

Family: Distinct and Obedient

Devotional Reading: 2 Samuel 7:25–29

Background Scripture: Matthew 19:3–9; Ephesians 6:1–4; 2 Timothy 1:3–5

Today's Scripture: Deuteronomy 6:3–9; Matthew 19:3–9

I. Receiving the Law Deuteronomy 6:3–9

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.

⁴ Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. ⁵ Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.

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

⁷ Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.

⁸ Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads.

⁹ Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

3. Our text from Deuteronomy begins the third part of a three-part exhortation. The first of those three parts affirms God as the source of the commandments. The second affirms Moses as God's spokesman of the commandments. The third, now before us, focuses on the people (*Israel*) as doers in obedience to the commandments. The reason for doing so follows. For the Israelites, the reward

they seek is the fulfillment of the promise to their *ancestors*. This verse reinforces the importance of the ensuing blessing; acquiring that which had been promised to their forefathers depends on obedience.

Note that it is not enough simply to *hear* the word. One must *be careful to obey* what is heard. Those who built the golden calf were the same people who had just received the commandments from Sinai (Exodus 32:1–6; 24:3). The Israelites were expected to keep these words close and to live them out. Simply being a part of the chosen people was not enough; they had to keep God's commandments.

4. Because the Hebrew verse does not contain any verbs for "is," the exact rendering of the verse has been subject to much discussion. As it appears in Hebrew, the verse literally reads, "Hear, Israel, the Lord, our God, the Lord, one." Some students suggest that the word for *one* may also be rendered *alone*; however, "one" is the most accepted translation. Certainly, the oneness of God that this verse declares implies that he alone is God, and there is no other.

This doctrine is affirmed elsewhere in Scripture (Psalm 18:31; Isaiah 44:8; 1 Corinthians 8:4–6; etc.). Such a belief stands in stark contrast to the pagan religions of the Old Testament world, which are characterized by belief in many gods.

The fact that the singular God has clearly revealed his will eliminates the guesswork and uncertainty accompanying belief in many gods.

If Israel would obtain the promises to the patriarchs, they must have the same faith as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob: faith that the one God who covenanted with them would see his plans to fruition—and that one God alone!

5. This allegiance is established abstractly in this verse: to love the Lord with one's whole *heart, soul, and strength*. Notice that in this most fundamental of beliefs, the Bible does not prescribe particular rituals or deeds that fulfill what God desires. Instead, it provides the foundational principles that can be applied anywhere in life. This, the appropriate human response to God, is what Jesus declared "the first and great commandment" (Matthew 22:38): to love him without any reservation, to love him with the totality of one's being. Indeed, on this and the command to love one's neighbor hang all the Law and the Prophets (22:40).

6. This verse reinforces the universal scope of the blessing by commanding it to be *on your hearts* at all times. This is not a command to fixate on or compulsively repeat the prayer as a reflex, but rather that it should be so familiar as to inform everything one thinks and does. To love God with the devotion described in the previous verse implies keeping his *commandments* treasured within one's heart. The psalmist recognized the importance of this when he wrote, "I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you" (Psalm 119:11). The commandments of God are to be internalized, not superficially listened to and then ignored.

7. It is not enough, however, for the people of God to discipline themselves. If the Israelites did not educate their *children* on how to think about God, then their pagan

neighbors would happily do so. Later rabbis interpreted the "children" referenced here as students, suggesting that, at least in later Judaism, one's responsibility for instructing the next generation did not apply exclusively to one's progeny. Similarly, while the book of Proverbs refers to the recipient of its wisdom as "my son," we understand it as applicable to all (Proverbs 1:8; 2:1; 3:1; etc.).

8–9. Notably, the text does not command to *bind* these things on the hands and between the eyes of one's children, but on one's own *hands* and forehead. Leading by example (modeling) is the ultimate form of education.

The list in these two verses is also not exhaustive. These are examples of how one might establish visual reminders of the prescribed attitude. The failure to erect such reminders is not a sin, but to heed it is wisdom. The purpose of this verse is to encourage endurance in the attitude outlined in the previous verses. When times get difficult, it is easy to forget this way of looking at the world. One way to mitigate human forgetfulness is with external memory aids.

II. Applying the Law

Matthew 19:3–9

³ **Some Pharisees came to him to test him. They asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?"**

⁴ **"Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,'⁵ and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh?'⁶ So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate."**

⁷ **"Why then," they asked, "did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?"**

⁸ Jesus replied, “Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning.”⁹ I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery.”

The New Testament passage for today’s lesson takes us into the third year of Jesus’ earthly ministry. Matthew structures his Gospel account in terms of five discourses, and the fourth of those has just ended as Jesus shifts his ministry efforts from Galilee to Judea on the eastern side of the Jordan River (Matthew 19:1).

3. These *Pharisees* do not have Jesus’ best interests at heart. So they test his interpretation of the Law of Moses. Their issue specifically seems to concern Deuteronomy 24:1 and its divorce clause regarding “something indecent about her.”

4. Jesus’ strategy is to go back to Genesis, where God’s original intent for marriage is recorded. It starts with acknowledging the *male and female* distinctive of Genesis 1:27; 5:2.

5. Jesus quotes Genesis 2:24, marking the establishment of a new family unit by means of marriage. *A man* living in his parents’ household leaves to make a new household with *his wife*. The relationship between man and wife overrides what was previously the most important relationship—that of parents to their children. Jesus reinforces the sacredness of the marriage relationship: with marriage, a new family unit is born. This is not a relationship to be treated lightly.

6. This verse contains the thrust of Jesus’ response: God has made *one flesh* by joining together a man and a woman. To rend them apart amounts to the destruction of God’s established order.

7. The Pharisees’ rejoinder is valid enough: the fact of the matter is that

ordinances for divorce *do* exist in the Law of *Moses*. If these ordinances are not applicable in the universal scope of space or time, then how did they find their way into Scripture? Perhaps the Pharisees think they have caught Jesus in a trap: Jesus has stated the ideal situation; but the Pharisees counter by noting the reality of divorce and its justification.

8. Jesus does not deny what *Moses permitted*. Instead, Jesus contrasts the doctrine of marriage with God’s permission of divorce as a concession. In the beginning, God joined man and woman together in marriage, a union never intended to be broken (except by death; see 1 Corinthians 7:39). Divorce is not what God intends for marriage relationships. However, because of the fall and resulting human sin, it is a “permission” that God gives.

Jesus reorients the conversation toward the original aim of God’s plan: although an exception exists, it should not be normalized. This is not to say that situations involving adultery or abusive relationships should be preserved in every circumstance. Christians ought to strive first and foremost toward the ideal God has established while acknowledging the contingency if this aim should fail.

9. Instead of overturning a former saying, Jesus strengthens the grounds of what was said. Here, Jesus affirms what God ordained through Moses: divorce is permissible in very particular conditions. However, he prioritizes God’s plan over the contingent allowances given to hard-hearted humanity.

The final clause speaks of the spiritual reality of marriage: a man who marries a woman who is, in the eyes of God, still married to her first husband commits *adultery* since she is still married in God’s sight. A marriage relationship is brought into being with God, and he will not easily admit its dissolution.

Involvement Learning

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Into the Lesson

Identify ways we can **hear** and **obey** God's Word?

Into the Word

Read Deuteronomy 6:3–9. Then answer the following questions from the differing perspectives of parents, grandparents, and children.

Parents/Grandparents:

What are some of the commandments God wants us to obey?

What do you know about God's promises?

Why does God want us to love him with the totality of our being?

Children:

Why does God say we're supposed to love him with the totality of our being?

What is the reason for God's commandments?

Why should we go to great lengths to remember these commandments?

Key Text

These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.
—Deuteronomy 6:6–7

Into Life

Write a letter to a young believer growing in faith. Encourage the young believer in their faith and celebrate the work of the Holy Spirit.

Thought to Remember

Love God in and through everything you do.