

Deuteronomy 4:1-2, 6-9

**Theme:** For the life of you, follow God

“Why? Why? But, why? Whhyyy??!” Have you ever had a conversation like this? With whom do you usually have such a conversation? Yes, that’s right, a 3 year-old. Very soon, you find that you run out of good answers and reasonable explanations because far faster than you were comfortable, you enter into deep philosophical territory. Very quickly, you find that this benign interrogation by a young child forces you to think through a number of things you took for granted and evaluate your stance on them, maybe rethink some things or defend others in a more understandable way. Eventually, this conversation ends in exhaustion, much confusion, but hopefully on a note like this, “I dunno, kid, but I love you and I tell ya what I know so that you can hopefully learn some stuff that’ll be helpful in your life. I love you. Conversation over.” This is a conversation we keep on having in various forms and with various people. As children of God, we’re also always in such a one with God.

Deuteronomy is part of this conversation. This book is experienced teacher and father figure, Moses, reminding the young nation of Israel, really, they were young, the older generation died in the wilderness, who God is and what God says so they can know what they need to know to follow him and live. Recounting some history, Moses explained that God fought fiercely for them and tenderly scooped them up in his arms like a father to protect and assure them. This God, their loving Father, had given them his Word so they’d be blessed by doing it and so they’d live in the land God had given them. God’s Word is wisdom and life and following it is nothing but good for us – that’s why God gave it!

To help Israel hear and do his will, God gives a very clear, highly crucial command about his Word, “*Do not add to what I command you and do not subtract from it, but keep the commands of the LORD your God that I give you.*” (**Deut 4:2**) To best know and do God’s will, don’t add to or take away from it because anything added gets in the way and anything removed is a tragic loss of God’s will for us. Not often is it directly done where someone adds to or slices out sections from the Bible, more often it happens over time, incrementally. God’s Word has extra stuff added to it with the result that some majorly important sections are diminished, subtracted. This happens when human customary practice becomes the focus, elevated beyond where it should be. The flipping of divine for human was never the goal, but often is the unintended consequence of people being people, creatures of habit, creatures of imposed and imposing habit. Jesus’ words from **Mark 7:8-9** are always needed to keep us honest, “*‘You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to human traditions.’*”<sup>9</sup> *And he continued, ‘You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions.’*” Believers of all places of all times are guilty of this in some way, which means we are too, in one way or another. So, the need then, is to examine ourselves, repent of this, rejoice in forgiveness, and like those born new, crave the pure Word of God to learn him and his love better and so we can follow him.

This is where a glory to God motivated, “Why?” mentality can be helpful. Why do we do what we do? Is it done magnify the gospel? Does it? Why? Better thinking is, “How can we be all things to all people and by all means possible lead them to be followers of Jesus too??” The need to evaluate is always there because we’re people who use God’s word but come to his Word with finite understanding, inadequate ability, lots of baggage, and the lens of our culture. The lens of culture, of common time, place, experience, and standard operating procedure, does skew our ability to see with 100% clarity what God says in his Word, so an adjustment to the prescription is always necessary. As God’s people made wise for salvation, let’s learn from Jesus’ words to the Pharisees not to repeat their thinking and living. Each of us should ask, “Why?” of what we do. “Do people see Christ in me, the wisdom of his mercy?”

God’s words *are* our wisdom and understanding and, when followed people, other people marvel at the God who gave them. Many nations had written law codes for civic life with things in common:

don't steal stuff, don't assault people, no killing. What sets the law of God aside is mercy toward others built into it. Altruism, unselfish regard for and the devotion to the welfare of others, is at the core of God's law. This is love! Dozens and dozens of times, God instructs his people to care for and watch out for each other, especially widows and orphans, not to harvest to the edges of their fields so those who couldn't work would have food and live, to welcome foreigners, clothe them, treat them fairly and that anyone who withheld justice for them or other vulnerable folks were under God's curse because he is their defender. WOW!!! God sure has a soft spot in his heart for all people and makes it clear by who is protected and looked after in his law. People would remark, "*Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.*" (**Deut. 4:6**) because they saw God's wisdom and love in the behavior of Israel.

Moses then interjects a word of praise to say how great it is to have the LORD near them and listen to prayer and how great it is to be the people who have God's wise statutes given to them. Moses then directs and all are wise to follow, "*Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them fade from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them.*" (**Deut. 4:9**) Lots of huge thoughts there! Major instructions: guard God's words in your heart because they protect your soul, don't forget them ever, teach them to your kids and grandkids. Big things! Excellent things. Caring for your own soul is a huge task, caring for others so much more so! All of this is follower of God stuff and all of this, the teaching, the not adding or subtracting, the living by God's Word, are really, really hard! At times, we're all gonna feel like failures because we fail a lot every day and will again. Jesus knows this and is our friend anyway and forgives us. Jesus is what we lack, and, in our weakness, he shines through us with his strength and grace that are more than sufficient for us so that when we do things like him, and you can because you have the Spirit, the Father smiles because he sees perfectly pleasing Jesus shining out in you. God uses the failures and short comings of his people to display what his love is capable of. God's forgiving grace is new every day and that's how you follow on rejoicing.

When you don't know what to do, just be merciful. This is the reflex for followers of Jesus who know they've been shown much mercy by him. Because I'm forgiven, grace has been beamed out through me and that is impactful. Forgiven sinner, know that God uses you to beam out his grace at times and in ways you're often not aware. For those God's given you the responsibility to teach and mold directly, etch into them Jesus because the way he is, the constant displays of God's mercy in him is their salvation and example to follow.

Jesus is the mercy and the life of God's Word. He stepped in to offer his own body in place of the suffering, physical and emotional and spiritual, we were to endure. He was forsaken by his own Father for our own sins. He died for them. Follower of God, that is your life. Jesus dying in your place and living again is your hope to do the same. You, who you are, perfectly so, will live forever, raised and glorified, because Jesus lives and you believe it. Jesus lives to rule on the principle of grace that all who believe in him are saved and will live forever. Listen to him and do his Word, nothing but good comes from that. Listen to him, his voice, follow the guidance it gives for this life as you follow him to life in heaven. Why? Because there's one name under heaven given to people by which were saved, Jesus. Amen.