

“The Marks of Grace in the Old Covenant”
(Deuteronomy 30:1-10)

I. Introduction.

A. Orientation.

1. Last week, we began considering what are called the “Marks of Grace.”
 - a. We’re not talking here about the works that earn or merit our salvation.
 - (i) Jesus has done those through His perfect work.
 - (ii) He alone can provide salvation.

 - b. We’re concerned here with the works/fruits that show that we’re saved.
 - (i) The changes that have taken place in our lives: in our experience, our thoughts, our words, our actions – after we came to trust savingly in Christ.
 - (ii) There is a difference between the believer and the unbeliever.
 - (a) In their knowledge and conviction of the truth.
 - (b) In the way they speak and act.
 - (c) In the affections of their hearts: in the direction they’re going.
 - (d) These differences are the outworking of the change the Spirit makes in our hearts: His work of sanctification.
 - (e) If there was no difference, there wouldn’t be anyway to know whether or not we are Christians, whether or not we’re saved.
 - (f) Thankfully, the Lord did not intend to leave us in doubt:
 - (1) He wants us to know, as we saw last week.
 - (2) He included an entire letter on the subject in the New Testament – “These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life” (1 John 5:13), not to mention many more things in both Testaments.

 2. I think we all realize how important it is to know whether or not we’re Christians.
 - a. To know that our souls are safe.
 - (i) That we won’t inherit eternal death, but life.
 - (ii) That we won’t be punished eternally for our sins.
 - (iii) That we are completely and eternally forgiven.
 - (iv) That all the promised blessings are ours.
 - (v) Not only will a study of this kind give us a sense of security, or assurance – if we are in fact, believers – it will give us a greater knowledge of what the Lord wants us to be and do, as well as a greater zeal to do it, all of which will help us better to glorify God.

 - b. We can only have this assurance if we know that we have savingly believed – not just that we believe the facts, but that we have the Holy Spirit in our hearts.
 - c. But let’s not forget:
 - (i) As we examine ourselves, we will see a lot of sin.
 - (ii) Our sins won’t like to be exposed and so will retaliate.

- (iii) We may find ourselves questioning Scripture, questioning God, criticizing the message and the messenger.
- (iv) But we must allow ourselves, even force ourselves, to listen to Scripture. “Let God be found true, though every man be found a liar” (Rom. 3:4).

B. Preview.

1. Now the subject of the marks of grace is large.
 - a. We won’t be able to deal with all of them quickly or exhaustively.
 - b. But I do want us to consider several of them in some detail:
 - (i) What I am intending to do is consider the marks from the Old Testament, then in the New – this will take a few weeks.
 - (ii) Then we’ll move into other areas.
2. This evening, let’s begin by looking at the marks from the OT.
 - a. Since we won’t be able to consider all of them, we’ll focus on a representative passage that deals with the heart of the matter.
 - b. Tonight, we’ll begin by considering the context of our passage:
 - (i) We’ll consider its historical context briefly.
 - (ii) Then, its context in God’s covenant.
 - (iii) We won’t deal directly with the marks it reveals tonight, except by implication.

II. Sermon.

- A. First, the historical context: The title gives us something of the purpose of the book:
 1. Deuteronomy means second law, or the second giving of the law.
 - a. It was given by the Lord through Moses as the people were camped on the edge of the Promised Land.
 - (i) After the Lord delivered/saved them from Egypt.
 - (ii) After He had brought them once before to the border of the Promised Land, where they had rebelled.
 - b. The previous generation had been destroyed for their disobedience (Deu. 2:14), with the exception of Caleb and Joshua (Num. 14:38).
 - (i) But now the Lord was bringing their children into the land, as He had promised (v. 31).
 - (ii) To accomplish this effectively, they needed renewed guidance in God’s Law: this is what Moses now gives them.
 2. This isn’t a new Law, but the same Law the Lord had given before.
 - a. This new generation didn’t need a new law.
 - b. They needed to own God’s covenant as their covenant.
 - c. And they needed a better obedience than that of their parents.
 - d. The book of Deuteronomy is what we call a Covenant Renewal Document.
 - (i) The parents had broken the covenant.
 - (ii) If the children are to inherit the blessings and not be destroyed with their parents, they must now purpose in their own hearts to obey the Lord.

- B. Let's consider this passage now in the context of God's covenant.
1. Remember the parts of the covenant:
 - a. First, God identifies Himself as the Lord of the covenant.
 - b. He then recounts for them the things He has done for them to show them how indebted they are to Him for the mercies received.
 - c. Next are the requirements of the covenant: the commandments.
 - d. Then the sanctions: the promises and warnings.
 - e. Finally, directions on how often to review the terms of the covenant.

 2. Our text contains the sanctions: the blessings promised and the curses threatened.
 - a. Their parents had missed God's blessings through their disobedience; but what would happen to them and their descendents?
 - b. Basically, the same thing:
 - (i) They will also forsake Him and inherit the curses (29:22-23).
 - (ii) This will happen because they too will turn away from the Lord to idols (vv. 24-26).
 - (iii) Why? Ultimately, because the Lord, for the most part, will not have given them "a heart to know, nor eyes to see, nor ears to hear" (v. 4).
 - (iv) Without God's grace, our heart resists, our eyes don't want to see, our ears don't want to hear: here are a couple clues to what the marks are – what the workings of God's Spirit in the hearts of His people produces.
 - (v) And so the Lord will uproot them and cast them away in His fury (vv. 27-28).
 - c. But this wouldn't be the end for Israel.
 - (i) The Lord is not going to forsake them, but return in His mercy.
 - (ii) After He inflicts the curse, He will also bring restoration.
 - (iii) He will reverse the effects of the curse – which were a reversal of the blessings – and turn them back into blessings.
 - (a) In the lands into which He will have banished them, they will call to mind the Lord's faithfulness to His covenant (v. 1).
 - (b) And they will return to the Lord and obey Him with all their heart and soul, according to all that He has commanded them (v. 2).
 - (c) Then the Lord will have compassion on them, and from there He will gather them, even from the ends of the earth (vv. 3-4).
 - (d) He will bring them back into the land of their fathers, and they will possess it, and God will multiply them in it (v. 5).
 - (e) Ultimately, this will come about because the Lord will circumcise their hearts, so that they will love and obey Him with their whole being (v. 6).
 - (f) At this point, the Lord will turn against their enemies and inflict the curses on them (v. 7).
 - (g) But as for Israel, they will continue in their faithfulness to the Lord (v. 8), and the Lord will prosper and multiply them, and rejoice over them, even as He did over their fathers (v.9), because they will obey His laws, since they will turn back to the Lord with all their heart and soul (v. 10).

- d. Our passage undoubtedly refers to the greater blessings of the New Covenant, which were yet future.
- (i) The Old Covenant could not bring this necessary change of heart, at least it couldn't through the Law.
 - (ii) It could only show them the requirements and remind them of their failure to live up to God's holy standards, as they continually brought their personal sacrifices and watched the yearly atonement (Heb. 10:1-3).
 - (iii) The Lord had commanded them earlier in this book, "To fear the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways and love Him, and to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the Lord's commandments and His statutes which I am commanding you today for your good" (Deu. 10:12-13).
 - (iv) But they couldn't do this: they had a heart problem, which is why the Lord also commanded them, "Circumcise then your heart, and stiffen your neck no more" (v. 16).
 - (v) But they couldn't do this either – they needed God's grace:
 - (a) A grace revealed to them through the Old Covenant, through the types and shadows (Gal. 3:24).
 - (b) But a grace that covenant was unable to provide: it could only point to it – to what Jesus would provide (Gal. 3:17-19).
 - (vi) This passage is a prophecy regarding the New Covenant.
 - (a) It describes for us the full flowering of this grace.
 - (b) God was revealing His intention to fulfill in them the requirements of His Law.
 - (c) This was the blessing that He was intending to bestow when He promised Abraham, "And in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice" (Gen. 22:18).
 - (d) God required perfect obedience to His Law, but His people could not attain to that obedience by themselves.
 - (e) The only thing that stood in their way was their own stubborn and rebellious hearts.
 - (f) Here the Lord was promising that He would effect a change in their hearts, so that they would *willingly* comply.
 - (g) This is nothing other than the gracious blessing of the New Covenant, which was available to the true Israelite of old through faith, but which was actually accomplished through the work of the Lord Jesus Christ.
 - (h) John Owen, the great Puritan expositor of old, once wrote, "The precepts of the old covenant are turned all of them into promises under the new. Their preceptive, commanding power is not taken away, but grace is promised for the performance of them" (*Works*, 6:138).
 - (i) This grace is nothing other than the change of heart which the Lord describes in our passage in Deuteronomy. It gives to the believer the power to keep God's Law by giving him a powerful love for it.
 - (k) Next week, we'll consider the circumcision of the heart, what it is, and why we need it. Amen.