

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 therefore, O Israel, and observe to do it; that it may be well with thee, and that ye may increase mightily, as the LORD God of thy fathers hath promised thee, in the land that floweth with milk and honey.

4 Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD:

5 And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.

6 And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart:

7 And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.

8 And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes.

9 And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy 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 (Deuteronomy 5:32–33). The second affirms Moses as God's spokesman of the

commandments (6:1–2). The third, now before us, focuses on the people as doers in obedience to the commandments (*observe to do it*). The reason for doing so follows. For the Israelites, the reward they seek is the fulfillment of the promise to the patriarchs (*thy fathers*). 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 *do* 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. (The need to supply the word *is* for smooth English is indicated by that word's appearing in italics in most editions of the *King James Version*.) 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; 45:22; 1 Corinthians 8:4–6; Ephesians 4:6). Such a belief stands in stark contrast to the pagan religions of the Old Testament world, which are characterized by 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 might*. 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 *in thine heart* 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 *words* treasured within one's *heart*. The psalmist recognized the importance of this when he wrote, “Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee” (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 *hand* and *between* one's own *eyes*. Leading by example 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. One way to mitigate human forgetfulness is with external memory aids.

II. Applying the Law Matthew 19:3–9

3 The Pharisees also came unto him, tempting him, and saying unto him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?

4 And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female,

5 And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh?

6 Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.

7 They say unto him, Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away?

8 He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so.

9 And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marieth her which is put away doth commit 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. Opposition has been growing, and these *Pharisees*, like those of Matthew 16:1, do not have Jesus' best interests at heart. So they test His interpretation of the Law of Moses.

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 establishing 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 been stating the ideal situation; but the Pharisees counter by noting the reality of divorce and its justification.

8. Jesus does not deny what *Moses* allowed. Instead, He 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. Divorce is not the result God intends for marriage relationships. However, because of the fall and 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. Rather, Christians ought to strive first and foremost toward the ideal that God has established while acknowledging the contingency if this aim should fail.

9. In the Gospels, Jesus frequently says, "Ye have heard it said . . . but I say unto you . . ." These pairs are often called "antitheses." But notice here that instead of overturning a former saying, Jesus strengthens the grounds of what was said. Jesus affirms what God ordained through Moses: divorce is permissible in very particular conditions. However, He prioritizes God's plan over the contingent allowances that God granted to hardhearted humanity.

A marriage relationship is brought into being with God, and He will not easily admit its dissolution.

Involvement Learning

Family: Distinct and Obedient

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 words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest 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.