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“Diligent Instruction in the Home”

Deuteronomy 6:4-9

Series: *The Church, The Home, & The School*

Introduction: On this day when we celebrate and rejoice in our Mother’s, we will turn our attention to one of the most well-known texts relating to parenting in all of scripture – Deuteronomy 6 – please join me there – Deuteronomy 6.

Ken Ham tells the story of a group of people in Australia who intentionally removed themselves from mainstream society and the modern world and disappeared into the jungles of northern Australia. Here is how he describes them, “Seeking a liberated and simple existence, free from the pressures and constraints of the world, they left behind their past identity and heritage, shedding their inhibitions (and most of their clothes!). They were known as the ‘hippies,’ and their offspring were not familiar with modern medicines or technology. They had little or no respect for society’s laws, and many of their children received no formal education. Concepts like ‘god’ and ‘truth’ were not considered important enough to teach. Consequentially, and tragically, they basically degenerated into a non-God-fearing and a non-technological culture in one generation. In less than two decades, they produced a new generation, by and large ignorant of their former heritage and culture – in a sense, we could say it was a ‘primitive culture.’”¹

When the discoverers from civilized nations first landed upon the shores of North America they came face to face with the anti-God spiritistic culture of the American Indian. Have you ever considered the fact that it only takes one generation to produce an animistic and spiritistic based culture like that of the native peoples of North and South America? Do you realize that each of these people groups have ancestors who knew the one True God and His Word of truth? At some point in their past their ancestors made a choice to abandon the truth and worship and serve another god. Their unfaithfulness produced generation after generation of those who did not know God!

That is what Moses is concerned about as he preaches the sermon which makes up the book of Deuteronomy. He longs for and instructs the people of Israel in being faithful to God as they prepare to enter into the Promised Land. He is concerned that the windfall of prosperity and blessing they are about to receive will lure them away from God. And so, in chapter 6, part of his prescription to them includes the instruction of the next generation. If they are to remain faithful as a people then what happens in the hearts of the next generation matters. And so, he calls them to hear and to heed his words in verses 4-9. Let’s start reading in Deuteronomy 6:4.

¹ Ken Ham, *Raising Godly Children in an Ungodly World*, pg. 73-74.

The overarching command of this text is to “hear”. This is the same header command which precedes the giving of the 10 commandments in chapter 5. Moses longs for the Israelite people to hear these words in such a way that they let them enter into their heart and transform their life and direct their steps. What follows from this one command in verse 4 will essentially be another 4 commands in verses 5-9. But these 4 commands are rooted in the core theological truth presented in verse 4. This is known as the Shema of the Jewish people. Shema is simply the Hebrew word for “hear”, and the Jewish people have become rigidly ritualistic about the repetitive saying of this doctrinal truth in verse 4. So much so, that for many of them this verse has lost true meaning.

This core truth of verse 4 is – “The Lord our God, the Lord is one.” It can be legitimately translated with a few slight variations to the phrase, but this well represents the ideas of the Hebrew – The Lord our God, the Lord is one. It is meant to point to the exclusivity and uniqueness of God. There is none other like Him – He alone is God. The covenant making and covenant keeping Lord of Israel is indeed God over all things. And this Lord is one. This Hebrew word for “one” is used in Genesis 2:24 to describe the husband leaving father and mother and being joined to his wife and the two shall become “one” flesh. So, like in a marriage, so in God – there is an unbreakable unity and oneness. There is singularity – there is but one God – and there is complete unity – there is oneness. This is especially true and pertinent as we understand more about the Trinity of God – One God in three persons – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. All three persons are fully God with the same nature and essence, but they are varying in their roles within the Godhead. They are not three gods, but they are uniquely One God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This completely united and unified God is the Lord who has made himself so clearly known to the children of Israel through his many signs and wonders which He has done to redeem them from Egypt. Moses is telling them in verse 4 that this Lord who miraculously saved them is alone the God of the universe. The gods of the pagan peoples they were about to overthrow and destroy in the Promised Land were not true gods at all. There was but one of those, and He is the Lord. Notice also that God is their Lord. This is a personal doctrine of truth about God. This Lord whom they have seen and known so clearly is also their God. The commands which come then in verses 5-9 flow out of this truth about God. Because He is God and because He is One, then they must love him and love his word and teach his word and bind His word to their life.

All of this together is the God-ordained recipe for faithfulness in His people. It is all rooted in and founded upon a right view of God. His singular uniqueness and His complete Godness. There is no other god, and He is completely and absolutely God. If we know this and believe this, then our lives will be completely dominated by this reality. This right knowledge of God precedes and produces a right love for God and a right obedience to God. The gateway to growing in faithfulness is to grow in knowledge of God – not just factual knowledge of trivia about God, but personal knowledge which increasingly understands God to be God. From this fertile soil grows the following four commands – love Him, love His Word, Teach His Word, and Bind His Word to your life. So, let’s consider the command in verse 5. If the Lord our God, the Lord is one, then love Him.

- I. **If “The Lord our God, the LORD is one” then Love Him (vs. 5)**
- a. This love for God is commanded and described in verse 5. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. The pronouns in verse 4 were plural, but now in verse 5 they change to singular. This means that this love for God which is being commanded is a love which is personal
 - b. *Personally*
 - i. We must love God personally. The truth of verse 4 must come upon the individual within the believing community of God’s people. Their corporate faithfulness to God depends upon the personal faithfulness of the individuals. So, you must love the Lord your God.
 - c. *Exclusively*
 - i. Not only is this love for Him a personal love, but it is also an exclusive love. Love God exclusively. This flows out of the singularity and uniqueness of God described in verse 4. If the Lord is Our God, then our love must be for Him alone. This love being commanded here is a love of covenant commitment. It is not primarily an emotional love – though it will not be absent of emotion – but it is a covenantal commitment kind of love. Jehovah God entered into a binding agreement with the people of Israel, and they ratified that covenant commitment at the foot of Mt. Sinai. They said – we want to be your people and we want you to be our God. Therefore – there is no other loyalties to be upheld in their hearts. Their committed connection to the God of Heaven is their first and all-consuming love.
 - d. *Completely*
 - i. It is also to be a complete love. A full-orbed love which encompasses the heart, the soul, and the might. Everything about you is to be loyally committed to God because He is uniquely God. This is the command that Jesus repeats when He is asked what the greatest command of the Law is. All of the Law and the Prophets are summed up in this command – to love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength. In other words – everything you are and have – the very core of you – the real and complete and whole you is to be committed to the Lord because the Lord our God, the Lord is one.
- II. **If “The LORD our God, the LORD is one” then Love His Word (vs. 6)**
- a. This carries into the next command found in verse 6. If the Lord our God, the Lord is one, then not only are we to love Him, but we also must love His Word. And so Moses says, And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. The children of Israel knew the voice of God. They heard him speak when they all gathered around the mountain – Moses rehearses this for them in chapter 5 – look at verse 22. *Read 5:22-27.*
 - b. Having actually heard the voice of the Lord, they were so terrified that they asked Moses to go and hear and then tell them what God had said. It is this same fearful

awe and reverence for God that he is calling them to in verse 6. These commands, these words are words from the living and true and only God. Therefore, it only makes sense that you would take these words and seek them with your whole heart, and cling to them like your most valued possession. Like the psalmist in Psalm 40:8 we should be delighted to do the will of God which is made known to us through the Word of God because it is from God!

III. If “The LORD our God, the LORD is one” then Teach His Word (vs. 7)

a. Not only should we love that word ourselves and cling to it with all of our heart, but we also should then teach His Word. So, if the Lord our God, the Lord is one, then we must teach His Word. If we love God with all our heart, soul, and strength, we will not be able to keep ourselves from talking to others about God and His Word. Verse 7 describes a diligent and constant teaching within the context of the home. If the people of God are going to be faithful to God then their homes must be led by dads and moms who are wholly devoted to the Lord their God. The faithfulness of God’s people has as a key component the home. There are other contributing factors, but if dads and moms do not love the Lord their God with all their heart, soul, and strength, and if they don’t put these words of God on their heart, then they will not teach these words diligently and constantly to their children, and then the people of God will not be faithful to God within a generation or two. This is simply the design of our Lord. The home is the ideal context for the next generation to learn and grow in their understanding of God as they watch their parents love God in the context of everyday life. The child gets to see if this is the real deal, or just something that is important when certain people are around. They get to observe how much the Word of God actually matters by seeing when it comes out of the mouth of their parents and when it is totally ignored. The context of life in the home does not allow us to hide. Children know what really matters to us – what we really love. This means that the greatest force of influence upon a child’s life is his or her dad and mom. If children are to love the Lord their God, and if they are to love His word, then the greatest hope they have is their dad and mom living out that love before them, and calling them to that love by diligently and constantly teaching them His Word.

b. *Diligently*

i. The diligent teaching of the Word of God in the home carries the idea of repetitive sharpening. Like when one would sharpen a sword. It would require the diligent and repetitive striking of the sword against the sharpening stone. Coming from many different angles to get just the right edge, one blow after another would eventually sharpen the sword into a useful weapon. So, a child's heart needs the constant repetition of rightly spoken words about God's Word to sharpen it with the truth. Everything relates to God, comes from God, is sustained through and by God, and is ultimately for God - therefore everything provides a talking point to reveal God and point to His glory and truth! For a child to think this way he must have a parent who lives and talks this way. Dads and moms will not

instruct their children in truth of God, unless they themselves are living in whole-hearted love for God and His word. Their instruction will only be diligent if their love for God is diligent. If the fire of love for God is reduced to slowly dying embers in a forgotten fireplace, then their children will most certainly not be warmed by its heat.

c. *Constantly*

i. This diligent instruction is to be constant instruction as well. So parents who love the Lord their God and who love His Word will be parents who speak of that Word at every opportunity they get. When they sit in their house and when they are walking on their way, when they lie down for bed and when they rise in the morning and face a new day, and everything in between these things. This is kind of like the instruction in 1 Thessalonians 5:17 – Pray without ceasing! The central point is that it is always a good time to pray. There is never a moment when prayer is a bad option. So too, it is always a good time for parents to be pointing their children to the Word of God so as to show them the God of the Word. This instruction is not about simple rote memory of facts which fill the mind but don't change the heart. God himself addresses this in Jeremiah 29.

1. Then the Lord said, "Because this people draw near with their words And honor Me with their lip service, But they remove their hearts far from Me, And their reverence for Me consists of tradition learned *by rote*, (Isa. 29:13 NAS)

ii. The so-called prophets of the people had nothing more to say than what they knew of the rote tradition passed down to them from previous generations, and this was not pleasing to God. Faithfulness to God is far greater than repeating facts about God and His Word. And this is the danger of instruction in the home by parents who come to Deuteronomy 6 looking for a formula for parenting. We just want a list to guide us and direct us, and so we read that we are to be diligently and constantly instructing our children and we forget that it is preceded by the commands to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, and mind and to love His Word ourselves. The most effective parent in shaping children who know and love God is not the parent who knows the most and who is the most diligent in teaching. No, the most effective parent is the one who is loving the Lord their God and loving His Word, who can't help but have this fullness of whole-hearted commitment to God spill out into life at every turn. Your child or your grandchild does not need a lecture about God as much as they need you to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and strength. I do not mean that they do not need to be taught. You must open your mouth and instruct them in the Word of God – that is what is being commanded in verse 7, but the keeping of this

commandment flows out of the whole-hearted love of verses 5-6. This love for God is best taught and caught together for its greatest impact.

- iii. Notice that this teaching in the home by parents is to be both proactive and reactive. So, in verse 7 we are to be proactive, always looking for opportunities to speak to our children about the God we love and about His Word that we love. This will be both planned and unplanned. We should be having regular times of simply reading the Word of God with our kids. But this is not to be done so that you can compare “family devotions” stories with your friend at church to see who is being more faithful. But rather, these planned times together in the Word create a rhythm to life which point our collective hearts to God to call us to love Him and honor Him in our home. But this must be coupled with unplanned times which are harder to prepare for and easier to neglect. I heard Josh McDowell say once that he never had formal times of family worship, but rather that he simply looked for a way to turn any and every conversation to some truth about God from His Word. I think we need to do both. I think verse 7 leads us to that conclusion – look for and create every opportunity possible to speak of God. Not in forced ways from compulsion, but willingly and freely from a heart of love for God.
- iv. These times are also going to be reactive. So, look down at verse 20. *Read 20-25.* If we are proactively teaching our children about God and His Word, and if we are constantly and diligently holding these things before them in word and in action and if we are doing this out of a heart of love for God, then we can know that they will ask us questions about why this is so important to us. They will be trying to figure it out as they develop and grow, and when they ask us why this all matters, we have a prime opportunity to speak to them the Gospel. Did you notice that in verses 21-25? The answer that Moses rehearses is a Gospel-centered and Gospel-driven answer. This provides the content for what parents are to be teaching their kids. So, in answer to why this all matters, Moses points to the bondage they were in and to the great signs which God did to rescue them. And then he speaks of how God brought them to this land in fulfillment of his promises and how he gave them these commands and these statutes so that they might live long in the land and enjoy his great blessings.
- v. So, when your children or grandchildren ask you why God is so important to you, or why you want to go to church, or why do we have family devotions or why do you get up early to read your Bible, or why do you seem to always talk about God – the answer you give is a golden opportunity to speak of the glorious truth of the Gospel. We do this because I once was lost in the darkness of my sin. I was in rebellion against God and I had no hope in this world. It was a terrible bondage, but then God broke in by His almighty power and He brought the truth of

the Gospel to my heart. He showed me my sin and He showed me Jesus Christ who came as God in the flesh and lived the perfect life of obedience that I did not so that He could lay down His sinless life and die in my place to pay my sin-debt on Calvary. He has saved me by His matchless grace and I have been redeemed and set free in Him. But this freedom compels me to seek to live every moment in a way that is worthy of Him. He is my Master and Lord and I want all things in my life to show how much I love Him. This is why I talk about Him at every opportunity. This is reactive instruction which rightly goes hand in hand with proactive instruction in the home.

- d. Let me also say that even though the home is the God-designed ideal place for children to learn and grow in their knowledge of God and their love for God – it is not the only place and the parent-child relationship is not the only relationship which affords such an opportunity. This is the beauty of a safe and trusted environment like what the local church provides for our kids. We have the privilege week in and week out to have our children influenced by other God-fearing and God-loving adults. And this shows our children that it is not just your dad and mom who love God and His Word. This combines with our own witness to our children to powerfully influence them to follow Christ.
- e. So, maybe you are wondering – how does this fit with our little mini-series on Christian education? Does this text mandate that everyone homeschool their children since it commands parents to teach their children? I want to walk gently and wisely through this, but I think it is important to address, especially since we have been giving our attention to formal Christian education. The homeschool movement has grown astronomically over the last 20 years. There are more families homeschooling their children now, than there ever has been. And I have told you before – I rejoice in this. Homeschooling is a good and viable option. But I want to make clear that it is not the Biblically mandated, nor do I think it is even the Biblically preferred option. I think this is a common misconception in many people’s minds. They tend to think that homeschooling is God’s best way to formally educate children, but Christian schooling is a good second option if you just can’t quite hack homeschooling. In fact, I was talking with a homeschool parent a few weeks ago – not one from our church – and that is exactly what they said. They said that homeschooling was the biblical way to educate children, but that Christian schooling was a good option for parents who weren’t equipped to do homeschooling, and public schooling, in this parent’s mind was not even an option.
- f. I’ve heard this argument before, and usually it finds its way back to this text in Deuteronomy 6. And I just want to say that this text does not mandate parents to educate their children in the home. What this text mandates is that parents teach their children about God and His Word from hearts that love God and His Word. That is not optional. It must be done if the next generation is going to faithfully serve our Lord.

- g. What is optional in the Scriptures is how parents choose to formally educate their children. So, how they choose to have their children learn about all the other realities of life is a decision that parents must make. So, even throughout the Scriptures we have record of dads and moms making various choices about the formal education of their children. Think of Samuel who was taken to the Tabernacle and given into the care of Eli at a very young age. Or think of Moses himself – the one writing the book of Deuteronomy – who was taught by the Egyptians of all things! Or think of Paul who was trained formally at the feet of Gamaliel. Or think of the church in Ephesus – Paul assumes in 4:2 that the children were under the care of a guardian for their formal education and this is not condemned nor commended. That’s just it – the Bible does not condemn nor commend the choices we face in educating our children. We saw last week, what is at stake in this education process because all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in Christ. So, whatever we choose as parents must be driven by our commitment to take them to Christ as the source and the sustainer and the ultimate purpose of all wisdom and knowledge.
 - h. So, let’s be careful in how we talk about our choice as parents, and about the choices of others. We naturally tend to see the strengths of our choice. That is why we made that choice – because we were convinced it was best for our family and for our kids. And we naturally see the weaknesses of the different choices that others make. We tend to think they are missing it in some key area and we wish they would buy into our reasoning and do what we do with our kids because that is obviously better. But what we need to do is rejoice in the strengths of each of the choices, and ask God for eyes to see the weaknesses of my particular choice and the grace to skillfully counter those weaknesses. God is honored by parents who chose to have their children formally educated at home, or at a Christian School, or at a public school. Each of those choices have strengths and each of them have weaknesses, but none of them will succeed if they are not undergird by a home where dad and mom love God and His word in such a whole-hearted way that they can’t help but teach their children about him diligently and constantly.
- IV. **If “The LORD our God, the LORD is one” then Bind His Word to Your Life (vs. 8-9)**
- a. Let me give you the last command quickly – verses 8-9 make the point that if the Lord our God, the Lord is one, then we must bind his word to our life. So the command is to bind them as a sign on your hand, and as frontlets between your eyes and write them on your doorposts and on your gates. These are not literal commands – though many Jews to this day continue to literally do this. They make leather boxes – phylacteries – in which they put portions of the Law – usually the 10 commandments and this text – the Shema – and they bind them to their hands and to their foreheads.
 - b. But the point is not to give you more things to put on in the morning as part of your garb. The point is to call you to bind the Word of God to your life. Get it as close to you as you possibly can so that it is a constant guide and filter for all of

life. He references the hand and the eyes. So, in everything you see – this should be filtered by the Word of God. And in everything you do – this should be guided by the Word of God. This is a truly biblical worldview – one that interprets all things by the Scriptures, and one that is then directed in all things by the Scriptures. When we are leaving the house and when we are returning we are to be so bound by the Scriptures that we are constantly thinking of and directed by them because we love the God of the Scriptures.

Conclusion: Will God find us faithful as a church in the next generation to know Him and to love Him? That question will be answered in the mundane and normal realities of life today. Will we love the Lord our God with all of our heart, soul, and strength? Will we love His Word and bind it to our hearts? Will we teach the next generation – particularly in the home – to know and love God – both proactively and reactively – both planned and unplanned? Will we bind His Word to our lives to such a level that it is like we have his word constantly at hand and constantly before our eyes? Will we? Will you? Let's pray.