



EXPLORE THE BIBLE®

Numbers, Deuteronomy Sermon Series

Supports Session 9: Love

Sermon Title: “The Most Important Commandment: Our Joyful Obligation” (Deuteronomy 6:4-9)

Connection to Session 9

God is a God of love and provision. He lovingly delivered His people out of Egypt and promised to provide them a land overflowing with blessings. And God, in His love, provided His people a law for their good. He promised that their obedience to His law would lead to their blessing and flourishing in the land of milk and honey. The God of love told His people their obedience simply entailed that they love Him with their minds, hearts, and wills.

Introduction/Opening

The love of God can be a controversial doctrine, in particular when God’s love compels Him to do what is best for his beloved creatures. God knows what is best for those creatures whom He loves. So, wayward creatures that we are, God commands us to love Him first and most. This commandment is for our good because God is the best and most worthy of all loves. This commandment, though, has turned many away from Christianity. For example, this admonition caused one well-known celebrity to leave the Southern Baptist churches of their youth. In an interview some years ago, speaking about why they no longer practiced the Baptist Christianity in which they were raised, this individual pointed to commandments like this one as the reason for their exodus. They stated that this commandment is not good. But, instead, seems “all about ego.”¹ This commandment compels us to ask if it is egotistical for God to command us to love Him and to state that this commandment is the most important of all His commandments.

Outline

1. There is one God. His name is the LORD (v. 4).

a) Though there were many gods in the ancient Near East (Moloch, Ra, Baal, and Ashtaroht), the true God, who defeated Egypt’s gods, informed His people that He alone is God. No other god compares to Him or is like Him. They were simply demons hell-bent on harming their worshipers by keeping them from the true God (1 Cor. 10:20). There are not many gods. Nor are there a few gods. There is one God—the God of the Hebrews.

b) This God revealed himself as the “I AM WHO I AM.” This was the God of Israel’s ancestors, to be remembered as the “I AM” for time immemorial “in every generation” (Ex. 3:14-15). Israel was to remember that their God is self-existent, independent of all gods and men. He always is and will always be for them. As Moses reminded his audience, it was “the LORD [who] brought them us of Egypt with a strong hand” (Deut. 6:21). It was the LORD who gave

¹ <https://www.dennyburk.com/answering-questions-raised-by-brad-pitt-about-the-faith/>

them “the land that he swore to [their] ancestors” (6:23). Just as it was the LORD who gave Israel His law so they might “fear the LORD [their] God for [their] prosperity always and for [their] preservation” (6:24). I AM loved His people. He did good to them. And He gave Israel His law as the embodiment of His love and goodness.

2. This God, the LORD, commands His people to love Him (v. 5).

a) In the previous chapter, Moses reminded his audience of the Ten Commandments God gave Israel in the desert. These commandments were the “shorthand” of Israel’s side of the covenant. In order to receive the covenant’s blessings, Moses commanded Israel to “be careful to do as the LORD your God has commanded,” do not “turn aside to the right or left,” and “follow the whole instruction.” They were to obey so they “may live, prosper, and have a long life in the land” into which they were entering (Deut. 5:32-33; cf. 6:1-3).

b) Moses then provided Israel with a shorter “shorthand” of the entire law with the command of Deuteronomy 6:5, “Love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.” Jesus underscored the importance and summative nature of this commandment. In response to the question “Teacher, which command in the law is the greatest?” He replied that this command “is the greatest and most important.” And, in conjunction with the command to “love your neighbor as yourself,” Jesus asserted that “all the Law and the Prophets depend on these two commands” (Matt. 22:36-40). There is, therefore, not a more important command for God’s people to obey. All of Israel’s obedience and covenant blessings were summarized in their fidelity to this command. This command has four components.

1) Israel was to love the Lord their God (Deut. 6:5). They were not to love other gods or lords. The Lord was to be their sole and supreme love. The God who redeemed them from Egypt, who revealed Himself to their fathers, who gave them His law and promised to bless them, He was to be Israel’s undivided love.

What is love? Love is more than a feeling, but it is not less than one. Love is an act of one’s entire being in affection-filled commitment to someone else. Love delights in the object of its love for its own sake—loving the beloved is love’s highest joy. This is love’s truest mark.

2) Israel was to love their God with all their heart. Their love for God was not to be cold or disinterested. Israelites were not to obey God for duty’s sake. The heart of each Israelite was to be warm toward their God for His goodness, grace, and loveliness. They were to “serve the LORD with gladness,” happily “keep his decrees,” and “seek him with all their heart” (Ps. 100:2; 119:1-2). God was to be Israel’s “greatest joy” (43:4). As the psalmists say, God’s people were to be as deer panting after the Lord from thirsty hearts. For He, far above anything on earth or in heaven, was the only object of desire that would never fail to satisfy a desirous heart (42:1-2; 73:25-26). God’s people were to “delight [themselves] in the LORD” (37:4). They were to love God for God’s sake.

3) Israel was also to love God with all their soul. In other words, Israel was to love God with their rational, spiritual being—their mind. They were to fill their minds up with thoughts about God, His lovely person and wonderful works. Israel was to meditate day and night upon the Lord’s law—the reflection of His holy character (Ps. 1:2). The eye of each Israelite’s mind was to be caught up in visions of heavenly rapture bursting forth with divine sights. For the Lord’s beauty was the blessed, peculiar portion of each Jewish soul. Meditating upon the Lord was to make Israel uniquely happy in the ancient world (Ps. 16:5; Lam. 3:24).

4) Lastly, Israel was to love God with all their strength. God wanted His people to love Him with their wills. They were to do what God required them to do. And not merely do it,

but do it with all their strength. The will of each Israelite was to be vigorous in its obedience. Weak wills were not what the Lord sought. Moses's metaphors in Deuteronomy 6 make this point clear: God's people were to follow the commandments, do them, keep them, listen to them, hide them in their heart, carefully observe them, and do what is right and good. Moses's summative statement at the end of the chapter makes this clear: righteousness would be Israel's if they were "careful to follow every one of these commands, before the LORD [their] God, as he has commanded" (Deut. 6:25). God's people would evidence their love for God by their glad obedience to His commands.

Conclusion

Moses himself stated what God's people are to do in view of His command to love God first and most. First, we are to allow this Word to make its home in our hearts: "these words that I am giving you today are to be in your heart" (Deut. 6:6). This Word is to etch itself permanently onto our heart's walls, so that we might think regularly about our need to love God and how this love ought to inform everything we do. Second, this commandment is to be a key point of instruction to our children—physical and spiritual. We are to "repeat [it] to our children," and talk about our obligation to love God throughout our days and throughout our lives, inside and outside the church or home (6:7). We need to instruct them such that they know their obligation to love God is the most important thing they can do. And, most wonderfully of all, teach them that obeying this command will make them truly happy. Lastly, Moses instructs us, very practically, to construct tangible, physical reminders of this command. Some may desire to put such signs on their hands, foreheads, doorposts, and gates as the Israelites did. Each one of us, however, need not do so. But we each are obliged to find ways, uniquely germane and helpful to us individually, to keep this command at the forefront of our minds and hearts.

Dr. Cameron Schweitzer serves at Gateway Seminary as the Director of the San Francisco Campus and Associate Professor of Historical Theology. He is an ordained Southern Baptist minister, and frequently speaks in churches and conferences in his home state and around the country. Dr. Schweitzer lives with his wife, Sandra, and two small children in Fremont, California.

All Scripture quotations are taken from the Christian Standard Bible, Copyright 2017 by Holman Bible Publishers.