

Terms and Conditions

Deuteronomy 10:12-22

We've been talking about the idea of the "active ingredient." The active ingredient is the substance in medicine that makes the drug work—that makes us feel better. Whatever else makes up the rest of the pill or liquid, it's the active ingredient that makes it work—the part of a drug that actually heals us, that makes us feel better, the part of the medicine that's designed to restore our health.

To be an active ingredient is to live our faith in a way that make our communities better, healthier, more shalom-filled places. Active ingredients bring the message of the gospel—the message that heals us and restores health in authentic ways to the places where we live and work and study and shop.

This is a journey through what it means to be missional people in a missional church. We find our missional habits and practices—we find our identities as Christian disciples—at the intersection of what we believe about God, and what we do about that belief.

12 And now, O Israel, what does the LORD your God ask of you but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, 13 and to observe the LORD's commands and decrees that I am giving you today for your own good?

14 To the LORD your God belong the heavens, even the highest heavens, the earth and everything in it. 15 Yet the LORD set his affection on your forefathers and loved them, and he chose you, their descendants, above all the nations, as it is today. 16 Circumcise your hearts, therefore, and do not be stiff-necked any longer. 17 For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes. 18 He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the alien, giving him food and clothing. 19 And you are to love those who are aliens, for you yourselves were aliens in Egypt. 20 Fear the LORD your God and serve him. Hold fast to him and take your oaths in his name. 21 He is your praise; he is your God, who performed for you those great and awesome wonders you saw with your own eyes.

22 Your forefathers who went down into Egypt were seventy in all, and now the LORD your God has made you as numerous as the stars in the sky.

This passage comes near the end of a long speech that Moses makes to the people of Israel. It starts back in chapter five with the giving of the 10 Commandments, and moves through some teaching about how to live as the people of God. It's in chapter six that we get the familiar prayer known as the Shema: "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 strength."

Later in the sermon Moses retells the story of how God had brought God out of bondage in Egypt, and of how Israel responded by worshipping a golden calf. 'Understand then,' Moses says just as God's people enter into the Promised Land, "that it is not because of your righteousness that God is giving you this land to possess, for you are a stiff-necked people."

Moses tells the story of how he was so angry and ashamed that his people had worshipped idols that he smashed the two tablets God had given to him, and also how God had told him to make new ones just like the originals.

By the time we get to our text Moses is back on what it means to live as people of faith—how the followers of God are supposed to live. There are commands and calls to certain behaviors, there are teachings about who God is, there's a reminder that God had saved them when they needed him the most.

Moses reminds the people that God had chosen them—not because they were good or worthy, but simply because God loved them and wanted them to share his blessings with the rest of the world. And there's a reminder—did you catch this?—there's a reminder not to be "stiff-necked" anymore.

I get most of my news on the web these days. It's cheaper to read the online versions *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, the *LA Times* and others, than it is to try and manage subscriptions to all of them. Each time I sign up for a new service I'm asked to read the fine print and click that I agree with the "terms and conditions" of the arrangement.

We do that a lot, right? We enter into a contract or business relationship or partnership, and at some point we have to review the “terms and conditions” and to agree with them.

The dictionary defines the legal concept of terms and conditions as the “provisions specifying the nature of an agreement or contract.”

When we apply that definition to our text this morning, it leaves us with some pretty important questions.

If this passage is talking about what it means to live the life of faith, then what exactly is it saying about the terms and conditions of our relationship with God?

In other words, what is about this ancient text describing what God wants from a group of recently settled nomads that can help us become active ingredients in our homes and jobs and schools and neighborhoods?

How can it help us grow into missional people in a missional church?

I was hoping you’d ask that.

This text is laid out in an unusually straightforward way. We’ve all struggled with different parts of the Bible—with how hard it can be to understand what different texts meant and what they mean for us now. This one is different. There are three main parts.

First, there’s a list of things that God calls us to do.

We’re called to Fear God: This isn’t about being scared—it’s about having some understanding of who we are in relation to God. It’s the sense, at the same time, of our unworthiness before God and also what God has done to restore us.

God also calls us to walk in his ways. This one describes how we avoid the idea that there is some checklist of things we do to please God—it’s meant to remind us that this is a lifestyle—like a long walk in the same direction—not something we finish before going on to something else.

God asks that we love him and serve him. In another part of the Old Testament, in Micah 6:8, there's a question about how we're supposed to live. The answer, according to the prophet Micah, is supposed to be simple. 'To act justly and love mercy and to walk humbly with God.' Love God and serve him, that's the point.

But none of this means that God is backing off of his Law. The last part of this list is to 'observe his commandments.' We push back on rules, but a review of the 10 commandments can be healthy every so often. Observing God's commandments is one of the ways we act on what we believe.

In the next section there are some things about God that are designed to answer an obvious question that we don't ask out loud very often: Why should I be interested in doing what God wants? Moses gives us five pretty good reasons: God is the creator and Lord of the universe, he loved us first, he defends widows and orphans, and he loves the outcast, the alien, the stranger.

Finally, and just in case the rest of that isn't clear, God calls us to two crucial practices for the life of faith—two ways that we can show that we're living by the terms and conditions of the covenant God offers us.

First, "circumcise your hearts", he says. Make sure your faith is lived from the inside out and not the other way around. Somehow in Hebrew this is the opposite of being "stiff-necked". To have a circumcised heart, as one writer put it, is to have your "mind and will purified and devoted totally to the Lord".

Second, we're called to "love the aliens among us". What better way to honor the God who redeems us and calls us, than to love the aliens he loves, to reach out to the stranger the way he does, to love the outcast the way he does? And just in case we're not convinced, there's always the reminder that once we were aliens and outcasts, too. But God reached out to us. God loved us in the life and ministry and death and resurrection of his son. God reached out to us and folded us into his family. What he wants in return is for us to do the same.

I'll say that even more bluntly. How we treat the aliens and outcasts and strangers around us is a sign of the extent to which we grasp how much God has done for us

to bring us back to him.

It's in the example of Christ's sacrifice for us that we see how far we're called to go in order to make the rest of the world welcome in this place. It's not fashionable, it won't sit well with everyone, but it's honest and has the advantage of being exactly what we were called to do—it's exactly who we were made to be.

The book I've been quoting lately, *The Monkey and the Fish*, has something to say about this. Dave Gibbons writes:

"So who in your community is the outsider, the misjudged, the misunderstood? Maybe the one who seems the weakest? Who are the strangers and the friendless? Focusing on them as a church may mean you won't grow as fast. And you may even lose some people. But your church will be fulfilling the most beautiful expression of who God is."

I'll say that a different way. When we reach out to the friendless outcast we show the world that we understand, just a little, about the way God reaches out to us. When we show love to the lonely around us we show people that we understand, just a little, about the God we worship and serve.

Those are the terms and conditions of living as God's covenant people. It's not rules and restrictions—it's not a list of do's and don'ts. It's allowing our hearts to be transformed, and living our lives in a different way.

Being the part of our communities that make them healthier, better, more shalom-filled places is what the gospel of Jesus is all about.

My prayer for all of us is that we'll take some time this summer to reflect on what this all means in our lives—that's we'll review the terms and conditions of our relationship with God.

That's how we'll grow into missional people, and that's how we'll become a more missional church.