

## Deuteronomy 5:22-6:25 Covenant and Love, part 2

We viewed some old slides over Thanksgiving. Seeing those pictures again reminded me that my grandparents and parents and extended family members were faithful, committed Christians. I'm very thankful for that tradition.

I had a short chat with one of my nephews regarding whether/where he was attending church. He said that he was not attending anywhere. I was very disappointed in hearing that. I encouraged him to check out a new church plant that I'd heard about in his town.

My nephew is an example of the decline we see in Christian families—a previous generation is faithful; the next not as much; the next drops off even further. If my nephew has kids, it seems likely that he would raise his kids with little if any Christian influence. That would be a real shame.

In Deuteronomy chapter 6, Moses fervently instructs the nation of Israel to retain their commitment to God over the generations. One of the keys to success in conquering the PL is faithfulness to God across generations. The people must be very careful to pass the faith down to their descendants.

Like the ancient Israelites, we must be very careful and intentional about passing the faith down to our descendants.

Last time we made our way through the end of chapter 5 and into the beginning of chapter 6.

Review:

### II. The greatest commandment: Love the Lord (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.

Moses next gives six commands or imperatives (perfects with imperative force) in verses 6-9. If you love the Lord your God, here's what you ought to do:

C. Propagation of the command (6:6–9)

1. .6 You must keep God’s word in your heart. It’s not enough to merely know these commands; we must accept them personally and emotionally. We think about these things and affirm them for ourselves.

Genuine faith is not mere external, formal rituals and religious practices. God demands a whole-hearted faith, a genuine love for God that comes from the heart. It must be a personal faith, one that you accept and adopt internally. Sadly, for many people, religion amounts to little more than a set of rituals and external rules. But true faith comes from the heart.

After you understand and accept these things personally, ...

2. .7 You must teach God’s word diligently to your children. It’s not enough to have them for yourself (.6); you must teach them to your descendants (.7). Passing down a love for God to the next generation is a very big responsibility.

God’s intent is that the faith extends to future generations. In order to do that, a regular routine of instruction in the household was necessary.

.7a The words “teach them diligently” comes from a single Hebrew word (לְיָדַע), and that word literally means “to sharpen.” You want your kids to be “sharp” about these things.

**Quote:** The image is that of the engraver ... who takes hammer and chisel in hand and with painstaking care etches a text into the face of a solid slab of granite. The sheer labor of such a task is daunting indeed, but once done the message is there to stay. Thus it is that the generations of Israelites to come must receive and transmit the words of the Lord’s everlasting covenant revelation [to the succeeding generations].<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, vol. 4, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 167.

Many families today want their children to be “sharp” about all sorts of things—education, sports, the arts, or business. They’ll spend enormous resources on helping their children develop their talents and interests. That’s all fine and good, but Christian parents ought to be interested in the spiritual sharpness of their children. It’s wonderful if your child is good at sports or music. But is your child sharp when it comes to the things of God? How many resources are you devoting to sharpen the child spiritually? In comparison with other interests, how much time and effort are you devoting to helping your child be sharp spiritually?

.7b How do you “sharpen” your children? How do you “teach them diligently”? It all starts in the home.

You instruct your children

- a) when you sit in your house
- b) when you walk by the way
- c) when you lie down
- d) when you rise up

In other words, God’s commands must be a normal part of our family life. The parents talk about these things, and the children learn them and accept them. The word of God should permeate our homes. We should be repeating these things and reminding our children about them regularly. We must be intentional about *chiseling* these truths into the minds and hearts of our children.

**Quote:** The moral and biblical education of the children [is] accomplished best ... when the parents ... [make] God and His Word the natural topic of a conversation which might occur anywhere and anytime during the day (v. 7).<sup>2</sup> So important is covenant truth that it must be at the very center of all one’s labor and life.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Jack S. Deere, “Deuteronomy,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 274–275.

<sup>3</sup> Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, vol. 4, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 167.

Could you say this about your home—that God’s commands form the very center of your family life? Do you talk about the things of God at home? Are your children learning these things and adopting them personally? Are they sharp in the things of God? Or are they sharper in the things of the world—TV, latest trends, movies, popular music, video games, etc. – that’s what they really know.

**Illus.:** Years ago I took a few teenagers to a youth activity in Watertown. The whole trip they talked about video games—they were very sharp about that. Sadly, none of the guys in the car that day were sharp about the things of God. None of them is currently following the Lord at all.

Also, remember that the NT obligates *fathers* to bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Eph 6:4). Fathers are responsible for setting the spiritual atmosphere of the home. If the father doesn’t do it, then the mother has to. Someone must attend to the spiritual discipleship of the children. Someone must make the effort to sharpen up the kids regarding the things of God.

One of the best ways to teach biblical truth to your children is through family devotions.

Bring them to church. Send them to camp. Bring them to youth activities.

It does not matter much *how* you do it; just make sure you do it.

Review—notice the progression

.4 There is only one true and living God—Yahweh.

.5 Love the Lord your God with heart, soul, and strength.

.6 Keep these words in your hearts—i.e., the 10 Commandments

.7 Teach these things to your children.

3. .8-9 bind them as a sign

a) “as a sign” – A sign point to something else; it tells you something.

(1) It would be a sign to *self*. The sign reminds you about your obligations.

(2) It would be a sign to *others*. Doing this would identify one as a member of the covenant community. Commitment to the Word of God would distinguish the Jews from all the other nations.

b) Bind this sign to your *hand*.

Something tied to one's hand would be a reminder, like tying a string on your finger or putting a rubber band on your wrist to help you remember something. It's hard to ignore something tied on your hand. Some people write notes on their hand; same idea.

c) .8b Bind them to your *head*.

(1) They shall be as frontlets between your eyes.

(2) “frontlets” (טֹפְתָה) is from a root word meaning “to go around or to bind.” The idea is that something is bound or set right in front of your eyes.

(3) It's hard to ignore something sitting right in front of your eyes. That's the whole point—focus on these things, don't forget them, keep them before your eyes, remember them.

**Illus.:** Sometimes you see horses with blinkers or blinders mounted on their halter. They keep the horse's focus on the road and avoids distractions.

d) .9 Bind them to your *home*.

The doorposts would be at the entry to your *home*. Every time you entered or exited your home, you would pass by your doorposts.

e) .9b Bind them to your *hometown*. “gates”

The gates would be at the entrance of the town or city. The gate of the city was where people conducted business and where the law courts were held.

**App:** God wants his word to be on our *hands*, our *heads*, our *homes* and our *hometown*. Like the ancient Jews, we must demonstrate our obedience to God's law both in private and in public.

Our society is telling us to keep our faith private; public expressions of faith are inappropriate. “Keep your beliefs to yourself.” But God tells us to live out our faith both in private and in public. Jesus tells us that we must let our light shine in our dark world. We must not be ashamed of the Gospel (Rom 1:16). We want to spread Christian influence to our family and to our society.

In America, we still have freedom of religion, and that means that we have the right to exercise our faith both privately and publicly. We must fight against any restrictions in public displays of the Christian faith.

Was Moses speaking literally here? Did he want the people to strap passages of the Bible on to their hands and heads? Were they supposed to write Scripture on their doorposts and city gates? That’s exactly what many of the Jews did. They would strap little boxes containing Scriptures on their hands and heads—these are called phylacteries. Jesus refers to them in the NT.

Phylacteries were little boxes or small metal cylinders with straps to bind them on the arm or forehead. These would often contain parchment rolls inscribed with passages from Exodus and Deuteronomy—especially the Shema.<sup>4</sup> Small metal boxes attached to door posts are called *mezuzah* (lit. “doorpost”).

Regarding whether Moses intended for his readers to take this instruction literally, we find that he uses similar language in Exod 13:9-16. In that passage, Moses uses two synonymous words: frontlets and memorials (זְכָרוֹן) – a reminder or remembrance. The Jews kept God in front of their minds through observing the Passover and by dedicating the firstborn to the Lord. These practices were reminders/symbols of what God had done in the past.

In fact, the Jews wore their phylacteries only on special occasions, not all the time. Jews still do this, but only on special occasions.

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<sup>4</sup> 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), 66.

And also note vs. 6—“in your heart,” and vs. 8 “as a sign.” That language seems to suggest that he was speaking metaphorically. You bind the word of God to yourself by keeping them in your heart and doing them at home and in public. My understanding is that Moses is *not* speaking literally here. He’s using figurative language to exhort the people to keep the commands of God in front of us all the time, to remember them and to obey them.

These words of God should be on their hands, their heads, their homes and their home towns in the sense that they should focus on them in every area of life.

The point of this language is that we must have God’s word before us all the time and everywhere—both at home and in public. These things should be at hand and in front of us all the time so that we are careful to obey God’s commands everywhere we go.

Sadly, even though the Jews wore their phylacteries on their bodies, they often did not have the word in their hearts. They thought it was enough to have the Scripture tied to them externally. God would be pleased by doing this ritual. But Jesus criticized the Pharisees for making broad their phylacteries merely to be seen of men (Mt 23:5). God’s words were strapped on their bodies, but they were not in their hearts. It’s easy to follow an external tradition without being sincere.

That’s still true today. We can easily have all the external trappings of Christianity, but still ignore God’s word and not have it in our hearts. We can have a show of religion without having a true heart for God. We can bring our family to church and never open the Bible at home.

Obedience to God’s word is a sign. It ought to be obvious both at home and out in public that we are members of God’s covenant community—the body of Christ, the church. God’s word should be before our eyes and in our hearts all the time and everywhere we go. That will make a difference in the way we live. It should not be hard for anyone to identify us as followers of Jesus. If the word is in our hearts, it will be like a “sign,” pointing others to Christ.

Further, I think it’s a good idea to have reminders of God’s word around our home so that we think about God and his word regularly. E.g., pictures hung around the house—e.g., “As for me and my house...” We want to keep God’s commandments “front of mind.” We need reminders of God’s commands.

If you want to prevent a decline in faith in your family, you must love God with your heart, soul, and strength, and keep God's word before you, as if it were written on your hands, head, home, and hometown. If we fail to do that, we should not be surprised when members of our family no longer have any interest in the things of God. Succeeding generations will become dull instead of being sharp. Because the word of God is not in their hearts, they'll not have a love for God. That would be a great tragedy.