

Hear now, O Israel, the decrees and laws I am about to teach you. Follow them so that you may live and may go in and take possession of the land that the LORD, the God of your fathers, is giving you. ² 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.

⁶ Observe them carefully, for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations, who will hear about all these decrees and say, “Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.” ⁷ What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the LORD our God is near us whenever we pray to him? ⁸ And what other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws I am setting before you today?

HEAR THE WORD OF THE LORD

- I. Guard it carefully
- II. Observe it faithfully

One dish that can be made to please just about everyone is taco salad. Most likely, because you make it anyway you like. The empty plate is your canvass and as you stand before the sea of ingredients you are the artist. What you build on top of that foundation of chips is entirely up you. Perhaps you like to start with a layer of seasoned meat, sprinkle on some cheese, a few black olives on the side, tomatoes, lettuce, onions, and finally jalapeño peppers for a little kick. By the time you are finished you have created a masterpiece. Many people enjoy taco salad because they can pick the ingredients they want and leave off the ones they don't.

There are many people and even churches today who want you to believe the same is true of God's Word. Most Christians, at the very least, confess that Christ is their foundation. But just as it is with taco salad where anything included after the foundation of chips is up to the eater; many hold the belief that when it comes to believing God's Word anything beyond confessing Christ is up to the reader.

In our text this morning, God makes it clear that this is unacceptable. God is serious about all of his Word, law and gospel, from “In the beginning” to the final “amen”. God's Word is not a taco salad where churches or individuals can simply pick and choose which parts they want and leave out the parts they don't. As Christians, and as confessional Lutherans, we desire to hear the Word of the LORD in its entirety, to guard it carefully and observe it faithfully.

Background

Our text picks up where Moses is about to leave off. After many years of faithful service, his time of leading the Israelites is drawing to a close. The book of Deuteronomy is really a collection of farewell sermons Moses preached before the Israelites entered Canaan.

Moses recounts how the LORD had blessed Israel from Mount Sinai till the present. He reminds them how the LORD was faithful every step of their journey, even when they were unfaithful. The LORD had appointed leaders for them, cared for them during their years of wandering, provided quail and manna when they were hungry and water when they were thirsty. It was not their military might but by the hand of God that the neighboring kings were defeated.

What was Israel's response for all God had done for them? They rebelled. It was because of their rebellion they could not enter the Promised Land. They also complained. They grumbled. Moses himself was no exception. At Meribah, the people grumbled because they had no water. God told Moses to speak to the rock and it would pour out water for the people. But Moses did not follow the

instructions of the LORD. For this reason, he was not permitted to enter the Promised Land. Yet Moses does not use his final sermons to lament his woes or plead his case in hopes for an appeal. Rather, this spokesman for God calls God's people to hear once more **“the decrees and laws I am about to teach you.”**

The word “laws” used here does not refer only to the Ten Commandments. Moses isn't calling the Israelites together for one last fire and brimstone sermon so he can really throw the tablets at them. This word refers to the entire Word of God. This includes God's judgments of condemnation in the law as well as his saving judgment in the gospel. This is what the Psalmist refers to when he says, **“All his laws are before me; I have not turned away from his decrees”** (Ps 18:22). This is the attitude Moses desired for the Israelites. That they never turn away from or stray from God's Word but carefully guard it as they enter in and take possession of **“the land that the LORD, the God of your fathers, is giving you.”**

This land, Moses reminds them, was an undeserved gift from God. The LORD promised this land to Abraham when He called him saying, **“Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you”** (Gen 12:1). By grace God gave this promise. By grace it was about to be fulfilled almost four hundred years later. Hear the decree of the LORD Moses says. See how God has kept his Word to Abraham. Trust that God will do the same for you.

I. Guard it Carefully

Moses then tells them how carefully they are to guard God's 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.”** Canaan was the Promised Land but it wasn't paradise. Israel had difficult days ahead and there would be many temptations to stray from God. In the past God guided Israel with a pillar of fire by night and a cloud by day. Now He would continue to guide them with His Word. God guides believers in the same way today... **“His Word is a lamp for our feet and a light for our path”**.

To keep them from wandering Moses warns, **“Do not add to God's Word.”** There are many ways this is done today. We are in danger of doing this when we seek to answer questions we have where God has not spoken. Some religious groups add to Scripture when they claim God has forbidden something when in fact, He has not forbidden it. The sinful nature in all of us says that Jesus' sacrifice for our sins was not enough that and it is necessary for us to contribute our good works for salvation.

Moses also writes, **“And do not subtract”**. It is a sin to remove anything from Scripture simply because it is offensive to our reason or emotions. Churches today will deny doctrines of Scripture (such as the Real Presence in the Lord's Supper, Infant Baptism, and the complete sinfulness of the human nature of man) because they conflict with the errors they are teaching. The ecumenical movement encourages Christians to agree to disagree on God's Word and doctrine for the sake of unity among Christian churches or denominations. Christian love no longer means pointing out sin but tolerating it. The Law is all but removed because it just sounds too harsh. But in doing so, the use of the Law as a mirror is removed as well; to show us our sin and our need for a Savior.

These are only a few ways the devil tempts us today. He wants us to believe that God's Word is nothing more than a taco salad. And that what a church teaches is only secondary to everything else it has to offer. But by the grace of God we, as individuals and as a church body, believe in our hearts and confess with our lips that **“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness...”**

Scripture is God's Word given to us for our salvation. Therefore, we guard God's Word by protecting it from those who seek to change it and by proclaiming it in truth and purity. And we do this not only with our mouths but also by observing God's Word faithfully in our lives.

II. Observe it Faithfully

Faithful observance to God's Word was what Moses wanted Israel to put into practice. Soon they would be rubbing elbows with pagan nations. These nations made their gods out of wood and stone. Their gods were not eternal but would perish in a fire made by a young child. Their gods could not walk on water; only sink to the bottom of the lake. They worshiped creation instead of the Creator. At the heart of pagan religions is the belief that the only way to obtain their god's blessings was to do what their god required.

By faithfully observing the decrees and laws of the LORD, Israel would not be tempted to trade their God for the deaf and mute gods of the nations around them. Their faithful observation would demonstrate that no nation had a body of laws like Israel. That their law was not required for salvation, and that it was a blessing and not a burden. And they showed **"their wisdom and understanding to these nations"** by how they lived among them. The LORD insists that if his people remain faithful to his Word in faith and life, their unbelieving neighbors will take notice.

In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus refers to all believers as lights of the world. As we let our light shine before men they will see our good deeds as fruits of our Christian faith. Godly living may attract unbelievers to the gospel where words would fail. Some may even be attracted to learn more about the God who gives his people wisdom by his Word.

While the world struggles to explain why there is evil when we are moving toward perfection; God's Word tells us evil entered the world when Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden. While the world struggles to find God; we rejoice knowing that God has found us. The world wants you to believe that God is distant and does not answer prayers; God's Word says "the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer" (1 Peter 3:12). The world teaches salvation by works; God's Word says "by grace you are saved, through faith, and this not of yourselves it is a gift of God, not by works so that no one can boast".

God gives us knowledge and wisdom. He gives promises and creates faith to trust them. All these blessings God gives to us through His Word. May we always have hearts eager to hear the word of our LORD and that we carefully and faithfully observe His Word until He brings us home to heaven, the land He has promised us. Amen