right does he have to make these demands and claims on my life?”

Well, look at the rest of the text. This God is sovereign over all creation. He is “God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome” (10:14, 17). He chose the Israelites as his people, and thus the Sovereign of the universe became their God. He is absolutely righteous and just, and always had their best interest in mind.

All that and even more is true for us. He is our Creator, Judge, and Redeemer. And in order to redeem us from sin and death he gave his only begotten Son for us! He has a right to us because he created us; he has a double claim on us because he has redeemed us through Christ’s life, his death on the cross, and his resurrection!

So why shouldn’t we bow to his claims and respond to what he wants? His commandments are for our good, and he has shown us his sovereign love in Christ and done his mightiest act for us in him to save us!

Just as a child is motivated to obey his or her parents through their love, concern, care, and provision, how much more should we be motivated by what God has done for us in creating us and redeeming us in Christ?

And so there it is, crystal clear. *God requires a reverent lifestyle, total commitment, and faithful obedience from us, his people.*

He’s not like John and Sally, taking for granted that we know his expectations. He has openly declared them. And he even gives us the power in Christ through his Spirit to fulfill them! We can’t do it on our own or in our own power. But as we trust in him and yield our will to his will, our spirit to his Spirit, Christ will live out his faithful obedience through us.

So the question faces us squarely. It’s not a matter of knowing what he requires, but doing it. It’s a matter of loyalty, of commitment. With who he is and all he has done for us, how can we give God any less than what he rightfully requires? And it’s for our own good to boot!

You know what he wants. Will you give it to him?

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