

## Deuteronomy 5:22-6:25 Covenant and Love, part 3

We are working our way through Deuteronomy chapter 6; I think we can finish this chapter today.

In this section of the chapter, Moses exhorts the people to do three main things: remember that God gave them everything they have, avoid idolatry, and explain these things to their children. The emphasis throughout the chapter is passing the faith down to the next generations. Moses is very concerned that the true faith not be lost or corrupted across the generations. Success in the PL depends on retaining the faith and not adopting the ways of the heathen. In order to do that, parents must explain the faith and their traditions to their children.

Today, about 3500 years after Moses wrote these words, these ideas are still applicable; these principles still pertain to us today. We must remember that everything we have comes from God, we must avoid adopting the ways of the heathen, and we must strive to pass along the faith to the next generations.

Thus far, we've seen...

### II. The greatest commandment (6:1–25)

A. The intent of the covenant (6:1–3) – Israel was obligated to obey God's commandments as they entered the PL. They must fear God, keep his commands in order that their days may be prolonged in the land.

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

We focused on the Shema, the profound statement asserting that 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.

C. Propagation of the command (6:6–9)—teach these things to your children, bind them on your hands, heads, houses, and hometowns.

That's all review. Now let's look at the rest of the chapter.

D. Ways to preserve the command (6:10–25)—how do we maintain our love for God?

This section contains a series of commands or warnings.

1. .10-12 When you conquer the PL and settle down there, and begin enjoying all the resources that God had provided for you (vss. 10-11), beware lest you forget God (vs. 12).

The only reason they will occupy all this land and personal property is that God gave it to them. God promised this land to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and now as the Israelites conquer this land, they'll take over "large and beautiful cities which [they] did not build" (vs. 10).

The implication here is that, when Israel conquers the PL, they will not destroy all the towns and houses and property of the Canaanites. The wicked people would be destroyed, but not the buildings and the farms. The Israelites would conquer and move in to the houses and farms. They would take over the land and all the towns and farms that the Canaanites had built.

That's not usually how it works in conquest. Usually, the conquering army destroys everything in its path, and then has to re-build after the destruction. That's not what Israel would do.

2. .12 But note the problem with this—once they conquered the PL and occupied the farms and the homes, they might forget the Lord.

**Quote:** Israel's new-found [wealth] and spirit of self-sufficiency and pride would quickly lead to forgetfulness about what Yahweh had rescued them from (*the land of slavery*), and for what reason. This in turn would dull their sense of covenant understanding and obligation before God in loving him exclusively and keeping his commandments.<sup>1</sup>

I.e., once they conquered the land and started enjoying life, they might forget God.

The warning here is necessary because we are prone to take our blessings for granted. We tend to forget how others have helped us or helped to solve our problems. We are prone to credit ourselves for the things we have—we earned them, we were smart enough to gain them ourselves. We tend to forget our promises and commitments to God.

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<sup>1</sup> Edward J. Woods, *Deuteronomy: An Introduction and Commentary*, ed. David G. Firth, vol. 5, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Nottingham, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2011), 138.

It's easy to make promises and commitments to God, and then fail to fulfill our commitments and promises. It's easy to take our blessings for granted. We should be committed to God because of all the blessings he gives to us.

We can be guilty of forgetting God as a nation. I think America has done what Moses is warning the Israelites not to do. America was built and sustained on a Christian foundation. The reason that America became great was Christian principles—freedom, the rule of law, protect the innocent, protect property rights, protect human rights (image of God). But what happens when the people no longer believe those foundational truths? Chaos.

3. .13 Instead of *forgetting* God, they must *fear* the Lord, serve him, take oaths in his name.

In taking an oath, you are calling God as witness that you will do something. You are asking God to curse you if you fail to keep a promise. So to swear/take an oath in his name is to acknowledge God in your daily life. And it's a way of preventing fraud and guaranteeing honesty and integrity.

In the NT, Jesus tells us that we should not need to swear by God's name to verify the truth of what we are saying (Mt 5:34; cf. James 5:12). We should be so trustworthy that people would believe the promises that we make without having to swear.

4. .14-15 Avoid idolatry. Strictly follow the first two of the 10 Commandments—no other gods, and don't use idols. Do not serve idols like the other nations do. God is jealous and will destroy you from the face of the earth if you turn away from him.

This warning shows that the promise/covenant was conditional. God would prosper them if they obey and stay away from idols. If they are unfaithful, God will bring judgment upon them. That's part of the covenant as well—cf. chapter 28.

.15 the original word order is “For a jealous God is the Lord your God...” The emphasis is on the word “jealous.”

God's jealousy is his desire to protect and keep what belongs to him. He alone deserves worship. If they forget God and sink into idolatry, they are giving what rightfully belongs to God to false gods. And that would stir up God's jealousy, resulting in judgment. God would take this land away from them—"destroy you from the face of the earth" (.15end).

In the NT, Jesus warns us to give unto Caesar what belongs to him, and to give to God what belongs to him. God deserves worship and obedience. We are provoking God to jealousy when we fail to give God what he deserves. When we give our greatest love and service to something else, we are provoking God to jealousy.

What is the object of your highest concern? If God is not the object of your highest love and commitment, then you are an idolater.

This passage reminds me of the "goodness and severity of God" (Rom 11:22). That's what we find here—if the people obey and avoid idolatry, they'll enjoy the goodness of God. If the people disobey and fall into idolatry, God will destroy them.

This principle of blessing and chastisement still pertains today. Cf. Gal 6:7-8

5. .16 Do not tempt the Lord as you did at Massah.

The word "tempt" could be translated as "test." To tempt/test God is to make demands of him that violate his nature or character. Jesus said the same thing when Satan tempted him – "thou shalt not tempt/test the Lord thy God" (Mt 4:7; Lk 4:12). To test God is to make unrealistic demands of him; to put him to the test.

.16end What happened at Massah? Exodus 17:1-7 relates that experience. The Israelites lacked water and complained to Moses. God commanded Moses to strike the rock, and water came out of it. The word *Massah* means "testing."

Exodus 17:7 *So he called the name of the place Massah and Meribah, because of the contention of the children of Israel, and because they tempted the LORD, saying, "Is the LORD among us or not?"*

The sin involved here was doubting whether God could provide for them in the wilderness. Instead of trusting that God could provide for them in the desert, they doubted God.

After all the signs and wonders they had seen, they still doubted whether God was with them. As they begin the conquest of the PL, they must not doubt God or test him by demanding miraculous interventions to save them.

Some Christians violate this principle regularly; they make demands of God. They feel that they have the right to command God. The Bible tells us to make our *requests* of God, but we have no right to *demand* that God do anything for us. And our attitude should always be “thy will be done.” We submit to him; he does not submit to us.

We must walk by faith, and that faith leads us to believe that God is with us as well. Even in the midst of trials and tribulations, even if we don’t sense the presence of God, we should not doubt that God is with us. “I will never leave thee nor forsake thee.” “I am with you always.”

6. .17-19 Diligently keep the commands, testimonies, and statutes. Do what is right and good in God’s sight. If you do, it will be well with you and you’ll possess the land. All the enemies will be cast out.

Again we see the conditional nature of this agreement. God desire is to bless his people—“that it may be well with you...” Obedience will lead to blessing; failure would result in judgment. Success for Israel hinged on obedience to God’s commands.

.18 is the key to success—“do what is right and good in the sight of the Lord.” We should have that same commitment today. If we want God’s blessings, we must obey God’s commands.

7. .20-25 Moses finishes the chapter with another exhortation to pass on these values to your descendants.

.20 Moses foresees a time when the young people will ask what all of this law means. The parents should tell the children that God gave us these laws and commanded us to observe them. Teach them that obedience is for our good.

.23 “He brought us out ... that he might bring us in...”

This explanation gives the history of the nation and then asserts that God gave these commands to the Jews for their own good. And if they keep these commands, it will be for our own benefit. If we fear and obey God, we will experience a good and long life (.24end). Obedience to God’s law is for our own benefit.

It’s important that we explain these things to our children—that we give them good reasons to believe and to adopt our faith. Many children do not accept the faith of their parents because they do not see the need for it, they do not understand it, they don’t see the benefits of it. They never accepted it for themselves.

As parents, we should instruct our children carefully and intentionally so they understand the faith—what it is and why we believe it. They should know how we came to faith and why it’s so important to us. We should demonstrate that it’s important.

Some children reject the faith of their parents because their parents are hypocrites. They are not living a genuine, consistent Christian lifestyle at home. They are one way at church but entirely different at home. If you want your kids to reject the faith, then be a hypocrite.

The danger is that succeeding generations lose the history and meaning of the faith. They don’t see how it matters to them; they don’t understand it, and they don’t adopt it. That would be a very great shame. We want to do everything we can to avoid that outcome.

.24 Notice that to fear the Lord is to obey his commands. Only when we respect God and keep his commands can we count on the blessings that he promises us.

.25 “It will be righteousness for us, if we are careful to observe all these commandments...” Is he saying here that keeping the law is the means of salvation? Are we made righteous by keeping God’s commands? No, the whole context pertains to Israel’s covenant with God. If they fear God and keep his commandments, they will have a right relationship with God through the covenant. Righteous living maintains their side of the covenant. God will bless them and provide for them if they fear God and keep his commandments.

In fact, the word “righteousness” is the same one found in Gen 15:6—*Abraham believed the Lord, and it was counted to him as righteousness*. So the principle is that salvation is by faith, not by keeping laws. They were saved by faith in the OT. We keep God’s law because we are saved, not in order to become saved.

**Quote:** True covenant keeping in the final analysis is a matter of faith, not merely of works and ritual.<sup>2</sup>

As we finish up chapter six, what are the proper responses to the truth of the Shema (6:4-6)—this profound truth that the Lord our God is one Lord? What is the result of loving God with our heart, soul, and strength? Everything else flows from this.

1. We have no other gods; we worship the true and living God alone. We don’t bow down to idols. We don’t worship the true God like pagans worship their false gods.
2. We teach these truths to our children. We talk about them around the house, and we explain to them why we believe these things.
3. We remember what God has done for us. We affirm that God has given us all things to enjoy; God is the source of what we have.
4. We remind ourselves about these truths regularly. We live in light of these truths; we keep them in front of us; we focus on them.
5. We believe/trust that God will provide for us. We don’t test God by demanding that he does what we want. We believe God is with us.
6. We diligently keep God’s commandments and explain them to our children.

That’s what we would do if we truly loved God.

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<sup>2</sup> Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, vol. 4, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 175.