

Deut 6           “Grace before Law: the Preface to the Ten Commandments”  
Psalm 119:9-16  
Mark 12:13-37

June 27, 2021

While I normally preach through books of the Bible,  
    every few years I preach a series of catechetical sermons.  
Usually I work through the topics of the Westminster Shorter Catechism –  
    but once I went through the Heidelberg Catechism –  
    and this time I will simply work through the Ten Commandments, the Nicene Creed,  
    and the Lord’s Prayer.

I thought about starting with the Creed –  
    but then realized that there would be a lot of overlap with the Hebrews series  
    that we just finished,  
so I decided to start with the Ten Commandments  
    (which actually follows really neatly from the Hebrews series –  
    since you have just been thinking about  
    how the OT points us to Christ!).

The catechetical pattern of sermons has a long and noble history.  
    Catechetical preaching refers to preaching  
    that works through the basics of the Christian faith.  
    The first clear example of catechetical preaching is found in our text today!

We saw in Sunday school a couple weeks ago that Deuteronomy 6-26  
    contains Moses’ exposition of the Ten Commandments.  
So Deuteronomy 6-26 is the first example of catechetical preaching.

In chapter 5, Moses has just given the people Ten Commandments,  
    and yet he says, this is THE commandment.  
In other words,  
    all the Law may be summarized in one commandment.  
If you keep this one commandment,  
    then all the others will fall into place.  
And what is that 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.”

This is *the* commandment.

I remember preaching a sermon in Scotland one Lord’s Day.  
    I told the congregation – “I know what your worst sin is!  
    You don’t love God!”

There was one woman sitting right in the middle of the church –

and she looked almost angry as she shook her head,  
as if to say, “how dare you say that – of course I love God!”

So I veered off my manuscript to say,  
“Do you want to know why I say that?  
Because every time you sin, you are saying, ‘I don’t love God’!  
If you always loved God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength,  
then you would never sin!  
Your biggest problem is that you don’t love God!”

I don’t know what sins you are struggling with today.  
But as long as you only focus on how you have sinned against others –  
or how your sin has affected yourself –  
then you are not dealing with your sin!

Your biggest problem is that you don’t love God!  
It’s why David says “Against you, you only have I sinned!”

Our Psalm of response understands this.  
Ps 119:11 says “I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.”

Sing Psalm 119B  
Read Mark 12:13-37

Which commandment is the most important of all?!  
Jesus does not say, “Don’t be silly – they are all important!”  
No, Jesus knows the scriptures!

He knows what Moses had said – “Shema Yisrael, Yhvh Elohenu, Yhvh echad!”

And the scribe likewise understands this.  
He was well catechized!  
He has understood the Torah--the direction, the instruction--of God.  
That’s why Jesus says to him,  
“You are not far from the kingdom of God.”

In our day, there are very few who understand this.  
I am generally impressed with those who understand “love your neighbor as yourself!”  
And I often think – though only occasionally have I said to them –  
“you are not far from the kingdom of God.”

Maybe I’ll start saying it more often...

The Law--the Torah--points us in the direction that we should go.  
The Law cannot bring us into the kingdom.  
(What caused Israel to inherit the promised land?)

Law-keeping?! No!

Joshua – as the LORD said to Joshua,

“Be strong and courageous, for *you* shall cause Israel to inherit the Land that I promised to their fathers.”)

The Law cannot bring us *into* the kingdom,

but it can tell us what life in the kingdom should look like.

This scribe is different from most of the scribes in the gospels;

this scribe has understood the Law,

this scribe has learned humility and wisdom.

You can see and hear the tenderness in Jesus' voice when he looks at this man,

this man who has sought so diligently to understand the things of God,

and says to him,

"You are not far from the kingdom of God"

Because those who have truly understood what Moses teaches,

MUST seek for Christ.

But what does Moses teach?

Chapters 6-11 reflect on the Great Commandment (6:4),

This is, in effect, the positive statement of the first commandment:

you shall have no other gods besides Yahweh.

What does it mean to have no other gods besides him?

It means that our whole heart, soul and strength is to be devoted to God alone.

It means that we are to love him with everything we have;

our love must not be divided between God and others.

Because if we truly love God with everything,

that love will overflow into everything we do.

Do you love God with ALL your heart?

Does your love for him use up ALL your strength?

Is your whole soul consumed with the desire to know Christ?

--not just to know about him--

but to **know** him.

Dt. 11:22 talks about holding fast to Yahweh

as a description of the sort of love we should have for him.

This is the same word that is used of marriage in Gen. 2:24,

where Adam says that a husband,

"shall leave his father and mother and HOLD FAST (or cling) to his wife,

and they shall become one flesh."

Our love for God should be the most passionate and whole-hearted love in our life.

Because, after all,

God loves YOU in this way.

God's love for YOU is more beautiful and lovely

than any other love you've ever experienced.

As Paul puts it,

Christ loved the church – how?

"he gave himself for her, that he might sanctify and cleanse her  
with the washing of water by the word,  
that he might present her to himself a glorious church,  
not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing,  
but that she should be holy and without blemish."

Do you long for someone who is perfectly faithful?  
someone who will love you and be with you  
even in those times that you are unlovable?

Don't expect your husband or wife to fill that role;  
they can only be a feeble picture of the love of Christ.

I once spoke to a young woman who said that she and her boyfriend had broken up  
because they couldn't accept each other the way they were,  
but kept trying to change each other.

We often talk that way--

how often have you heard someone say, "I just want to be accepted the way I am"?  
As long as we think that way,  
we will never understand the gospel,  
and we will never understand how God loves us.

Because God's love for us is so much better!

God's love comes with the power to change us,  
to transform us into the sort of lover that we ought to be.

Too often, all we want is a God who just loves us and accepts us just the way we are!  
*But there's a problem with the way we are!*

If God simply accepted us the way we are,  
he wouldn't be much of a God.

But God's love takes our hateful and spiteful hearts,  
and gently, but firmly transforms us.

God doesn't merely accept us the way we are.  
God wants to change us!

And in Jesus Christ--he has!

But if God's love for us is a love which seeks to change us,  
what should our love for God be like?

What does it mean to love God with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our strength?

It means to be changed.

If God loves us so that he can change us,  
then our love for God should reflect that change.

In other words – the whole of the Ten Commandments is rooted in the grace of the gospel!

You see that in the preface to the Ten Commandments:

"I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt,

out of the house of bondage.”  
The Law itself begins with a proclamation of the Gospel!  
The Story of Salvation – who God is, and what *he* has done to save us!

The Law is not our way to get to God!  
The Law is our grateful response to the gospel of God!

And in Deuteronomy 6 we see three things that express these changes:

- 1) Loving God means remembering what he has done for us, and worshiping him alone
- 2) Loving God means obeying God, trusting in him to accomplish what he has promised
- 3) Loving God means teaching your children all that God has done for us

**1) Loving God means remembering what he has done for us, and worshiping him alone (10-15)**

The Great Commandment, like the 10 Com, starts with who God is and what he has done  
6:4

Who is God?

Yahweh our God, Yahweh is ONE.  
There is no other god besides him--therefore we are to worship him only.  
All the other nations had many gods.  
Israel alone had ONE God.  
So Moses declares that Israel has ONE God  
and ONE Commandment.  
And that ONE Commandment is to love the ONE God.

But who is God?

When Moses wants to tell them who God is,  
he turns to what God has done:  
Verse 10 – “And when the LORD your God brings you into the land  
that he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob...”

God is present with his people, leading them into the Promised Land.

He is the one who has redeemed you from Egypt--from slavery to sin.  
He is the one who loves you as a father loves his children.

As Moses said earlier in chapter 4,  
"what other nation is there that has God so near to it,  
as the Lord our God is to us"

The nations have many gods,  
but they have no fellowship with their gods.

We have ONE God,  
ah, but we may draw near to him because he has drawn near to us.

Isn't it amazing.

Because God had spoken from Sinai,  
and revealed his glory and his presence in the cloud of fire,

Moses and the Israelites think that God is near.  
They Israelites tremble and fear God because he comes within a few miles,  
or a few yards of them.  
And yet we have been united with Christ;  
and his Holy Spirit dwells in us;  
but do we tremble at the thought?  
are we amazed at his nearness to us?  
We have a gift that Moses could only dream of--  
how dare we treat it so lightly!

But notice something else:

not only is God present with us,  
but he also gives his people a home.  
cities you did not build  
houses full of good things you did not fill  
wells you did not dig  
vineyards and olive trees you did not plant

That is the blessing of the Promised Land:

to receive gifts which are undeserved.

These blessings that God promised to the Israelites in the Promised Land,  
are fulfilled for us, first in the comfort of being accepted in the beloved,  
accepted in the body of Christ,  
and then finally, in the New Creation,  
where we will receive a City which God has built,  
houses prepared by Christ,  
not just wells, but a whole river of Living Water  
and we will come to Christ's vineyard,  
and share with him the cup of blessing  
in the Great Wedding Supper of the Lamb.

But if these blessings are ours in Christ,

then so also the warning of verse 12 is for us:

“then take care lest you forget the LORD,  
who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.”

(notice how Moses here quotes from the Preface to the Ten Commandments!).

Those who have drunk deeply of the grace of God,  
who have received his rich blessings,  
must never forget what God has done for us.

What does this mean?

You may say,

How could we "forget" what God has done?

We all know that Christ died on the cross for our sins.

We all know that he has saved us by his grace.

See, we haven't forgotten.

But forgetting is not an intellectual process.

Forgetting is about worship.

Forgetting is about love.

Have any of you guys ever forgotten your anniversary or an important birthday?

You hadn't really forgotten.

If anyone asked you when your anniversary was, you still know the date!

But for whatever reason,

as that date drew closer, other things crowded that date out of your mind,  
and you "forgot".

That's what Moses is talking about.

I won't ever "forget" that Christ died for me,

but I can live as though I've forgotten.

Other things can crowd out Christ,

until I act as though God is distant and irrelevant.

And THAT is idolatry.

As the Israelites get comfy in the Promised Land.

As they get used to their new homes and vineyards,

they will be tempted to worship other gods--to forget the Lord their God.

But God will not tolerate that.

He will destroy those who forget him.

He is jealous.

He doesn't like it when you forget how near and how good he is.

If you love God,

then remember him,

and let your remembering him be sweet and delightful,

because he delights to be in your presence,

so also you may now delight in him.

So Loving God means remembering him,

putting him in the front of your mind,

setting your heart upon Jesus Christ,

where he is seated at the right hand of the Father.

Set your minds on things above,

not on earthly things.

For you died, and your life has been hidden in Christ with God,

and when Christ, who IS your life appears,

you also will appear with him in glory.

Don't forget that.

Secondly:

**2) Loving God means obeying God, trusting in him to accomplish what he has promised (16-19)**

God has promised that he will drive all your enemies out of the Land.

He has promised that he will give you the whole of the New Creation.

Believe him!

And live like it.

We obey God because of what he has done,  
and because of what he has promised to do.  
He has accomplished our salvation in Jesus Christ,  
and promises that he will bring it to completion in the day of Christ's return.

What are your enemies?

What are the sins that weigh you down?  
What are the things that creep into your thoughts,  
distracting you from the remembrance of God,  
leading you to forget him?  
Is it bitterness toward someone?  
Lust?  
A particular project which is consuming you?

What are your enemies?

Do not test God.  
God had promised the Israelites that he would provide for them,  
but at Massah, in Exodus 17,  
they complained that God had brought them into the wilderness,  
only to leave them without food or water.

And so rather than believe in his promises,  
they rebelled.

So also,  
you must believe that God will provide the way out  
against the temptations that you face.  
and you must seek out what that way is.

So when you are tempted to forget God,  
and place something else in his place,  
turn to his Law--his instruction,  
and look for the way out.

For instance,  
when I am tempted by lust,  
I know that God has provided a way out;  
since my idolatry is rooted in the fear of rejection,  
I look to Christ for his acceptance.

And not just in abstract terms,  
I turn to the picture of Christ as a passionate bridegroom:  
he has wooed me to himself,  
and has given himself to me entirely.  
There is no love like his--no embrace so much to be desired as his.

And as I reflect on the powerful love of God in Christ,  
my old enemy lust is shattered and destroyed.

If you struggle with sins which involve your imagination,  
you must find holy pictures  
which can replace the unholy ones you have stored in your memory.



After Paul talks about the rebellion and grumblings in the wilderness in I Cor. 10, he says,

"Now all these things happened to them as examples,  
and they were written for our admonition,  
upon whom the ends of the ages have come.  
Therefore, let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.  
No temptation has seized you except such as is common to man;  
but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted  
beyond what you are able,  
but with the temptation will also make the way of escape,  
that you may be able to bear it."

You must believe that God will provide,  
and seek for that provision.

And there is no substitute for what Moses advises,

"You shall diligently keep the commandments of the Lord your God,  
his testimonies and his statutes which he has commanded you.  
And you shall do what is right and good in the sight of the Lord,  
that it may be well with you,  
and that you may go in and possess the good land  
of which the Lord swore to your fathers,  
to cast out all your enemies from before you,  
as the Lord has spoken."

God has promised that he will destroy your enemies and bring you safely into the Land,  
**Therefore,**

believe his promises and obey his commands.

You know,

if we spent all our time doing what God has given us to do,  
we wouldn't have any time left to get into trouble!

And Thirdly:

### **3) Loving God means teaching your children all that God has done for us (20-25)**

This theme runs through the whole of chapter 6.

in verse 2 it says, "that you may fear the LORD your God,  
you and your son and your son's son, by keeping all his statutes..."

in verses 6-9, it adds,

"You shall teach them diligently to your children..."

and finally in verses 20-25, Moses concludes:

"When your son asks you..."

The fifth commandment says to honor your father and your mother.

This is fairly unique in ancient cultures:  
most ignore mothers.

And so here in chapter 6,

I would suggest that the command to teach your children

applies to both fathers and mothers, but especially to fathers.  
Notice v2--you, and your son, and your grandson--  
implies that Moses is speaking in particular to fathers.  
Still, husband and wife are a team and must work together.

So, when you are teaching the book of Deuteronomy to your children  
(that is the idea of v20 –

catechesis is not only the task of the church,  
but also *parents* should catechize their children),  
and when your children ask you, "so what?"

You are to answer (v21)

“We were Pharaoh’s slaves in Egypt.”

It’s easy for children to not understand the point!

If you grow up in the church, the truth can become very much of a “so what?”

Remember – and teach your children about where we came from!

But “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.”

(The Law also requires sacrifice for sin,

they are not claiming works-righteousness in v25,

but the righteousness that comes through the sacrifice).

Our society has missed the point of this passage.

We expect that someone else will teach our children about God.

We send them to Sunday School and bring them to church,

and think that we have done our job.

But Moses says that our love for God,

which overflows into everything we do,

is especially to overflow into our relationship with our children.

When you sit down in your house--you are to speak of God's commandments;

When you drive down the street, you are to remind them of his blessings;

As you go to bed (everyone would have slept in the same room

in many ancient houses) you are to teach them of his great redemption.

When you get up in the morning, talk about the new life that Christ has given.

Family worship is a good start,  
and I hope that all of you are spending some time as a family in the Word and prayer,  
but that's only the beginning.

But this is to become a part of everyday life.

Do you talk with your kids about what goes on at school?

Yeah, because that's an everyday part of life.

Do you play with your kids, and go to their school events?

Yeah, because that's an everyday part of life.

Do you talk with your kids about Christ?

No?

How dare you?!!

You are telling them that Christ has nothing to do with everyday life.

You are teaching them that God gets one day a week,  
and other gods have the other six.

If you climb into bed and realize that you have not spoken with your wife,  
or your children,

about the great and wonderful gift that is ours in Christ,  
then repent.

If we do not open the Word of God with them,  
if we do not pray with them,

then we have failed to do the most important thing in the world that day.

And kids, think about this too:

God will judge your parents for how well they have taught you the things of God.

AND--if you have not learned of the grace and salvation of God,  
then you will fall away.

So like the son in verse 20,

ask your parents, "what is the meaning of what God has done?"

If you don't have believing parents,

ask your elders – that is why God commands his people to look after widows and orphans  
--and why Paul commands Timothy to take special care of such people.

Why do you read the Bible?

We read the Bible to remember who we are.

Preaching reminds us who we are.

In hearing the stories over and over again we are called upon to see ourselves in the story,  
because if Jesus Christ is the true Israel and we are in Christ, then this is our story.

Fathers and mothers, teach your children.

This is not optional.

This is not something that can be done later.

If you love God, then teach your children.

If you do not teach your children, then **YOU DO NOT LOVE GOD.**

Does that one sting a little?

It stings me – because I have not done as well at this as I should!

But I cannot apologize for saying it so strongly,  
because this is the Word of God!

But I can offer you hope!

If your children belonged to you,  
then you would have to despair,

But your children don't belong to you.

In Jesus Christ,

God has adopted them, with us, as his children.

We are like orphans whom God has taken into his home;

and though we fail to imitate his fatherly care and protection,

he NEVER fails to guide and direct us and our children in his ways.

That is why God made his covenant with us and with our children!

He promises that even though we will fail to teach our children as we should,

he NEVER fails in fulfilling his promises.

So rather than cause us to despair,

we ought to recognize his gracious kindness to us,

and that ought to stimulate us all the more to love and good deeds.

Love for God is displayed in our lives

1) by remembering what he has done for us, and worshiping him alone;

2) by obeying God, trusting in him to accomplish what he has promised

and 3) by teaching your children all that God has done for us.

So let us pray:

Father, forgive us for not loving you with our whole heart, and soul and strength. Forgive us for forgetting you and turning to other gods. Forgive us for disobeying you and not trusting that you will defeat our enemies. And forgive us for not speaking of these things to our children. Our love for you is often so cold that we treat you as an unwelcome visitor in our homes. Your Word too often lies forsaken on our tables; Your Name comes too seldom to our lips. We think fond and tender thoughts of our idols, and leave you in a remote corner of our minds, only to call for you once in a while. Forgive us Father. Have mercy upon us, for the sake of your Son Jesus Christ, forgive all that is past, and grant to us your Holy Spirit that he may inspire our hearts with new love and devotion to you, O Christ. May we truly worship and glorify your Holy Name, together with the Father and Holy Spirit--One God whom we love and adore, both now and forever. Amen.