

To Love *the* Lord Your God



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: *Deut. 6:4, 5; Deut. 10:12; Eph. 2:1–10; Rev. 14:6, 7; Deut. 4:37; Deut. 11:1; Mark 12:28–30.*

Memory Text: “ ‘You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength’ ” (*Deuteronomy 6:5, NKJV*).

In the Jewish religion, one of the most important prayers is taken from Deuteronomy 6. It is known as “the Shema,” based on the first Hebrew word of the prayer, from the root, *shama*’, which means “to listen,” or even “to obey”—a word that appears again and again, not just in Deuteronomy but all through the Old Testament.

The first line of the Shema reads like this:

Shema Yisrael Adonai Elohenu Adonai echad.

It means: “ ‘Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one!’ ” (*Deut. 6:4, NKJV*). Many times when Jews pray it, they cover their eyes, the idea being to let nothing distract them from thinking about God. This first line of the Shema is deemed an affirmation of the monotheistic nature of *Adonai Elohenu*, “the LORD our God,” and Israel’s loyalty to Him alone and to no other “god.” In fact, it also could be read as “the LORD is our God.”

This one line is part of the first speech that Moses gave to the children of Israel as they were about to enter the Promised Land. What follows that opening line, however, is a powerful expression of truth that remains as crucial now as it was then.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 23.

To Love God

After Moses recounted to the children of Israel their history, he began giving them instructions on what they were to do in order to take the land and to thrive on it. Indeed, one could argue that the bulk of Deuteronomy was simply that: the Lord telling the people what they needed to do in order to keep up their end of the covenant, which He graciously made with them in fulfilling His promise to their fathers.

Deuteronomy 6 begins like this: “ ‘Now this is the commandment, and these are the statutes and judgments which the LORD your God has commanded to teach you, that you may observe them in the land which you are crossing over to possess, that you may fear the LORD your God, to keep all His statutes and His commandments which I command you, you and your son and your grandson, all the days of your life, and that your days may be prolonged’ ” (*Deut. 6:1, 2, NKJV*).

Read Deuteronomy 6:4, 5. What command does the Lord God give to the children of Israel in verse 5? What does that mean?

Love the Lord your God with all your heart . . . ? How interesting that here, in the midst of the law, in the midst of all the warnings, rules, and provisions, the people are called to love God. And not just to love Him, but to do so “ ‘with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength,’ ” which points to the absolute nature of this love.

Loving God with all the heart and soul and strength means that our love for Him should be supreme over our love for everything and everyone else, because He is the foundation and ground of all our being and existence and everything else. Love for Him should put our love for everything else in proper perspective.

In the Hebrew, the word “your” for *your* God, *your* heart, *your* might, is in the singular. Yes, God was speaking to the people as a whole, but the whole is only as strong as the parts. The Lord wants each one of us, though part of a larger body, to be faithful to Him individually, and the foundation of that faithfulness should be our love for Him, for who He is, and for what He has done for us.

What does it mean to you to love God with all your heart and soul and might?

To Fear God

Moses told the children of Israel to love God with all that they had. That was a command. However, a few verses earlier Moses gave them another command: “That you may fear the LORD your God” (*Deut. 6:2, NKJV*).

Read Deuteronomy 10:12. What does it say in this text about love and fear, and how do we understand it?

In one verse they are told to fear God, in another to love Him, and in this verse they are told to both fear and love Him at the same time. In the common understanding of the word “fear” this might seem like a contradiction, but it’s not. Instead, the fear of God—in the sense of awe and respect for who He is, His authority and power and justice and righteousness, especially in contrast to our sinfulness, weakness, and complete dependence on Him—should be a natural reaction. We are fallen beings, beings who have violated God’s law and who, but for His grace, deserve condemnation and eternal death.

Read Ephesians 2:1–10. How should these verses help us understand how we can both fear and love God at the same time?

Despite the fact that we were “children of wrath” (which is why we should fear Him), Christ died for us and thus gave us a new life in Him, which includes freedom from the sin and condemnation of the past (which is why we should love Him).

And just as this is true for us today, this same principle applied to ancient Israel: they were captives in Egypt, condemned to slavery and oppression, and it was only God’s love for them and graciousness toward them that led to their great redemption. “Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there” (*Deut. 5:15, NKJV*). No wonder, then, that they both loved and feared God at the same time. And if they were to do that, how much more should we, having the great truth of Jesus dying on the cross for us?

Read Revelation 14:6, 7. How are we to understand why the command to “fear God” should be the first command of the Lord’s last-day message to the world? Given what we know about what is coming on the world, why does that command make so much sense?

He First Loved Us

Even amid rules and regulations in Deuteronomy and all the admonitions warning the Jewish nation that the people must obey “His commandments, His judgments, and His statutes,” they were first and foremost to love God with all their heart and soul and might. Of course, they had good reasons to do just that.

Read Deuteronomy 4:37; Deuteronomy 7:7, 8, 13; Deuteronomy 10:15; Deuteronomy 23:5; and Deuteronomy 33:3. What do these verses teach about God’s love for His people?

Again and again in Deuteronomy, Moses told the people about God’s love for their fathers and for them. But more than just in words, the Lord revealed this love by His actions. That is, even despite their shortcomings, their failures, their sins, God’s love for them remained steadfast—a love that was powerfully manifested in His dealing with them.

“We love Him because He first loved us” (1 John 4:19, NKJV).

How does this text help us understand why we should love God?

God’s love for us predated our existence, in that the plan of salvation was in place way before “the foundation of the world” (Eph. 1:4).

As Ellen G. White said it: “The plan for our redemption was not an afterthought, a plan formulated after the fall of Adam. It was a revelation of ‘the mystery which hath been kept in silence through times eternal.’ Rom. 16:25, R.V. It was an unfolding of the principles that from eternal ages have been the foundation of God’s throne.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 22.

How fortunate we all are that God is, indeed, a God of love, a love so great that He went to the cross for us, a self-sacrificing love in which “He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross” (Phil. 2:8, NKJV). Thus, we today have a revelation of God’s love for us that the children of Israel probably couldn’t even have imagined.

Instead of being love, what if God were hate or if God were indifferent? What kind of world would this be? Why is the revelation of God’s love for us something that we, indeed, should rejoice about?

“If You Love Me, Keep My Commandments”

Israel—the nation as a whole—was called to love God. But this was something that only could happen individually. As a single human being given free will, each Israelite had to make the choice to love God—and they were to show that love through obedience.

What do the following texts have in common? That is, what is the common theme among them?

Deut. 5:10 _____

Deut. 7:9 _____

Deut. 10:12, 13 _____

Deut. 11:1 _____

Deut. 19:9 _____

How much clearer could the Word of God be? Just as God doesn't merely say He loves us but has revealed that love for us by what He has done and still does, God's people, too, are to show their love to God by their actions. And in these texts we see that love to God is inseparably linked to obedience to Him.

This is why, when John says such things as, “For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments” (1 John 5:3, NKJV), or when Jesus says, “‘If you love Me, keep My commandments’ ” (John 14:15, NKJV), these verses are merely expressing this basic teaching. Love to God must always be expressed by obedience to God. That has always been the case, and it always will be. And this obedience to God means obedience to His law, the Ten Commandments, which includes the fourth commandment, the Sabbath, as well. Keeping the fourth commandment is no more legalism than is keeping any of the other nine.

Though obedience to any of the commandments *can* be legalism, that kind of obedience isn't really done out of love for God. When we truly love God, especially because of what He has done for us in Christ Jesus, we want to obey Him, because that's what He asks us to do.

When Moses again and again told Israel to love and obey God, he did it *after* they had been redeemed from Egypt. That is, their love and obedience was a response to the redemption that God had given them. They had been redeemed by the Lord. Now they would respond by faithfully obeying His commandments. Is it any different today?

What is your own experience in seeking to obey God? That is, what are your own motives in obeying God? Why should it be done out of love for Him? What role, if any, should fear, the biblical understanding of fear, play, as well?

The First Commandment

However much some Christians, for various reasons, seek to separate the Old Testament from the New, it can't be done, at least not without all but denuding the New Testament of its true meaning. The New Testament, in its revelation of Jesus and its theological explanations of His life, death, resurrection, and high-priestly ministry, points to the fulfillment of many of the Old Testament prophecies and types. In many ways, the Old Testament forms the background, the context, the basis for the New. Both testaments reveal the goodness and love of God.

This is one reason why the New Testament, including Jesus, again and again, quotes the Old.

Read Mark 12:28–30. What was the question asked about the “first commandment of all”? How does Jesus respond, and from where does He get His answer?

It's interesting that a scribe, someone who had dedicated his life to understanding the law and how it should be applied, would have asked this question. However many laws they might have believed that they needed to obey (later Jewish tradition said that there were 613 laws), it's not surprising that they would want it all distilled into one question.

And what does Jesus do?

He goes right to Deuteronomy 6, starting out with “ ‘Hear, O Israel: the LORD our God, the LORD is one!’ ” (*Deut. 6:4, NKJV*), and then quotes the next verse, as well, about loving God with all our heart, soul, and strength. He points to the key affirmation of the Lord as their God, their only God, and based on that great truth, they are called to love Him supremely.

What could be more “present truth” than this command? In the very last days, when final events unfold and everyone will be called to choose one side or the other in a very dramatic way, the commandments of God (*Rev. 14:12*) will play a crucial role.

Ultimately, the side we choose, even in the face of persecution, will be based on whether or not we truly love God. That's the deciding issue, and we can come to love God with all our heart and soul and might only as we come to know Him for ourselves and experience for ourselves His goodness, love, and grace. If need be, that's something to die for.

If someone were to ask you: How do people come to love a God that they have never seen personally, what would you say? In class, talk about your answer.

Further Thought: “The cross of Christ will be the science and the song of the redeemed through all eternity. In Christ glorified they will behold Christ crucified. Never will it be forgotten that He whose power created and upheld the unnumbered worlds through the vast realms of space, the Beloved of God, the Majesty of heaven, He whom cherub and shining seraph delighted to adore—humbled Himself to uplift fallen man; that He bore the guilt and shame of sin, and the hiding of His Father’s face, till the woes of a lost world broke His heart and crushed out His life on Calvary’s cross. That the Maker of all worlds, the Arbiter of all destinies, should lay aside His glory and humiliate Himself from love to man will ever excite the wonder and adoration of the universe. As the nations of the saved look upon their Redeemer and behold the eternal glory of the Father shining in His countenance; as they behold His throne, which is from everlasting to everlasting, and know that His kingdom is to have no end, they break forth in rapturous song: ‘Worthy, worthy is the Lamb that was slain, and hath redeemed us to God by His own most precious blood!’ ”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pp. 651, 652.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Read the Ellen G. White statement above. What does it say that should help us understand why our love for God should be the greatest love that we have? Think about what it means that God, the One who “upheld the unnumbered worlds through the vast realms of space” was the One who went to the cross for us. Why should this truth be at the foundation of our relationship with God?
- 2 Dwell more on the idea of loving and fearing God at the same time. How do we do both, and why should we do both?
- 3 It’s one thing to love God when things are going well in our lives. What about when things aren’t going well, when tragedy strikes? Why, during such times, is loving God even more important than when things are going well?
- 4 Go over the final question in Thursday’s study. What are the various approaches that you could take in explaining to someone who isn’t a believer about what it means to love God? How can we human beings love someone whom we’ve never physically seen? Why does it not matter that we have never seen Him, at least in person?

Power of a Book

By KAZUHIRO HIRAGA

Nine-year-old Saki loved to read on the Japanese island of Okinawa. She especially loved to read books sold to her family by a kind stranger who had knocked on their door. Again and again, she read the set of five books, *Uncle Arthur's Bedtime Stories*. Her favorite story was about a boy named Wilford and his Surprise Package Company. Wilford liked to surprise people with gifts. Saki felt happy imagining the joy of the people who received the gifts.

The books also introduced Saki to Jesus. Her family was not Christian. Her parents, like many people in Japan, did not worship Jesus. In the books, she read that Jesus loves children and wants to make them happy.

Saki grew up and moved to Tokyo, the capital of Japan. She got married and became the mother of two little boys. Somewhere along the way she lost the books with her favorite bedtime stories.

When her eldest son was old enough, she began to look for a school for him. Near their home, she noticed a private school called Tokyo Saniku Elementary School. Curiously, she looked up the school on the internet. She was surprised to learn that it was a Seventh-day Adventist school. She had never heard of Adventists, so she looked for more information online. To her surprise, she read that Adventists not only have many schools but they also publish many books for children, including her beloved bedtime stories. She knew that she wanted her son to study at the Adventist school.

But first she wanted to know more about the Adventist Church. An Adventist church was located on the property of the Adventist school, and she began to attend its Sabbath worship services. She felt great peace as she sang hymns and listened to sermons.

Saki got hold of a new set of bedtime stories and began to read them to her sons. The boys loved the stories. As Saki read to her boys, she began to read another Book on her own—the Holy Bible. Just as her son started the first grade, she joined a Bible study group at the school. Months later, she gave her heart to Jesus and was baptized.

Today, Saki Takahagi, 35, still reads bedtime stories to her young sons. She also shares the Bible with them. She loves the Bible, and she loves

Jesus.



Saki learned about Jesus through the bedtime stories and later by searching for information on the internet. Part of this quarter's Thirteenth Sabbath Offering will go to a project to help many Japanese people, especially young people, learn about Jesus through the internet. Thank you for planning a generous offering.

Key Text: *Deuteronomy 6:5*

Study Focus: *Deut. 6:4–6, Deut. 7:9, Deut. 4:37, Deut. 10:15, Deut. 23:5, Mark 12:28–30, Eph. 2:1–8, 1 John 4:19.*

Part I: Overview

In the Hebrew Scriptures, the word “love” appears mostly in the book of Deuteronomy and in the Song of Songs. This affinity between these two books already suggests the particular relational nature of love. Because the book of Deuteronomy is essentially about covenant—that is, about the *relationship* between God and His people—love is an important theme of this book. Unfortunately, the book of Deuteronomy does not contain a clear definition of “love.” Love is mysterious and beyond our understanding (*see Eph. 3:17*). Love appears, however, associated with God, fear, and the law. In this lesson, we shall grapple with three complex themes and the difficult questions that devolve from each.

Lesson Themes:

- *Love and God.* What is love? If God chose His people because He loved them, not because they loved Him (*Deut. 7:8*), then what is love? If love begins with God and has no cause in the object of love, why did God love? In response, from a human point of view, how can we love a God whom we cannot see? (*See 1 John 4:20.*)
- *Love and fear.* If “there is no fear in love” (*1 John 4:18*), how can we love God and fear Him at the same time?
- *Love and the law.* How can we love God freely when we are commanded to love Him? How can we reconcile the imperative and legalistic aspect of the law and the spontaneous character of love?

Part II: Commentary

Read Deuteronomy 6:1–9.

“The Commandment” (Deut. 6:1, NKJV)

The construction of the first sentence, “ ‘Now this is the commandment’ ” (*NKJV*), clearly indicates that the phrase “the commandment” refers to what follows: “the statutes, and the judgments” (*Deut. 6:1; compare Deut. 5:1*), which God has commanded Moses to “teach.” So,

when Moses pronounces his first words, “ ‘This is the commandment,’ ” he alludes to the Ten Commandments, which he had just listed (*Deut. 5:1–20*). In addition, the definite article before the word *mitswah*, “commandment,” suggests emphasis. The commandment he is referring to is *the* commandment par excellence, *the* commandment that includes all. Interestingly, the same verb *tsawah*, “command,” that Moses used in his introduction reappears in the middle of the passage in connection with the commandment of love (*Deut. 6:6*); and there also, as in the introduction (*Deut. 6:1*), it appears in connection with the verb “teach.” This echo clearly suggests that the commandment to love is, therefore, the commandment Moses has in mind when he says, “*the* commandment.” So, when Jesus identifies the commandment of love as “the first commandment” (*Mark 12:29–31*), He is in harmony with Moses’ commentary of the law.

Discussion and Thought Questions: Why does the commandment to love the Lord of love include all the other commandments? Why is the commandment to love one’s neighbor like the command to love God, and not just another (second) distinct commandment (*Mark 12:31*)?

“That You May Fear the LORD” (*Deut. 6:2, NKJV*)

Following the flow of Moses’ reasoning, the purpose of “*the* commandment” is “ ‘that you may fear the LORD your God’ ” (*Deut. 6:2, NKJV*). In other words, to love God means, first of all, “to fear God,” to realize that there is a God. Love implies the existence of the other person we love. To love God is not loving an abstract principle, a profound wisdom, or a beautiful story. To love God is not a theology or a cultural tradition. To love God is to love Him as a Person. To fear God means to have, and entertain, the acute sense of His presence everywhere and in every moment. God is present not only in the church or when we pray. But God also is present in the office, in the kitchen, in the bedroom, in the marketplace. God is present when we are with people or when in we are alone, in the light or in the darkness. (*See Psalm 139:2–12.*)

Discussion and Thought Questions: What does it mean to love God as a Person? Why is it not possible to love God without realizing that God is a Person? Read Ecclesiastes 12:13, 14. Why is the fear of God associated with God as the Judge?

“To Keep All His Statutes and All His Commandments” (*Deut. 6:2, NKJV*)

Therefore, to fear God is to walk with Him, to live continuously in His presence. We cannot love Someone and take another way wherein He is absent. Love leads to the commandments. First, love leads to the commandments because God’s commandments are the expression of His love: “ ‘because the LORD loves you’ ” (*Deut. 7:8, NKJV*). Second,

love leads to the obedience of the commandments because we love the Lord: “those who love Him and keep His commandments’ ” (*Deut. 7:9, NKJV*). Note that the Hebrew syntax of this phrase suggests that the conjunction *waw* (“and”) is to be understood as introducing an explanation: “those who love; that is, who keep His commandments.” The keeping of God’s commandments is not added to the love; it is love. Because we love God, we love His law (*Ps. 119:70, 92, 97*).

Discussion and Thought Questions: How does the fact that “to love God” means to keep His commandments affect our understanding of love? How will our dismissal of God’s commandments affect our love for Him? Why will our observance of God’s commandments affect our understanding of who He is as a Person and, hence, our love for Him?

“You Shall Love the LORD” (*Deut. 6:5, NKJV*).

The fact that God commands us to love is not a problem, because “God is love” (*1 John 4:8*). “To love God” is *the* commandment because it cannot be otherwise; it is the absolute imperative because of who God is. Thus, because God is love, the commandment involves the totality of our being. Love stems from the heart; that is, from within, from what is not visible, from our most intimate thoughts and feelings, our profound intentions. Significantly, the commandment that concludes the decalogue, “‘you shall not covet’ ” (*Deut. 5:21, NKJV*), gives, at the end of the law, the inner key to all the commandments. It is not enough to *have* the law, to *have* the truth, to know that we should not kill or commit adultery. Moreover, to refrain from committing adultery or from killing is not enough; we should not even think about it or desire it (*Matt. 5:28*). Because “love” is a passion, our response of love to God is pressing; it emanates from our heart today (*Deut. 6:6*). It is not just an act of memory or a hope for the future. It is present and involves our daily life. To love God, who is always present in His love, is to make God relevant in our present life. Therefore, to love God, who loves, is total; it embraces “all”—not only “all your heart,” but also “all your soul” (*Deut. 6:5, NKJV*), which means “all your person.” And it does not stop there. Because of what love is, it implies intensity. We cannot love God in a mediocre or lackluster way.

Discussion and Thought Questions: Does our love for God limit itself to the obedience of His commandments? Is it possible to love God apart from His commandments? If not, why not? How does fanaticism affect the genuineness of our love for God? Why is fanaticism contrary to the love of God?

“You Shall Teach Them” (Deut. 6:7, NKJV).

Just as Moses was commanded to teach God’s commandments (*Deut. 6:1*), we are commanded to teach (*Deut. 6:7*). Because the commandment to teach God’s commandments derives from God’s love, the mission to teach them cannot derive from the intention to force or the desire for personal profit. If people accept Jesus under the threat of the sword or under the prospect of some benefit, they will not understand the meaning of God’s law and who God really is. This biblical passage has been chosen to signify the mission of Israel as a witness to God. In the Hebrew text in the first line, “ ‘Hear O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one’ ” (*Deut. 6:4, NKJV*), the letter ‘*ayin*, which ends the first word *shema*’, “hear,” and the letter *dalet*, which ends the last word, “one,” make the word “witness.” For the ancient scribes who copied the Torah, this line contained the very essence of the identity of Israel and her mission as God’s people to witness to the world everywhere, at any time, in the morning and in the night, at birth and at death, about who God is: the unique God who loves His people.

Discussion and Thought Questions: What does the teaching of God’s commandments mean? What is the connection between the notion of a unique God and the notion of a loving God who desires to be loved? Does mission limit itself to the law? How would such a limited understanding distort the meaning of the law?

Part III: Life Application

Read Deuteronomy 6:8, 9. This text, with others (*compare Exod. 13:9, 16; Deut. 11:8*), is used as a source to justify the Jewish tradition of the *tefillin* (phylacteries); that is, the practice of binding this text on the hand and between the eyes. Although there is no convincing evidence of this practice in biblical times as a literal application of this passage, this tradition seems to have been very ancient; it is attested to in the New Testament (*Matt 23:5*) and in the writings of Flavius Josephus and some Qumran artifacts. What is clear, however, is the symbolic significance of this ritual. Visit a synagogue or search for a demonstration of this ritual on the internet in order to better visualize it.

Meditate on the lessons of faith and devotion that are symbolized in all the gestures of this practice:

- “ ‘*You shall bind*’ ” (*Deut. 6:8, NKJV*). The law of God should be tightly connected to our physical persons. The binding also suggests the idea of faithfulness and a loving relationship with God.
- “ ‘*On your hand*’ ” (*Deut. 6:8, NKJV*). The law of God should affect our actions.
- “ ‘*Between your eyes*’ ” (*Deut. 6:8, NKJV*). The law of God should affect our mind and our discernment.

