
Moses said: ¹ “These are the commands, laws, and rules the LORD your God commanded me to teach you. Obey them after you enter the land and take possession of it. ² As long as you live, you, your children, and your grandchildren must fear the LORD your God. All of you must obey all His laws and commands that I’m giving you, and you will live a long time. ³ Listen, Israel, and be careful to obey these laws. Then things will go well for you and your population will increase in a land flowing with milk and honey, as the LORD God of your ancestors promised you. ⁴ Listen, Israel: The LORD is our God. The LORD is one. ⁵ Love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. ⁶ Take to heart these words that I give you today. ⁷ Repeat them to your children. Talk about them when you’re at home or away, when you lie down or get up. ⁸ Write them down, and tie them around your wrist, and wear them as headbands as a reminder. ⁹ Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.
Deuteronomy 6:1-9 (GW, alt)

Today we gather together in the theme of ‘Generations In Faith Together’ as we celebrate our ‘Generation’s Brunch’. We do so with the theme of “How do we ‘pass on the faith’ from one generation to another?”

Important here is ‘Church and family’ in faith together’. One Christian writer has said on this topic: *The critical agent in this process of impressing our young people is not their Sunday School teachers, not their Christian school teachers, not their public school teachers, not just mum if she is the home school teacher, but the parents.*

And so we have this image of ‘families together in devotion to the Lord’. However, if this is your ‘starting point’ for passing on the faith from one generation to the next, I can tell you now you are probably on the path to failure, with a sense of guilt often accompanying this. Have you ever felt like this?

Perhaps there are some other things we need to keep in mind *before* we come to this image of ‘family in devotion together’...

In this past week one of my devotion books had me reading through First Samuel. The account of the Lord calling Samuel is fascinating in many ways. We know how Hannah did not have any children whilst Peninnah had children (1 Samuel 1). And when Hannah went up to the Tent of the Lord, Hannah prayed at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. And we remember how Eli the Priest received her? He thought she was drunk! (1 Samuel 1:13)

Later, after Hannah bore Samuel, and brought him to serve the Lord, Samuel had that encounter with God one night when God announced His judgement on Eli’s family (1 Samuel 3). The Bible tells us that Eli’s sons were known to have taken from the Lord’s offering, as well as taking sexual advantage of women who had come to serve at the Tent of Meeting (1 Samuel 2:22). And the Scriptures say (1

Samuel 3:1): "And the word of the LORD was rare in those days." "The Word of the Lord was rare in those days." Does this sound familiar, perhaps even to us...?

Another Christian writer has said this: *What fools are those parents who imagine that by neglecting the religious instruction of their offspring they are "leaving them free to make up their own minds!" What they are doing is leaving the Devil free access to bring every evil pressure upon the children to destroy their souls. Parents do not leave their children free to take any kind of poison or drugs in order to allow them to "make up their own minds," do they? Maybe some do, and perhaps that is why we have countless drug-ruined children all over. We agree with Adam Clarke, "No head of a family can neglect the instruction of his children without endangering the final salvation of his own soul."*

There is something in our world, and there is something in our 'human nature' (our 'flesh') that struggles to hear God's Word, and live it...

So, what is the answer for us...?

If we come to Deuteronomy 6, which is Moses' 'Farewell Speech' just before the people of Israel were to enter 'The Promised Land', we find some clues for us...

Moses said to the people: *"Now this is the commandment, the statutes and the rules that the LORD your God commanded me to teach you.... Hear therefore, O Israel, and be careful to do them, that it may go well with you..."*

But note this: the Hebrew is emphatic here. Moses called attention to The Commandment. In the following verses, God reduced the law to one ruling principle - one commandment which encompassed all the commandments. And what is this 'commandment'..?

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.

Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might...

Love God. Love God with everything you are: heart, soul, strength. Love God with your life (perhaps a better translation than "soul")

Many scholars would say that "love" here is not primarily an emotion. They point to examples of political treaties known from the ancient Near East. To "love" one's sovereign in these ancient political covenants was to be loyal to him; that is, to obey the stipulations of his covenant, to fight alongside him against his enemies, and to be faithful in paying tribute to him.

Such ancient political treaties are undoubtedly in the background of this passage. To "love" God as one would "love" a human sovereign entails primarily action, not emotion. To love is to be faithful and loyal in fulfilling the obligations of the covenant. And, indeed, the Shema passage emphasises knowledge of and obedience to God's commandments:

Still, there is another realm of life in which the language of love and covenant abounds. The image of marriage, though not as explicit in Deuteronomy as in other biblical books, provides another way for understanding the relationship of God and Israel. Indeed, in the next chapter of Deuteronomy, it is God who is said to love, and this love is a matter of the heart.

It is important to remember that the special status of Israel rests not upon her merits, her strength or numbers or intelligence or honesty, but upon something else – the very grace of God. Something almost irrational, a passion, an affair of the heart, not the mind, in short a love. All the efforts to explain the special destiny of Israel in rational terms only dissolve its power. For Israel is singled out by and for the love of God."

And for us, as Christian people, we say (along with the Apostle John: 1 John 4:19): "We love because He [God] first loved us."

Before you think about 'sharing faith together', think about 'the faith' that you wish to 'share together'... This is the very love of God in Christ Jesus – a love revealed and known to us through His very Word...

And it is on this basis we can now say: *"Take to heart these words that I give you today. Repeat them to your children. Talk about them when you're at home or away, when you lie down or get up. Write them down, and tie them around your wrist, and wear them as headbands as a reminder. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates."*

Each parent is to be a great teacher; a diligent teacher.

- "when you sit in your house" – Inside the home
- "when you walk by the way" – Outside the home
- "when you lie down" – From the beginning of the day
- "when you rise up" – to the end of the day

You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes.

- "bind them" – give all diligence and use all means to remember
- "sign on your hand" – put something there that is out of the ordinary. (also let them govern the actions of your hands)
- "frontlets between your eyes" – put it right where you can see it. (also let them govern the desires of your eyes)

You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

- "on the doorposts" – so the household knows
- "on your gates" – so the neighbours know

There is no situation that is not covered here. Every area of life is covered. This is what will be the natural outflow of placing this command in your heart.

Every aspect of your life, every relation to your children, and every decision of each day should be permeated by this command: Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.

When we say “The Lord our God, the Lord is one” (Or “He is the only Lord”) we are saying something about the ‘nature of God’. This is the love of God for us in Christ Jesus – and what a beautiful and holy love this is...

So often we try to implement God’s Word, especially the Law, in our homes. We yell and scream, we try to reason and sanely instruct ... but no change. We give up on real change; we just want external conformity. But the only way real change will ever take hold is in the heart. And this is the heart that knows its own sin, and rejoices in Christ alone as Saviour.

This is the key to life: to love God, the whole story of Christianity –God's redemptive love: the cross, the resurrection, the coming of the Holy Spirit, the preaching of the gospel, the believing of it, the receiving of the Lord into our own hearts; all this is simply the way by which God has made it possible to ‘keep’ His word and love Him. The person who knows the love of God (for them) will never go astray in life. And the child who learns to love God will be kept through every testing, every trial, every danger. Amen.