

## Bible Study – Deuteronomy Chapter 6 – The First Commandment

In today's study, we will look at the first commandment in a bit more depth. You will notice the same benefits for obeying and loving God (e.g. long life, prosperity, and numerous descendants) are repeated in this chapter. It may sound like a broken record, but this only underlies the importance of listening and obeying the commandments given to the Israelites. Remember, when something is ever repeated in the bible, there is great significance to the teaching and should be held dearly to our heart.

### Read Deuteronomy 6:1 – 9

Moses reemphasizes the benefits for following the laws and decrees that God gave to the Israelites: to enjoy long life, that it may go well for them, and that they may increase greatly. Moses sets the basis for the first of the ten commandments and the reason for it: that there is only one God and that they are to love Him with all their heart, soul, and strength. This was something they were to always remember and to teach to the next generations so that they would remember God's faithfulness to His chosen people.

**Q.** Verses 4-5 are known as the "Shema" or the Great Commandment. Shema translated means listen (or hear). Do you think that listening just means absorbing what is said? In what ways does it go beyond that? (10 min)

- **Objective – One cannot just hear the words, but rather hear, process, and respond to what you hear into action. You cannot be a bystander.**
- Listening is more than just hearing the words and absorbing them. It also means doing what you hear.
- An action must follow what is being said. One cannot just listen and not do anything.
- The intention is not to take what you hear and store it only as head knowledge and then reiterate it like a trivia answer.
- Pious Jews would recite it twice daily
- This is meant to be a "slogan" rather than just prose. It is meant to be proclaimed and to be made as a confession of who God is to the Israelites (and to us as well).
- This is a cry of allegiance, an affirmation of covenant commitment in response to the question, "Who is the God of Israel?"
- It was a good intention but did not mean anything if action did not follow their recital of the passage.

**Q.** In verse 4, "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one." ESV – (other translations are "The LORD our God is one LORD" (KJB); or "The LORD is our God, the LORD alone" (NLT); or "The LORD is our God, the LORD is one" (NIV)). How are we to understand this verse? How does a proper understanding help us to focus on who God is? (15 min)

- KJB – King James Bible; NLT – New Living Translation; NIV – New International Version
- **Objective – Understanding who God is will help us to appreciate what we have and to properly worship Him as intended.**
- The idea of verse 4 is not just that Yahweh is the only God, but that He is also "one" unified person – aspects of the Trinity of God
- It can be understood the uniqueness or exclusivity of Yahweh as Israel's God and so may be paraphrased 'Yahweh our God is the one and only Yahweh'
  - This is taking the noun 'ehad' ('one') in the sense of unique or solitary
- It can also be understood on the unity or wholeness of the LORD. This is not in opposition to the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, but rather functions here as a witness to the self-consistency of Yahweh who is not ambivalent and who has a single purpose or objective for creation and history
- The ideas clearly overlap to provide a basis for monotheistic (e.g. One God) faith

- Yahweh is indeed a unity, but beyond that He is the only God
- This affirmation makes polytheism (the belief in many gods) and henotheism (the worship of one god without denying the existence of other gods) inappropriate
- A proper understanding helps us to appreciate who God is and why He is the only one to be worshipped
- The idea of exclusivity is important because it means that no one else can be considered an equal and therefore there can be no one else that is worthy of our worship and devotion.

**Q.** When Moses speaks of loving God with all your heart, soul, and strength, what is he trying to convey to the Israelite people? Why does he give it in this specific order (hint: Define heart, soul, and strength)? Why do you think it is hard to love God with all your heart, soul, and strength? What are some practical ways that one can practice loving God with all their heart, soul, and strength? (20 min)

- **Objective – We are to love God with our whole being because He is the only worth of it.**
- That the whole being of a person was to worship God and no part was to be excluded or left for another to have their attention
- There is to be no division in any aspect of our worship and love for God
- First and foremost, all that was essential for the Israelite was an unreserved, wholehearted commitment, expressed in love for God
- The order is important and is defined as follows:
  - The **heart** is considered the seat of the intellect, equivalent to the mind or ration part of a person
  - The **soul** is considered the invisible part of the individual, which includes the will and sensibilities
  - The **strength** is the physical side with all its functions and capabilities
- We may know other versions where the word 'mind' is also inserted (cf. Mark 12:30; Luke 10:27), however, there is no word in Hebrew for 'mind' or 'brain'
- Loving the Lord with all the heart and soul and strength is placed at the head, as the spiritual principles from which the observance of the commandments was to flow out of.
- It can be hard to love God wholeheartedly because we are easily distracted and have been trained to multi-task, therefore dividing our focus
- It is easy to focus on other things rather than God, especially if we do not practice a devoted time spent with him in the reading of His word and in prayer, along with trusting Him in all the things that we do.
- Also, we have a rebellious tendency so we may not always want to give everything we have to God and will choose our own way at times when our earthly bodies desire something
- We must set our heart right in order for us to try to love God with our entire being. Once our heart is set right, the desire to obey and to listen well will come.
- A practical way is spending quality (not necessary quantity) time with God through the reading of His Word, in prayer and meditation.
- One can start slowly by reading a short passage and spending five to 10 minutes a day meditating over the span of a week. From there, increase the time spent meditating and journaling it so you can remember for a later time.

**Q.** In verses 6-9, Moses tells the Israelites how to be wholeheartedly devoted to God. How do you remind yourself about who God is and what He has done for you? Do you come to God all the time or only when things are going well (or poorly)? Why do you think it is hard to stay close to God? (15 min)

- **Objective – We are to take practical measures to always remember God and His commandments in our daily life, so that it also informs our thoughts and actions.**

- In Old Testament psychology, the heart is not the center of emotional life and response, but the seat of intellect or rational side of humankind.
- To 'be upon the heart' is to be in one's constant, conscious reflection
- One way is to daily remember what God has done for you by remembering and praying the exact action God performed for you.
- Another is to write it down in a journal and to review it periodically or whenever you need a reminder of who God is and what He has done for you
- We can also set up 'memorials' to remember God's faithfulness and love in his dealings with us, like how the Israelites did it several times during their journey to the Promised Land. (Use Wilson's example of the key to their condo).
- Another way still is to be mindful of God, meaning that He is always to be in our thoughts and actions.
- Be reminded that God's ways are good and what He gives us is for our benefit while also showing us His nature.
- It is hard to stay close to God because we may not always sense He is with us. We are rebellious by nature and so that rebellion may creep up from time to time, which may cause us to not listen or obey Him, but rather choose our earthly desires.
- Another reason is because we are easily distracted and so it may be difficult for us to focus our thoughts on Him
- The amount of time you invest in the relationship may determine how close we feel to Him as well. If we always spend time with Him, it would be easier to come to Him in any situation because of the intimacy that is developed.

### Read Deuteronomy 6:10 – 25

Moses reveals the blessings that wait for the Israelites when they conquer the land that God has promised to give them (e.g. cities to inhabit, plentiful food and water ready to have). Moses, however, warns they are not to forget what God has done for them when they conquer the land, and gives a further explanation of the first commandment from Mount Sinai: God is a jealous God and His anger would burn against them if they pursue other gods. Moses reminds them again to be diligent in keeping the commandments of God, along with His testimonies and statutes. Moses also commands parents to give an answer to their son (or children) when asked about the meaning of the testimonies and statutes: It was for their good and it would be righteousness for them.

**Q.** Has there been a time when you received unexpected blessing in your life? Did you attribute that to God or to something else (e.g. return of a favour or benefit of your good works)? (10 min)

- **Objective – To have people be mindful of what God has done for them and to always remember to thank God for all the good things in their lives.**
- No specific notes, but just to have people share and hopefully be an encouragement to others.

**Q.** Moses gives an answer to the younger folk (e.g. son) when they ask about the meaning of the commandments and statutes given by God. How would you answer a younger person (whether it be a child related to you or someone young in the faith) about the reason for following God's commands? Why is it important to inform them of who God is? (15 min)

- **Objective – To be able to explain the reason for following God's commands to young people who ask. Also, teaching it to the next generation is for them to know God's love and faithfulness.**

- Covenant keeping (or obedience to the Law) is not the basis for righteousness, but rather an expression of faithful devotion.
- True covenant keeping is a matter of faith, not merely of works and ritual.
- It is important that the next generation know of God's love and faithfulness, so they know who to worship and follow in their life.
- Also, it is good to share good news with others, such as God's love for us and how that was demonstrated through the sending of His son who died on the cross for the penalty of our sin and rose again.
- It is also a way to 'bless' children with the knowledge of God so that one day they may testify they knew God throughout their life.
- God's commands and statutes are meant to live a proper life in this world, one that would come with blessings.

We are reminded in this chapter that the LORD God alone is the one who deserves our worship and obedience. There should be no one else that has our wholehearted devotion and worship in this world. We are also told that God is a jealous God and that His anger would burn against us if we were to substitute Him with anyone else. Moses gives compelling reasons why the Israelites (and by extension Christians) should love God with all their heart, soul, and strength, as well as to fear (in reverence) Him: The love and faithfulness of God to His creation should invoke a response of wholehearted love and obedience to Him. Moses instructs that the current generation teach the commands, statutes, and testimonies to the next generation because they should never forget the faithfulness and love of God to their generation. This is also something we need to do for our kids and for their kids so that they may experience knowing God all the days of their life.