

AM Deuteronomy 6 One God and one only

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[0 : 00] Bible, and we have two readings. The first is from Deuteronomy, chapter 6.

I recall a month or so ago that I began a series of sermons on the book of Deuteronomy. Not going to attempt to go through every chapter, but just highlights from this wonderful book.

So, Deuteronomy, chapter 6. Now, this is the commandment, the statutes and the rules, that the Lord your God commanded me to teach you, that you may do them in the land to which you are going over to possess it, that you may fear the Lord your God, you and your son and your son's son, by keeping all his statutes and his commandments, which I command you, all the days of your life, and that your days may be long.

Hear, therefore, O Israel, and be careful to do them, that it may go well with you, and that you may multiply greatly, as the Lord, the God of your fathers, has promised you, in a land flowing with milk and honey.

Hear, O Israel, The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.

[1 : 44] And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise, you shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes.

You shall write them on the doorposts of your house, and on your gates. And when the Lord your God brings you into the land that he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give you, with great and good cities that you did not build, and houses full of all good things that you did not fill, and cisterns that you did not dig, and vineyards and olive trees that you did not plant, and when you eat and are full, then take care, lest you forget the Lord, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

It is the Lord your God you shall fear, him you shall serve, and by his name you shall swear. You shall not go after other gods, the gods of the peoples who are around you.

For the Lord your God in your midst is a jealous God, lest the anger of the Lord your God be kindled against you, and he destroy you from off the face of the earth.

You shall not put the Lord your God to the test, as you tested him at Massah. You shall diligently keep the commandments of the Lord your God, and his testimonies, and his statutes, which he has commanded you.

[3 : 35] And you shall do what is right and good in the sight of the Lord, that it may go well with you, and that you may go in and take possession of the good land that the Lord swore to give to your fathers, by thrusting out all your enemies from before you, as the Lord has promised.

When your son asks you in time to come, what is the meaning of the testimonies, and the statutes, and the rules, that the Lord our God has commanded you, then you shall say to your son, we were Pharaoh's slaves in Egypt, and the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand, and the Lord showed signs and wonders, great and grievous, against Egypt and against Pharaoh and all his household, before our eyes.

and he brought us out from there, that he might bring us in, and give us the land that he swore to give to our fathers.

And the Lord commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the Lord our God for our good always, that he might preserve us alive, as we are this day.

And it will be righteousness for us, if we are careful to do, all this commandment, before the Lord our God, as he has commanded us.

[5 : 09] Now we are going to read also from the New Testament, from Mark's Gospel, chapter 12. Always good to remember, how the Old and the New Testaments, are intertwined with each other.

Here we are going to read, how the Lord Jesus quotes from that chapter. Mark chapter 12, reading verses 28 to 34.

And one of the scribes came up, and heard them disputing with one another. And seeing that he answered them well, asked him, which commandment is the most important of all?

Jesus answered, the most important is, hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God, with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.

The second is this, you shall love your neighbour, as yourself. There is no other commandment, greater than these. And the scribe said to him, you are right teacher, you have truly said, that he is one, and there is no other beside him.

[6 : 36] And to love him, with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbour, as oneself, is much more than all whole burnt offerings, and sacrifices.

And when Jesus saw, that he answered wisely, he said to him, you are not far, from the kingdom of God. And after that, no one dared to ask him, any more questions.

Well may God, write his word, upon our hearts, and help us now. Well let me ask you to, turn please, to Deuteronomy chapter 6, and verses 4 and 5.

Here, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.

You shall love the Lord your God, with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. Some years ago, I visited Israel.

[8 : 00] We went to all the famous places, of course, to Jerusalem, and Bethlehem, and Nazareth, and Galilee. But each night, we stayed in a hotel, in Netanya, by the coast.

And one night, at the hotel, there was, a bar mitzvah party. Bar mitzvah, is, a Jewish, coming of age ceremony.

It means literally, son of the law. And it marks the fact, that at the age of 13, a boy, is considered, old enough, to take personal responsibility, for keeping, the law of God.

There is, by the way, a similar ceremony, for girls. It's often followed, by a lavish party.

And on this occasion, there were about, a hundred guests, seated, waiting for a meal. But first, the boy himself, stood up, and he recited, in Hebrew, Shema, Yisrael, Adonai, Eloheinu, Adonai, Echad.

[9 : 25] Which is, Deuteronomy 6, verse 4, Hear, O Israel, the Lord, our God, the Lord, is one. Why this particular verse?

Well, it's regarded, as the very foundation, of the Jewish faith. It's recited, every day, in the synagogue, at morning, and evening prayer.

And on the Sabbath, and at Yom Kippur. And I'm told, that Jewish people, also, recite it often, at bedtime.

In the synagogue, it's followed, by three passages. Deuteronomy 6, verses 5 to 9. Deuteronomy 11, 13 to 21.

And numbers 13, or 15 rather, 37 to 41. No need, to look those up, now, but they're all, about keeping, God's commandments, in our hearts.

[10 : 33] Together, they're known, as the Shema. That being, the first word, in Hebrew, of Deuteronomy 6, 4. This is, a very, very, important, verse, for the Jews.

But not only, for the Jews, for Christians, too. We've seen that, in our reading, in the New Testament, in Mark 12, where, Jesus is, asked by, one of the scribes, which is, which is the most, most important, commandment, of all.

And he quotes, this verse, one of the many, occasions, on which he quotes, from Deuteronomy. The most, important, he says, is, hear, O Israel, the Lord, our God, the Lord, is one, and you shall love, the Lord, your God, with all your heart, and with all your mind, and all your strength.

And then he adds a second, quoting from Leviticus 19, verse 18, you shall love, your neighbor, as yourself.

And he says, there is no other, commandment, greater than these. The scribe, very wisely, agrees with him. And Jesus assures him, you're not far, from the kingdom of God.

[12 : 02] In the parallel passage, in Matthew 22, Jesus calls it, the great commandment. And he says, on these two commandments, loving God, and loving your neighbor, hang all, the law, and the prophets.

Also appears in Luke 10. A lawyer asks there, what must I do, to inherit eternal life? And Jesus asks him, what do you read, in the law?

And he, the lawyer, quotes these same, two commandments. And Jesus replies, you've answered correctly. The lawyer, wanting to justify himself, asks a question, about the second commandment, and who is my neighbor, neighbor, and Jesus replies, with the parable, of the good Samaritan.

Our concern, though, this morning, is with the first, of the commandments, here in Deuteronomy 6. And I want to consider, first, the uniqueness, of God, in verse 4.

And then, the undivided loyalty, that we owe to him. In verse 5. So first, the uniqueness, of God.

[13 : 30] Verse 4, hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord, is one. That opening word, here, is a call to attention.

Here is something, vitally important. It has been called, the Jewish creed. But it's a vital part, of our creed too.

The Nicene Creed, for example, begins, I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven, and earth. There is one God, and one God, only.

We call this, monotheism. And in those days, it was very unusual, if not unique. The nations, of the ancient world, were all, polytheistic.

They had many gods. The Egyptians, for example, worshipped, Ra, the sun god, and Osiris, and Isis, and Anubis, and Horus, and lots of others.

[14 : 44] It's said they had, over 2,000 gods. One Egyptian pharaoh, Amenhotep IV, tried to reduce it, to one, supreme God.

But it didn't go down well, and he was written out, of the list of pharaohs. The Canaanites, also had many gods.

Their chief god, was Baal. But scripture mentions, also, Dagon, Moloch, Asherah. Lots of gods.

How important, it was then, for the Jews, to realize, that there was, one true God. And one only. All the more so, considering the background.

Let me remind you, what had happened, and is happening here. God had brought Israel, out of Egypt, with a mighty hand, with signs and wonders.

[15 : 50] He'd opened the Red Sea, for them. He'd brought them, through the wilderness, to the borders, of the promised land. to the land, flowing with milk and honey, that he'd promised, to Abraham.

And Deuteronomy, is the speech, that Moses made, on the borders, of the land, in preparation, for them, to enter, the promised land. Setting out, God's covenant, with them, and the laws, and statutes, that he was giving them.

How important, it was for Israel, to know, who this God was, who had led them, from Egypt, and was now, bringing them, into Canaan, and made all these, requirements, of them.

Back in Egypt, they had been, surrounded, by false gods. Over in Canaan, once again, they would be, surrounded, by false gods.

Surrounded, by temptation. Surrounded, by error. God, wants to, protect, their minds. To fix it, in their minds, once and for all.

[17 : 05] That they must, never worship, the gods, of the nations. That there is, one true God, and one only, and him only. They must worship.

And who is that God? He is their God. The Lord, our God, it says. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

The covenant God, of Israel. The great, I am. The eternal God, who made, heaven, and earth. You'll notice, in our text, that the word, Lord, is in capitals.

I'm sure, most of you know, that that is, the holy name, of God. Given to Moses, at the burning bush. We don't know, for sure, how it was pronounced.

Because Hebrew, is written, only with vowels. Without vowels. And all we have, is the four consonants. Yod, he, val, he.

[18 : 14] So called, tetragrammaton. Could be, Yahweh. Could be, Jehovah. The Jews, never speak, the name.

But instead, they read, Adonai. Which means, Lord. And that's how it's written, in our Bibles. But the point is, he is, Israel's God.

The God, who had made them. The God, who had loved them. The God, who had chosen them. The God, who had brought them, out of Egypt. The God, who had brought them, to the promised land.

Their God, was the only, true God. Israel. And Israel's God, is our God. He is the God, who made us, and loved us, and chose us, and sent his own son, to die for us.

He is the God, who brought us, out of darkness, into his marvelous light. He is the God, who is leading us, to the promised land, of heaven.

[19 : 28] This God, is our God, forever, and ever. He, is the true God, the only God. God. And we too, as Christians, need to, remember that.

In a world, where there are, many religions, many gods, many concepts, of God, many substitutes, for God. People, sometimes say, that all religions, are basically, the same.

That they all, worship the same God, under different names. That simply, isn't true. The different religions, have totally, different conceptions, of God.

It's not the same thing, under different names. There is one God, and one God only, and he is our God. But you may ask, well, what about the Trinity?

Doesn't that, contradict the idea, that there's one God? Well, no, it doesn't. We believe, as Christians, that the one God, exists, eternally, in three persons.

[20 : 42] Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. But that doesn't mean, that there are three gods. One God, in three persons. Jesus himself, saw no contradiction, in quoting this verse, whilst at the same time, claiming to be, the Son of God.

He reconciles the ideas, in John 10, and verse 30, when he says, I, and the Father, are one. There is one God, but how should we relate, to that God?

Let's look now, at the undivided loyalty, due to him, in verse 5. You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.

Now, it may seem strange, to be told, to love God. We might have expected him, to say, you shall worship, the Lord, your God, or you shall obey, the Lord, your God.

And he does say that, elsewhere. But here he says, you shall love, the Lord, your God. And love, of course, will lead, to worship, and obedience.

[21 : 57] You might object, that love, can't be commanded. That it has to be, spontaneous. But it's right here, in front of us, isn't it?

This is quite plainly, a command. We are commanded, to love God. Now, Israel had, good reason, to love God.

Because of all, that God had done, for them. And all that God, would yet do, for them. Moses reminds them, of that, later in the chapter. In verse 10.

When the Lord, your God, brings you, into the land, which he swore, to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give you, with great, and good cities, that you did not build, houses, full of good things, that you did not fill, cisterns, that you did not dig, vineyards, and olive trees, that you did not plant, when you eat, and are full, then take care, that you do not forget, the Lord, who brought you, out of the land of Egypt, and out of the house, of slavery.

It's the Lord, who is going to give them, all these wonderful things, because he loves them. Should they not love him, in return? Again, in verse 21, you shall say, to your son, we were, Pharaoh's slaves, in Egypt, and the Lord, brought us out of Egypt, with a mighty hand, God had done, wonderful things, for Israel, and they should love him, in return.

[23 : 43] Now, isn't the same true, for us as Christians, today, even more so? Think what God, has done for us. God has rescued us, from the slavery of sin, by sending his own son, to die for us.

He has blessed us, in Christ, with every spiritual blessing, in the heavenly places. But as if that were not enough, he has promised us, heaven itself.

Surely, we should love him. As John says, we love him, because he first loved us. Of course, as we get to know God, we will find, deeper reasons, to love him.

We will love him, for his own, spiritual perfection, for his glory, his majesty, his holiness. But we should, always love him, because of his love, for us.

There should always be, that basic gratitude. God has done, wonderful things for you. Love him, in return.

[25 : 02] But our text, requires more than just love, doesn't it? It requires, total, undivided love. Now that clearly, doesn't mean, that we should love God, to the exclusion, of other people.

That's obvious, from Mark 12, where Jesus commands us, to love our neighbor. The Bible teaches us, to love our family, and to love our fellow Christians.

This is my commandment, Jesus says, that you love, one another. Nor does it mean, that there should be, nothing else in our lives, other than God.

God, it's not wrong, to have hobbies, and pastimes. It's not wrong, to enjoy the beauty, of this world, all around us. But God, must come first.

And everything, that we do, should be ultimately, for the glory, of God. We should love, our God, above everything else.

[26 : 06] And we should love, our God, with all, of our being. With all our heart, all our soul, all our might, he says.

The heart, in Hebrew thought, includes our thoughts, and our emotions. Our soul, is our inward being. Our might, is all our energy, and strength.

Some of us, perhaps, who are older, don't feel, we have much energy, most of the time. But whatever energy, we have, it must be for God. We must, in a word, be totally, totally, totally, totally, devoted, to God.

And as Christians, that means, equally, being totally, devoted, to the Son of God. It's well expressed, by that hymn, which we'll be singing, shortly, by Francis Ridley, Have a girl, take my life, and let it be, consecrated, Lord, to thee.

It speaks of our time, our hands, our feet, our voice, our lips, our wealth, our intellect, our heart. And it ends, take myself, and I will be, ever, only, all, for thee.

[27 : 24] But how do we, show that love? Well, obviously, in worship, our praise, should be full, of love, to the Lord, but also, obedience.

As Jesus said, if you love me, keep my commandments. That's the focus, of the verses, that follow here. These words, that I command you today, shall be in your heart.

You shall teach them diligently, to your children, and shall talk of them, when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them, as a sign, on your hand, and they shall be, as frontlets, between your eyes.

You shall write them, on the doorposts, of your house, and on your gates. The Jews have taken that literally. That's where they get the idea, for phylacteries.

Technically, I think the term is tefillim. Those little black boxes, that they attach, to their foreheads, and their arms, containing little portions, of scripture.

[28 : 36] And the idea, for the mezuzah. If you've visited, a Jewish house, you'll know, that attached, to the door, there will be again, a little scroll. And that's taking literally, these commands here.

As Christians, we take it as a metaphor. What the Lord is saying here, is simply that, the word of God, should always be, in our hearts.

I wonder, could we do, better than we do, in this regard? Is the word of God, always in your hearts, always on your lips? What will you think about, on the way home today?

What will you talk about, over lunch? Will it be the word of God? Not necessarily, this sermon. But will it be, the precious things, of the Lord?

will the world, immediately, come rushing in, and you'll want to talk, about everything else, I wonder. And nor should we, only think about it, and talk about it, but we should actually, obey it.

[29 : 53] Thus we've read, in verse one, this is the commandment, the statutes and rules, that the Lord your God, commanded me to teach you, that you may do them, in the land, to which you are going, over to possess, that you may fear, the Lord your God, you and your son, and your son's son, by keeping, all his statutes, and commandments.

Again, verse 17, you shall diligently, keep the commandments, of the Lord your God.

Verse 24, the Lord commanded us, to do all these statutes, to fear the Lord our God, for our good, always.

Notice incidentally, that love and fear, go together here. We should walk then, in the light, of God's word.

And that for us, means, following Christ. Remains for me to ask, do you, love God, wholeheartedly, as God commands?

By nature, of course, the answer is no. By the perfect standard, of the law, none of us, really loves God, as we ought.

[31 : 11] That's why, we need salvation. That scribe, in Mark 12, knew that he, ought to love God.

And in that sense, Jesus could say, you're not far, from the kingdom. But to enter, the kingdom, he must trust, in Christ, as his saviour.

And we too, need to come, to Christ, to be saved. And not least, from our lack, of love. He will then, give us his spirit, to enable us, to love him.

As Christians, we have a duty, to love him, who first loved us. With a total, undivided love.

And it should be our joy, to do so. It's the spirit of God, who will breathe, that love, into our hearts. Pray for that spirit, to come in abundance, to you.

[32 : 19] To fill you, with love. Do we give, God, our whole hearts, I wonder? Or only half, our hearts?

The Bible is full, of examples, of divided love. Tragic examples. Israel itself, after the death, of Joshua, they went wandering, after other gods.

They started, worshipping Baal. First, it was just, in addition, to the Lord. But eventually, it was instead, of the Lord.

Many of the kings, had divided, hearts. Solomon, for example. There's a man, who truly loved God. The man, who built the temple. And yet, we read, 1 Kings 11, King Solomon, loved many, foreign women.

He had 700, wives, and 300 concubines. And his wives, turned away his heart. And he started, building altars, for the gods, that his wives, worshipped.

[33 : 28] And then he started, worshipping them, himself. It's a slippery slope, isn't it? And therefore, it says in scripture, his heart was not, wholly true, to the Lord, his God.

Later, kings were the same. Eventually, Elijah, had to challenge Israel. How long, will you halt, between two opinions? Christians. If God is God, follow him.

If Baal is God, follow him. Take your choice. You can't have a divided heart. Jesus warns us, we can't divide our hearts, between God and money.

Where your treasure is, there your heart, will be also, he says. Make sure, that your treasure, is in heaven.

You have in the New Testament, the case of the rich young ruler. We heard about that recently, from John Angus. Yes, he loved the Lord. He wanted eternal life.

[34 : 39] He admired Jesus. But he wouldn't give up his wealth. I wonder if your heart, is divided like that. Thankfully, there are examples, in scripture also, of undivided love.

There was Abraham, who as we heard last week, loved God so much, he was even willing, to give up his own son. There was Moses himself, who had given up, all the riches, of Egypt, in order to suffer, with the people of God.

Two more examples, would have been standing, with Moses, as he spoke these words. Joshua, and Caleb, says of them, in Numbers 32, that they, wholly, followed the Lord.

David also, in spite of all his sins, scripture says, that he was, wholly true, to the Lord. David says, in the Psalms, with my whole heart, I seek you.

With my whole heart, I cry out to you. That's how it should be. In the New Testament, there's Mary of Bethany, pouring her ointment, on Jesus.

[36 : 03] All of it. There are the disciples, leaving their nets, and following Jesus. And of course, there's Jesus himself.

He loved God, his Father, with all his heart. He could say, I always do those things, that please him. And for that reason, he was willing, to go to the cross.

May the Lord give us, true, undivided hearts, full of love, for the one true God.

Amen. Let's sing now that hymn.