

The Greatest and First Command  
Deuteronomy 6

Turn to Deuteronomy 6 please. Moses is doing something unique in Deuteronomy 5-11. He's answering the question: "how does a relationship with God work?" He's telling Israel, "this is how your relationship with God works."

I am not sure there is any other place in the OT that tries to do this. Actually the whole of Deuteronomy does this, but chapters 5-11 are where Moses lays out the big picture. After that he gets into specific details a little more.

The basic relationship is not very complicated. It does not take those seven chapters to describe it. In Deuteronomy 5-11 Moses goes over the same basic points again and again, lots of repetition, coming at the same picture from different angles.

So as we go through these chapters in the Sundays to come, it should sometimes sound familiar to you.

Jesus liked Deuteronomy 6. When the devil tempted Jesus those three times in the wilderness, Jesus answered every time by quoting Scripture. Two of Jesus' quotes were from Deuteronomy 6, and the other one from Deuteronomy 8. And later on when someone asked Jesus which was the greatest commandment, he answered from Deuteronomy 6.

This is important because we have sometimes been taught that Israel's relationship with God in OT times was completely different than how Gentile believers now relate to God. And there are certainly important differences.

But in the way Moses sets it out in Deuteronomy 5-11, there are NOT very many differences. Most of what Moses says here, the NT also says to Gentile believers.

*The First and Greatest Command – Deut 6:4-5*

Near the end of Jesus' ministry, a Jewish teacher asked Jesus which of the commandments was the most important, and Jesus answered by quoting Deut 6:5. So we'll start there, and we'll look at vv4-5 together. Jesus said this is the first and greatest commandment (Matt 22:37; Mk 12:29).

*Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. <sup>5</sup> Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.*

The Jews call this command the "Shema" [shi-MA]. Shema is the Hebrew imperative for "Listen!" And that's how Moses starts: "LISTEN, Israel: the LORD our God, the LORD is one." That line could be translated different ways, and I think this fits better: "Listen, Israel: the LORD is our God, the LORD alone," or "the LORD is our God, the LORD's the one."

Our God is the LORD, our God is YHWH, He's the one, no one else, that's the first thing to get straight. Since he alone is our God, love the LORD your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your strength.

The Ten Commands, the Ten Words, began by saying this negatively: you shall not have any other gods, you shall not make any idols, you shall not bow down or worship them.

The great command says the same thing positively: YHWH is our God, he's the one, him alone, so love God with all you have, all your heart, all your soul, all your might.

When they asked Jesus what the greatest command was, he answered with this command, but Jesus would not let this command stand alone. They just asked for the greatest command, and Jesus knew the answer, but he refused to stop there.

There was a second command just as important: "love your neighbour as yourself" (from Leviticus 19). Once Jesus had spoken those two, he could stop, Jesus would let those two stand alone.

The Ten Commands follow that same flow, love for God and love for people. The first commands are just about how we treat God, and then they move to how we treat people.

*What does "loving God" mean?*

How do we love God? I'm going to talk about two other words here, "obey" and "fear." Let's start with "obey." The Shema is Deut 6:4-5. Let's read the verses just before and just after.

*Deut 6:3 Hear, Israel, and be careful to obey so that it may go well with you and that you may increase greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, just as the LORD, the God of your ancestors, promised you.*

*Deut 6:6 These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts.*

Loving God means obeying God, and loving God means his commands are to be on our hearts. That does not mean there is not real affection for God. There is. This Scripture instructs us to open our hearts to God, to understand that he has loved us and rescued us, and to love him in return. This includes emotion and affection.

The question is: how will we express our love? The answer Moses gives is obey his commands. In Deuteronomy 5 we got the Ten Commands, the Ten Words. We love God by taking God's words to heart, and obeying them.

That's "obey." Now we'll look at "fear." We'll read Deut 6:1-2, then 6:13 ("fear" also in 6:24). 6:1-2 - *These are the commands, decrees and laws the LORD your God directed me to teach you to observe in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess, <sup>2</sup> so that you, your children and their children after them may **fear** the LORD your God as long as you live by keeping all his decrees and commands that I give you, and so that you may enjoy long life.*

6:13 - ***Fear*** the LORD your God, serve him only and take your oaths in his name. <sup>14</sup> Do not follow other gods, the gods of the peoples around you; <sup>15</sup> for the LORD your God, who is among you, is a jealous God and his anger will burn against you, and he will destroy you from the face of the land.

Love God, obey God, and fear God. There is an idea around that love and obedience are not compatible. You cannot have a relationship where two love each other, and where one obeys the other. You just can't do that. If there has to be obedience, than love is not real, genuine, deep.

People, that is a modern prejudice. In the Bible loving God deeply, and obeying God completely, go together very well. What's more, obeying God is the main way that we express our love for him.

But what about fear. This is an even bigger stretch for us. Can we love God deeply and also fear what will happen if we reject him? As far as Moses goes, yes.

And I can tell you that Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew was even stronger on the fear element than Moses. Three major books in the NT, in particular, warn God's people about the judgement of God that will come on them if they reject Christ: Matthew, Hebrews, and Revelation.

And once we've absorbed it from those three NT books, we will see it all over the place.

Love God, obey God, fear God: whatever kind of tugging we have to do in our minds to make these three fit together, we need to do. In the Bible, in Moses and in Jesus, this all works.

Moses spoke about God being a consuming fire. Jesus talked more than Moses about the fire of hell, the furnace of fire, eternal fire, weeping and gnashing of teeth, and so on. Jesus wanted people to fear rejecting God.

And at the end of Matthew Jesus told his followers to make disciples "by teaching them to obey everything I commanded you." You teach them to obey my commands, like Moses in OT.

And Jesus also taught that the greatest command was to love God with all our heart and soul and mind and strength.

Love God, fear God, obey God.

*Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.*

Do you do this? If someone asked you if you loved God this way, how would you answer? It seems awfully bold to say "yes I do love God that way." But if this is the first and greatest command, and our answer is "no I do not love God that way," then we're in trouble, right?

Let's come at this in a way that's a bit safer. Suppose that beginning tomorrow morning, you would love God with all your heart and all your soul and all your might. Tomorrow for sure, no fooling around, you were going to love God that way.

What would you do? What would change? Imagine that you really want to do this, you have a hunger to obey this command, to love God with all your might – what would that look like? What would you stop? What would you start?

Answer: first of all, life that's completely devoted to God will look like ordinary life. These people were going into Canaan, they were going to be wives and husbands, plow fields and shovel manure and make supper and feed the children.

In Deuteronomy 6, along with loving God Moses says, “don't forget God, and don't follow other gods, serve only God, do what is right and good in the LORD's sight.” Moses was not asking for anything heroic or extreme. The only commands he's given so far are the Ten Words.

We want to add special things to our lives, and *then* we think we're really loving God. We like to add two kinds of special things. One is the private disciplines.

“If I was going to love God with all my heart and all my soul and all my might, tomorrow I would get up at five and read my Bible for an hour and then pray for an hour. And would fast for a day or two.”

By the way, this Wednesday is Ash Wednesday. If you want to fast from something for Lent, it starts Wednesday.

Now these private disciplines, and this private communion with God are not bad things, and God may lead you to this. But the private disciplines are NOT the core of loving God.

The other kind of special thing we might add is some kind of ministry service out there. I will volunteer at Siloam mission once a week, or I'll go on a mission's trip every year, or I'll work at a Bible camp in the summer. Again, these are good things, and God may well lead you that way.

But neither the private disciplines nor the ministry service out there are what loving God is about. We must do this in ordinary life, in Southern Manitoba, in 2014, right here and now in ordinary weeks. If we cannot love God with all our might in ordinary life, we cannot do it at all.

Jesus: *Many will say to me on that day, “Lord, Lord, did we not prophecy in your name, and in your name drive out demons, and in your name perform many miracles?” And I will say, “I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers.”* Matt 7:22. It is NOT special ministry.

Jesus: “do to others what you would have them do to you, *for this is all the law and the prophets*” (Matt 7:12). THIS is all the law and the prophets, THIS is love your neighbour as yourself.

*Love the LORD your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your might.* This sounds like something out of reach, how could we ever do that?

But I don't think it is out of reach, any more than not worshipping idols is out of reach. Moses thought ordinary Israelites could do this if they wanted to.

If you will go through your day treating people kindly and with respect, and do so because YHWH is your God, because Jesus is your Lord, well, that's it.

*Why would we do this? Why love God with all our heart and soul and might?*

There's a wonderful little paragraph at the end of Deuteronomy 6, and I cannot leave it alone. We'll end with this. If Deuteronomy 5-11 shows us in seven chapters how a relationship with God works, Deut 6:20-25 shows us in six verses.

Deut 6:20-25 - *In the future, when your son asks you, "What is the meaning of the stipulations, decrees and laws the LORD our God has commanded you?"* <sup>21</sup> *tell him: "We were slaves of Pharaoh in Egypt, but the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand.* <sup>22</sup> *Before our eyes the LORD sent signs and wonders—great and terrible—on Egypt and Pharaoh and his whole household.* <sup>23</sup> *But he brought us out from there to bring us in and give us the land he promised on oath to our ancestors.* <sup>24</sup> *The LORD commanded us to obey all these decrees and to fear the LORD our God, so that we might always prosper and be kept alive, as is the case today.* <sup>25</sup> *And if we are careful to obey all this law before the LORD our God, as he has commanded us, that will be our righteousness."*

It starts with the child coming to the parent and asking about all God's rules. The child says, "God says we should do this and do that and not do those things. Where did this come from? Why do we do these things? Why do we love God with all our heart and soul and might?"

Good question. And Moses tells the people how to answer the children not just so the children will know how this all works, but also so that the parents will know how this all works.

V22 - *Tell the child: "We were slaves of Pharaoh in Egypt, but the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand."*

Remember how the Ten Words began? *I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery* (Deut 5:6). Our love and our obedience always starts with his rescue.

The explanation starts with God's rescue. We Gentiles were not slaves of Pharaoh in Egypt, but we were slaves to sin, and we were terrified to die. Hebrews 2 says we were held in slavery to the devil by our fear of death. But God through Jesus rescued US.

Israel's rescue comes from something real that happened in history, human history on this planet. The LORD God led Israel out of Egypt. And our rescue comes from God in history, Jesus, his birth, life and teaching, his death, and his resurrection.

That's how this started. God rescued us. We had done nothing to deserve it, or earn it. It was God's kindness to us, in history. And then he had people go spread the news of salvation through Jesus, and in one way or another that's come to each of us. We heard the gospel.

And in this way God changed our lives. We still struggle with sin, but we are not slaves in the same way at all, we have each other, we have direct access to God, to pray or to worship, and we are freed from the fear of death.

That's what God does for us. And he has taught us the right way to live, and so in response to his rescue, we serve him by living in the right way that he taught us.

And I will say it again: it starts with rescue. Through Jesus God rescued us from slavery to sin, from coming judgment, from the terror of death that made us slaves.

And God taught us the right way to live, and so in response to his rescue, we love him and serve him and obey him by living in the right way that he taught us.

Titus 3:3-8 describes the relationship to God for NT Gentile believers, but it is much like Deut 6:20-25 - *At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures.*

[If you were not ever enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures, that means only that God rescued you at a very early stage. His mercy to you has been even greater than his mercy to those who were in the thick of it.]

*We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. <sup>4</sup> But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, <sup>5</sup> he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, <sup>6</sup> whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, <sup>7</sup> so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. <sup>8</sup> This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone.*

**Why** do we love the LORD our God with all our heart and all our soul and all our might? We love and obey him because he rescued us, and brought us to a good place, and he taught us how to live right. Because he rescued us, we're his servants. We serve him by loving and obeying him.

**How** do we love the LORD our God with all our heart and all our soul and all our might? We treat people well, because we love God and we love his Son Jesus Christ. We love our neighbour as ourselves, we do to others as we would have them do to us, because we love God and we love his Son Jesus Christ.

Prayer: Father, you have rescued us from all kinds of slavery, from death itself, and from the wrath to come. So we want to love you with all our heart and all our soul and all our might. You called us to this, Jesus called us to this. We don't know how much has to change, or even what has to change, for us to love you this way. But we want your Spirit to lead us to this. You've called us and you are faithful, so will you do this? Have mercy on us, on the ways we're hard hearted and stubborn, on how we protect ourselves from you. Bless us by turning us toward this love for you. Bless us by leading us to love you with all our heart and all our soul and all our might. Amen.