

“Love the Lord Your God”
Deuteronomy 6:1-9

Nov. 3, 2024 (Pen. 24-B)

St. Paul’s Lutheran, North Freedom

These are the commands, decrees and laws the LORD your God directed me to teach you to observe in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess, so that you, your children and their children after them may fear the LORD your God as long as you live by keeping all his decrees and commands that I give you, and so that you may enjoy long life. Hear, O Israel, and be careful to obey so that it may go well with you and that you may increase greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, just as the LORD, the God of your fathers, promised you.

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates. (Dt. 6:1-9, NIV84)

In the name of the Lord, the only true God, dear fellow believers:

“Love, not hate!” It’s a refrain that we hear people chant. And it’s a slogan that is seldom put into practice. The campaigns leading up to Election Day tend to demonize the opposition. Overseas, there’s little love to be seen when war is spreading in the Middle East and continuing in the Ukraine. True love is hard to find in our world.

“Love, not hate!” is what God told the Israelites in Moses’ farewell address, and what he tells us today. After Moses repeated the Ten Commandments to a new generation that was getting ready to enter the Promised Land, he gave them a summary of what God was telling them to do: **“Love the Lord your God.”** May we also find that **“Love the Lord your God”** is not only a command for us to keep, but a truth for us to treasure and teach.

God had a purpose in mind for the Israelites when he had Moses teach them so many commands and laws to observe. As the Lord was giving them this new land, “a land flowing with milk and honey,” he wanted to make sure that they would “fear the LORD” their God in this new land. This fear would not be deathly fear, like someone’s afraid of snakes or ghosts, but the fear of awesome respect. We might put it this way, “He is so great—I’d be afraid to disappoint him.” It’s for this reason that Martin Luther wrote in the catechism, “We should fear and love God” when explaining each commandment. Awesome respect toward God and love for him should lead us to keep and obey his commands.

The Lord God reminds us to love him alone as God. “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.” The Israelites were surrounded by nations and tribes who worshipped a variety of gods. Still today many think that all religions with their various gods are equal with each other; even the pope reportedly said that all these religions have their own way to God. The Lord says otherwise: There is only one God. He is the LORD. And the LORD is not divided into many different gods; the LORD is one. We say he is triune—three in one—but while we believe in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, it’s important to remember that they are not three, but one God. Love the one God, the LORD, alone!

The Lord tells us how much we are to love him: “Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.” As Jesus pointed out, this is the “first and greatest command.” We are to love God with our whole hearts, not half-heartedly as in, “God, I love you on Sunday mornings but I love this football game even more so I can’t make it to church.” We are to love God with all our soul, that is, our whole inner being, our mind, everything in our life. And we are to love God with all our strength, loving him with our body. If we were to say in our mind, “I love God most of all,” but our lips fail to praise him, or our hands fail to help the needy, or our legs and feet fail to walk to church, we’re not loving God with all our strength. The weak excuse, “I tried to come but I just couldn’t make it” isn’t loving God with all our strength.

When we see what God commands with this greatest of all commandments, “Love the LORD your God,” we confess that we have not kept his command the way God wants. So often our “love” is only when it’s convenient for us; so often the God we love is ourselves, because we think we have to do what’s right for me. And when we check our hearts, we too often find hatred, not love; resentment instead of mercy; bitterness, not patience; envy, not kindness. “Love the LORD your God” is a command to keep, but a command that we keep breaking.

At the same time, “Love the LORD your God” is a truth that we will treasure, as God says, “These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts.” The reason we treasure it is because someone kept this command perfectly for us. That someone is Jesus, God’s own Son. “This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins” (1 John 4:10). Where we failed, Jesus didn’t fail. He loved us so much that he gave himself up for our sins. Jesus said, “Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13). Jesus loved us that much, to die for us!

There are some who look at the cross and they wonder, “How could God do something like that? That seems hateful, to kill his only Son! God’s a monster!” What they don’t understand is that Jesus *willingly* laid down his life for us. God the Son was not an unwilling victim, kicking and screaming on the way to the cross; both he and his Father were united in their love for the world, so that God could still have sins paid for, and we can still be forgiven of all sin. That is love!

“We love because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19). God’s love for us in Christ will lead us to love him back with all our hearts; this amazing truth leads us to treasure him in our hearts, and to teach his love to others. Moses told the Israelites, “Impress them on your children”—ingrain it in them. “Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.” In other words, don’t assume that teaching about God and love is just for church. Teach your children about Christ and his love at home, at the dinner table, in the car, at the park—anywhere you are with them, so they grow up knowing the Lord and his love.

And “tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads.” Whether the Israelites were to do that literally or not, they were to teach themselves, as reminders of God’s love and what he did. Use aids to memorize key Bible passages and impress them in your mind.

And “write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.” We do that when we have Bible passages and hymn verses on pictures and plaques on the walls of our homes. That way, we are telling about God’s love to visitors and guests at our homes too.

This truth is so important that we will treasure and teach it the rest of our lives. Impress it in your hearts again: God is love. He loves you! He died for you! He rose again and lives for you! So, let’s love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul and strength! Amen.