

(12/07) Deut 9-11 “Overcoming Failure” - Handout⁵

Summary

This week's study spans two sub-sections. In the first section (Deut 9-10), Moses cautions the Israelites to serve God from the heart and imitate God's character/ethical interests. He warns them not to think that God chose them because they were special or better than other peoples. Instead, God chose because he loved their forefathers. Moses then reminds the people of times when they were unfaithful to God...as a way of encouraging them to be careful and diligent in their thinking. The section deals with the themes of failure and recovery.

Deuteronomy 9-10

This unit retells the story of the Golden Calf, Moses receiving the ten commandments on the mountain, and the rebellion at Kadesh-Barnea when the Israelites did not trust God. These stories seem to serve three purposes. One purpose is to remind Israel that they are “stiff-necked” or inclined to pragmatism instead of trusting faith. The second purpose is to prevent Israel from thinking they were chosen because they *were* special but rather that they were chosen to *be* special. The third purpose is to utilize past failures as leverage for future growth. The section also highlights a path forward which recovers from the failures of the past. Failure was the result of turning away from God, recovery will result from imitating God. Some observations about this section:

- Failure is associated with idolatry while recovery is associated with faithfulness and ethical living.
- God's commands flow from God's character (note: 10:17f)
- Israel can recover from their failures at Sinai and Kadesh Barnea
- The basic assumption is that those who love God will love their neighbor
- God's relationship with his people spans generations

Discussion

- How many different types of “failure” can you find in this section?
- Read Exodus 32:1f about the golden calf. What leads to the people's idolatry? What do they lack?
- (9:4f) Why do you suppose Moses warns them of self-righteousness as the first warning?
- (9:7f) God emphatically tells the Israelites to “remember and never forget” their sins of idolatry and lack of trust. How does this “sin memory” connect to the idea of forgiveness? What is the difference between forgiveness and forgetting?
- (9:26f) What reasoning does Moses use to motivate God's forgiveness? Note the use of Ex 34:4f.
- (10:15f) What motivates God to forgive?

⁵ Derived from Mark Hamilton, “Now Choose Life! Deuteronomy for a Renewing Church”, 2001.

- (10:17f) There are some basic community ethics outlined in these verses. According to these verses, how does God want Israel to treat each other? Why?
- How are the responsibilities for failure and recovery divided between individuals and the whole community in this section?

Deuteronomy 11

Chapter 11 marks the end of the section which began in 5:1 as a call to follow God. The opening verse links the love of God with obeying his commands. The next verses highlight the different ways that people come to faith. Some see firsthand the mighty acts of God, others only hear the stories of God's activity. Finally, the section closes with an emphasis on obedience that will lead to receiving the promise versus disobedience that will result in death.

Discussion

- How is the love of God related to obedience?
- (11:2-7; 11:18-21) Both of these sections deal with transferring faith from generation to generation. What repeating themes emerge? What responsibilities do witnesses have? Learners?
- (11:8f) The verse speaks of obedience in order to have the strength to take possession of the land. But 11:22f clearly says that it will be God who defeats the enemies and wins the battles. In light of the fact that it is God's strength that wins the battle, how do we understand the meaning of "strength" we are to have in 11:8f?
- (Read 11:22f along with Romans 6:19f) What parallels are there between these two passages? How is obedience linked to life? Disobedience to death?