

Deuteronomy 5:22-6:25 Covenant and Love, part 1

Deuteronomy is a re-statement of the law that God gave to Moses on Mt. Sinai. As the nation of Israel was about to begin the process of conquering the PL, Moses rehearsed the law and explained its meaning.

Moses had just re-stated the 10 Commandments, a very significant summary of the entire OT law. In today's section, Moses states another very significant summary of Israel's faith, a passage often called the Shema, which describes what it means to love the true and living God alone.

This section of the text connects obedience to God's law with love for God. If we love God, we must keep his commands. If we fail to keep his commands, it shows that we don't love God. Or perhaps our love is insincere and shallow.

In our world today, many people claim to love God while at the same time openly violating God's commandments. They like the idea of God's love, but neglect or ignore God's commands. They like to think that God is obligated to love them, but they do not like to think about their obligations to obey God. But we cannot separate love for God from obedience to God. As Jesus said, "If you love me, keep my commandments." If we don't obey God, we don't love him.

And love for God means that we worship a particular, specific God—the true and living God, the one and only God. He's not like the false gods of the heathen. We worship Yahweh alone and no other gods. And because we worship the only true and living God, our lives are different from those who worship false gods.

Moses begins this section by referring to the...

I. Ratification of the covenant (5:22–33)

- A. .22 The Lord spoke these words and wrote them on two tablets of stone. God was the author of the 10 Commandments; these words have authority because they come directly from God—"the Lord spoke these words." .22end God even wrote them down—they were inscribed with the finger of God. They are a permanent expression of his moral will.
- B. .23-25 The people heard the words and were afraid of being destroyed because of hearing God's voice.

Moses is referring here to the events described in Exodus 19-20. The people actually heard God's voice proclaiming these commandments.

This overwhelming experience reveals an awesome, majestic, and fear-inducing God. Twice in Deuteronomy we have the words, “Our God is a consuming fire” (Dt 4:24; 9:3).

- C. .27 The people urged Moses to hear the voice of God and then tell them what God said. The people did not want a direct experience with God; they were worried about being destroyed if they continued to hear the voice of God. They wanted Moses to function as a mediator between them and God. The prospect of hearing God’s voice was overwhelming.

It’s interesting to me that so many people today claim to hear God speak, and yet they do not react like the people did here. For many modern Pentecostals, hearing God’s voice is fairly common and mundane experience. They describe it as an almost casual encounter. But that’s not how it was for the Jews, who were afraid of dying if they continued to hear God’s voice.

If God were to speak to us, we would find it an overwhelming experience; we might fear that we would die.

- D. .28 God approved of this arrangement; Moses would be a mediator between God and the people.
- E. .29 God expresses how earnestly he desired the people to obey his voice so that it might be well with them.

Here we have a brief insight into God’s heart. God wants the best for his people, and that outcome was directly tied to obeying his law.

Fear for God and obedience to his commands begins in the heart—“a heart in them.” Our inner love for God should result in respect and obedience. A problem begins when we focus on external law-keeping instead of the internal heart attitude. We get our hearts right first—love God first—and that results in obedience to God’s law. Everything begins with a right heart attitude towards God.

.29b “that it might be well...” God wants the best for us, and obedience to God’s commandments is in our own best interests. God wanted to bless them, and he would if they would obey.

God would say the same thing today. If we want to enjoy God’s blessing on our lives, we must fear and obey God.

- F. .31 God agrees to talk to Moses who will teach these things to the people.

G. .32-33 Up to this point, most of what Moses had said was review of Israel's history—mostly a narration of previous events. But now he's shifting gears and moving more to exhortation to obey God's commandments. The present generation must obey God and keep the covenant that Israel previously made with God.

.33 Here is the covenant: do as the Lord commands, do not turn aside from them, walk in all his ways, and the results will be that it will be well with you and you will enjoy prolonged days in the land which God is giving to you. If they would obey, God would bless.

Note the language “not turn aside to the right hand or to the left. You shall walk in the ways...” God told them the way to go, and they must not drift away from the right path.

Quote: The laws of Deuteronomy are like a straight and well-marked ‘path’ or road, without any detours. Therefore, it was imperative for Israel to follow the Lord in *all* the way that he had *commanded*.¹

We must get on the right road and stay on it without turning off to the left or right. We must go the right way. If we want to prosper and to prolong our days, the best thing we can do is obey God's commands. If we want God's blessings, we must be obedient. Life works best when we obey God's commands.

And like the OT Jews, we should make a commitment to love, fear, and obey God.

II. The greatest commandment: Love the Lord (6:1–25)

.1 “Now this is the commandment, and these are the statutes and judgments.” Most of the remainder of the book is Moses' comments regarding the law and exhortations to obey it.

Before he actually gets into the laws, he describes what these laws are and how they are to be applied and transmitted to future generations.

A. The intent of the covenant (6:1–3)

1. .1 Moses exhorts the people to observe these commands when they go into the PL.

¹ Edward J. Woods, *Deuteronomy: An Introduction and Commentary*, ed. David G. Firth, vol. 5, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Nottingham, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2011), 131.

2. .2a “that you may fear the Lord your God” –

One writer suggested that the fear of God is the sensation of standing in awe of God and of holding him in utmost reverence and respect.² The word “fear” (יָרָא) refers to piety, obedience, and service inspired by awe and reverence toward God.³

That awe, reverence, and respect results in obedience to his commands. We cannot say that we fear the Lord while at the same time live in stubborn, unrepentant disobedience.

Even Christians sometimes lack a proper reverence for God. Our approach to God is sometimes shallow and half-hearted. We may treat God casually and disrespectfully. We must avoid that attitude. We must approach God with fear and obedience.

3. .3 If you obey the Lord, your days will be prolonged and you will multiply greatly in the land. You’ll enjoy a long life in a land flowing with milk and honey. Obedience results in blessing.

.3end The phrase “milk and honey” is a way of describing the richness of the PL. [Milk and honey] represent the fullness of blessing associated with the fulfillment of God’s promises.⁴

The OT promises prosperity for obedience. We rightly criticize those today who promise health, wealth, and prosperity. But that’s exactly what God promises the Israelites if they would keep their covenant obligations. That was the nature of the covenant that God made with Israel—if they obey God’s commands, God would grant them prosperity, land, and long life.

² Earl S. Kalland, “Deuteronomy,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 & 2 Samuel*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992), 63.

³ Earl S. Kalland, “Deuteronomy,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 & 2 Samuel*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992), 63.

⁴ Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, vol. 4, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 161.

Their wellbeing, wealth, and number of descendants depended on obedience. If they wanted to remain in a “land flowing with milk and honey,” i.e., a fertile and productive land, a land of plenty, they had to keep their end of the bargain. Their prospects for long life, wellbeing, and increased descendants was directly linked to fearing and obeying God. Reverence and obedience were the keys to success as they enter the PL.

Fearing and obeying God is still necessary for us today. The key to a successful Christian life is the same—trust and obey; fear God and keep his commandments.

However, obedience was not based on mere will power or duty. Obedience should be the result of love for God...

B. The greatest command: love the Lord your God (6:4–5)

We now come to one of the most significant statements in the whole Bible. This is the heart of Israel’s faith, what the Jews thought of as the heart of the law. This text expresses the essence of all of God’s person and purposes, stated in sixteen words of Hebrew text.⁵

In fact, faithful Jews would recite this passage twice daily.

This statement is commonly known as...

1. .4 the Shema

- a) The primary command at the beginning of verse 4 is “hear.” It’s the Hebrew word *shema* (שמע) “to hear.”

And to “hear” is to listen and obey. We cannot claim to hear God’s voice if we don’t obey his commands. He’s about to say something very profound, so we’d better listen.

- b) Put literally, the verse says *Yahweh/ our God/ Yahweh/ one*.⁶ The verse does not even contain a verb.

⁵ Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, vol. 4, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 162.

⁶ Edward J. Woods, *Deuteronomy: An Introduction and Commentary*, ed. David G. Firth, vol. 5, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Nottingham, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2011), 134.

The LXX says “The Lord our God is one Lord.”

- c) This is a summary statement of the entire Hebrew faith—Yahweh alone is God. He is the one and only true and living God. He is unique as God; there are no other gods. God is one, not many. God is unique, and we must worship him alone. He is the one and only God.
- d) The Shema is a primary statement regarding the nature of God; this text teaches monotheism. God is one, not many. There is only one God.
- e) That truth is compatible with the doctrine of the Trinity. In fact, the word for “God” here (אֱלֹהִים) is a plural. Even the word “one” (אֶחָד) often implies unity of distinct parts. So this strong statement of God’s oneness does not rule out the Trinity.

2. .5 Love the Lord your God.

- a) The proper response to the fact that Yahweh is the one and only true and living God—“our God”—is love for God.

Quote: In covenant terms, then, love is not so much [an emotion or a sensation, but an] obligation, a legal demand. Thus because of who and what he is in regard to his people whom he elected and redeemed, the Lord rightly demands of them unqualified obedience.⁷

How do we show our love for God? By obeying his commands.

- b) .5 That obedient love ought to be both sincere and total—it encompasses the entire person—heart, soul, and strength.
 - (1) Heart, soul, and strength is your entire self. The whole self should be committed to God; our entire trust and obedience should be directed toward God.

⁷ Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, vol. 4, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 164.

- (2) That's the kind of love for God that we should have—wholehearted, genuine, sincere love for God.

One of the great dangers in religion is insincerity or hypocrisy. It's easy to put on a display of religious devotion externally, while internally there is little or no genuine love for God.

Isa 29:13 ... *these people draw near with their mouths And honor Me with their lips, But have removed their hearts far from Me, And their fear toward Me is taught by the commandment of men,*

Our love for God should be wholehearted and sincere.

Jesus quoted this passage and called it the “first and greatest commandment (Mt 22:38). He quoted it as “heart, soul, mind, and strength” (Mk 12:30).

To the Jewish mind, the Shema was a summary of the 10 Commandments, and the 10 Commandments were a summary of the entire OT law. Jesus said that the whole law and prophets “hang” on these two profound ideas—love God and love your neighbor (Mt 22:40).

Quote: [The Shema] encapsulates all of God's saving intentions and provisions. To love God ... is to place oneself within the orbit of his saving grace because the Shema, the heart and core of the Old Testament law, was designed, as Paul said, “... to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith” (Gal 3:24).⁸

The NT shows us that the only way that we can love God with our heart, mind, and strength is to love the Son of God...

This is probably a good spot for us to stop for today. The Shema is a profound statement that we should take time to consider and respond to.

There is only one true and living God—he is the God of Israel, Yahweh. And we are obligated to love God with our entire selves—heart, soul, and strength.

⁸ Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, vol. 4, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 165.

External obedience comes from internal love for God. “We love him because he first loved us.” Those who love God supremely should have no problem submitting themselves to God’s commands.

Love for God must be the heart and soul of our worship of God and walk with God. How do we show our love for God? Fear God and keep his commandments.