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All-Encompassing Love for the Lord Our God

Deuteronomy 6:1-9

Series: *Loving God in Every Way*

Introduction: Take your Bible and join me in Deuteronomy 6. In our current series on the book of Deuteronomy this is the second sermon from this very text. When we started this series we started with this text. To use that mountain illustration that I keep using, if Deuteronomy can be compared to a mountain, this text before us today is the top of the peak. We ascended the mountain in Moses' first address, or sermon, in chapters 1-4. Then we came into a lush mountain meadow near the top of the peak as we entered into chapter 5. We see in this mountain meadow the fountainhead of a spring which flows from the peak to water the rest of the mountain. This fountainhead is the 10 Commandments which are the heart of the Law which is further explained in the rest of the book. Last week we took a step back from the specifics of that mountain spring and we gazed at the whole scene once again in which we saw the glory and grandeur of the One whom this whole mountain of truth is all about – God himself. The text before us takes us to the ascent of the book. Everything in Deuteronomy leads to or flows from the truths found in this text. So, there could be a thousand sermons preached on this text and we would never exhaust its grandeur. We should long to come back often to the glorious views this text affords. Verse 1 says this . . .

Wilson Bentley is the first known photographer of snowflakes. In January of 1885 he captured his first photo of a snowflake, and this set him on a life lived in obsession with snowflakes. When everyone else was rushing inside during a snowstorm, Wilson would rush outside to catch some snowflakes on black velvet and then take a photograph of them before they melted. After 50 years of pursuing this obsession with snowflakes he had amassed a collection of over 5000 photographs – which was quite the accomplishment with the technology of his day. His death came in a fitting way. He contracted pneumonia while walking six miles through a severe snowstorm and died in December of 1931. We might say that his life was a fleshing out of his love for snowflakes.

We all know what it means to obsess over something so that it consumes our thoughts and fills our words. We know that anticipation in our hearts for when we can give our time and attention to the object of our affection. A child with his favorite toy, a young girl with her dolls, a young teenager with his sports or music craze, a newly engaged couple and their all-consuming relationship, a young father and his commitment to his career for the sake of his family, the young mother and her willingness to go to any lengths necessary to raise her children well, an older man and his car hobby obsession, or an older woman and her pursuit of health – we are all prone to giving ourselves to an all-encompassing love of something other than the Lord our God.

So, let's allow this text to wash over us like a warm shower and wash away our spiritual filth and grime as we see the glory of our great God. You're probably familiar with the popularity of this text. When Jesus was asked by the expert in the Law which was the greatest commandment, he quoted Deuteronomy 6:4-5. When the Jewish leaders followed the text literally and put leather phylacteries of Scripture on their foreheads and arms, they filled them with this text. This has become one of the central texts of the Old Testament for the most devout of Jews even to our own day. Every day they recite the Shema – verses 4-9 – twice every day. When I was explaining the 10 commandments to you I told you that those 10 words are the core or the heart of the Law. The rest of the Law is summarized in those words and encapsulated in those words. They are like a strand of DNA out of which the design and the plan for the growth of the body develops. Well, what the 10 commandments are to the rest of the Law, so this Great commandment in our text is to the 10 commandments. It is the 10 commandments in DNA form. It is the whole of the Law encapsulated in these few sentences. It is the great commandment, not simply because it is the best of the lot, but because in it the rest of the commandments are found. If you keep this commandment you keep all the rest. So, the popularity of this text is for good reason.

There are plenty of ways to lay out our approach to this text, but I want to ask and answer two questions this morning to help us dive deep into this section of Scripture. The first question is why must we love God? And the second is how must we love God?

I. Why Must We Love God? (vs. 1-4)

- a. The answer to that first question – why must we love God? – is found in the first 4 verses, and specifically in verse 4. Verse 4 is the unchanging truth about God which is the foundation of everything else in this text. So, we find the reason for our love for God in this clear and foundational truth. We must love God because He is the Lord our God.
- b. *He is the LORD our God*
 - i. Moses is calling them to their only logical response to this God who has made them His own people and called them by His own name. This Yahweh God has spoken to them directly at Mt. Horeb, which we looked at last week. And this God has given them the commandments and statutes and judgments which are to guide their lives together as they enter into the Promised Land. This is what Moses rehearses in verses 1-3. That is the buildup to the truth statement of verse 4 – the Lord is our God.
 - ii. Moses tells them in verse 1 that these commands are not Moses' to them, they are the Lord's. Moses reminds them that they are going over the Jordan to possess a land that the Lord is giving them in verse 3. And Moses reminds them that this Lord who is their God has promised to prosper them and multiply them. And so they are to fear the Lord and hear these commands and keep them so that they may live long, and so that their children may live long in the land. This Lord who is their God has covenanted with them and chosen them out of the depth of his own love

for them. That is seen in how they are addressed in verses 3 and 4. “Hear, O Israel.” This is the covenant name given from God directly to Jacob. It is a name which should always remind them of God’s faithful love. It means the “one who strives with God.” And this is the history of God’s people. They have not been the most lovable and submissive bunch. And yet God is a covenant making and covenant keeping God because He is a God of steadfast love. So, the first phrase of verse 4 reminds them that the Lord is their God.

c. *He is the LORD Alone*

- i. But He is also Lord alone. That’s the idea of the last part of verse 4 where it says in the ESV, “the LORD is one.” So, the first phrase is the arm of the boxer, and this second phrase is the tip of the glove. This is the powerful punch of this combined truth – Their Lord is one. The Lord who has made them His people and who is their God, He is indeed the Lord alone. And by this, the text means to communicate the exclusivity of God as God, and specifically of God as the Lord of His people. This short phrase is packed with meaning about God. It speaks to his exclusivity – that there is but one God. There is none other and there is not greater than Him. He is the one God. But the phrase also speaks to His simplicity, meaning that the Lord is completely one in his nature, character and essence. The Bible makes clear to us that God is three persons – Father, Son, and Spirit – but those three persons of the Godhead are not three Gods, but are one in essence, nature, and character. The Lord our God, the Lord is one! This also means that we cannot compartmentalize God and make Him 30% love and 30% power and 10% justice and 10% mercy and 20% grace. No, what God is He is completely that in his nature and essence and He is unified as one in all of these things. In other words, we cannot say that God has all power, as though He possesses power as a part of his makeup and being. Rather, the Scriptures speak of God as all-powerful. That is what He is. He doesn’t possess power, he is all powerful. The same could be said of love. God does not have love, but God is love – that’s who He is. And in all of these things, He is a unified One.
- ii. But the special concern of this phrase in its context is that God is exclusively Israel’s God. They have no other. The Lord is their Lord alone. This is why they will be called in verse 5 to love him exclusively. This is the necessary result of His nature as their exclusive God. There is no other god they are to split their love between. They have one God and this one God is one in all that He is. This means that his commands will not contradict his providential work. And his providence will not contradict his desires for them. And his desires for them will not contradict his miraculous interventions on their behalf. And his miraculous interventions will not contradict what he has revealed already about his character. You get the idea. They can be fully exclusive in their worship of

this God who is completely one in all that He is and all that He does. He is their Lord alone.

II. How Must We Love God? (vs. 5-9)

a. *With an All-Encompassing Love* – vs. 5

- i. This leads quite naturally to answer the second question then. How must we love God? Well, we must love Him with an all-encompassing love. So, just follow the logic of the text here. If verse 4 is true about God, then the command of verse 5 makes complete sense. If the Lord is our God and the Lord is our Lord alone, if the Lord is united and one in character and essence and nature, and if He has made me His own through His loving choice then the only logical conclusion is to love God with this all-encompassing, completely comprehensive love. So in verse 5 we are commanded to love the Lord our God with all our heart and with all our soul and with all our might. Notice the comprehensive nature of the command. There is no partial part of the person which we can withhold from this love of God. We cannot give part of our heart or part of our soul or part of might in this love for the Lord. It is an all-in kind of love. It is the full plunge into the deep end of the pool and not the inching into the water on the shallow end. It is all-encompassing. Also, notice that the three things we are to love God with encompass the entirety of your existence. The heart is used throughout Scripture as the source of all of your immaterial and non-physical aspects of life. So, the Scripture talks about the heart as the source of thoughts and as the source of choices and as the source of emotions. It is this all-encompassing description for the three main functions of the immaterial side of who you are – the emotions, the thoughts, and the will. In essence then, the heart is the inner man, the non-physical you which produces thoughts and processes choices and wrestles with emotions. We are to love God with all of that. Our thoughts, choices, emotions – are all to be channeled to love God.
- ii. This is combined with loving God with all your soul. The soul is the whole of your existence. It is the fullness of your life and the wholeness of your person. If your soul departs then you are no longer alive in this life. But it is more than just what gives you life in the Scriptures. It is often described as longing for and desiring something. So, in Psalm 42 the psalmist says his soul thirsts for God. And in Psalm 119 he says that his soul longs for God's law and God's salvation. And in Psalm 63 he says that his soul clings to God. So, the soul is that which is life, but it is also that which is producing desires and cravings in you, particularly the cravings to stay alive and to have true and abundant life. The soul is that which is living in you and brings life to the rest of you. So, with the fullness of that living and with every desire to live you are to love God.
- iii. Then this is combined with loving God with all of your might. The Hebrew word is literally "muchness" or "greatness." It is not specifically the word for strength, though that is often what is thought of here. In the

immediate context the most likely meaning of this word is to point them to the greatness of their prosperity that they will have when they enter the land. They will be greatly blessed by the Lord and caused to prosper if they listen to God and fear God and walk in His ways. They are to love God with all of that muchness – all of that greatness – all of that might.

- iv. So, take in the whole description here. Love God with all of your heart, and all of your soul and all of your might. These three are like three concentric circles where heart is at the middle and then around the arena of the heart is the soul, or the wholeness of life, and around the soul is the might – or everything that we possess and have in this life. In other words, it is an all-encompassing love. Everything you think and feel and choose, and everything that makes up your life and vitality and everything that you own and have use of in this life – every resource, every talent, every possession, every skill, every opportunity – all of this is to be the avenue through which we love God.
 - v. So, God is that great and awesome and singularly Divine that He deserves our all-encompassing love. His great character and essence should capture every aspect of who we are and have so that we are moved to use it all out of love for Him.
 - vi. Notice that this love for God is not an emotion or an intention alone. It is not an affectionate feeling we might get in a great worship service. It is not merely an overwhelming sense of awe when we are struck by some great aspect of truth about God. It is not merely a moment of service to the Lord. It is not merely a word spoken about our love for the Lord. It is not merely a choice to use something we possess to show our love for Him. No, this is an all-encompassing love. Every part of everything that we are and have is to be moved to love for God.
 - vii. So, this is an inadequate analogy, but I think it will help us understand the point. Think about the love that a husband has for his wife – the love of marriage. You know that if that love is merely expressed in word and not in deed and emotion and choices that the wife will begin to greatly question the trueness of that love. Or think of the parent with the child. Would you feel loved by your mom if she told you everyday how much she loved you but refused to listen to you and to help you with your homework and refused to provide for you? Like this – only on a much grander scale – is this love we are to have for the Lord. It is an all-encompassing love.
- b. *With an All-Encompassing Love Ruled by the Word – vs. 6*
- i. But we're not done. The text goes on to say that this all-encompassing love is to be ruled by the Word of God in verse 6. So, this whole person all-encompassing love for the Lord should evidence itself in one's life this way. Verse 6 says – “And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart.” The flow of the text leads us from the love of verse 5 to the submission to and immersion in the Word of God in verse 6. In other

words this orientation of loving commitment to the Lord shows itself with this whole-life saturation of these words from God.

- ii. So, my every thought, every move of the will, every emotive energy, every part of my life, and every resource and possession is to be ruled by these words from God which are to be upon my heart. Therefore, we are not left to dream up how this all-encompassing love for God is supposed to be shown. Rather, God tells us how he expects us to love Him. He speaks to us these life-ordering and life-giving words and He expects us to place our hearts under these words as they govern every area of life as an expression of our love for Him.
 - iii. This shows us that truth from God and love for God are both propositional and personal. What I mean by that is that the truth of God is given to us in propositions – in clear and undeniable statements of truth. And these propositional truths about God are to be personally received in faith and God is to be loved from the heart.
 - iv. This is counter-cultural to the mindset of our own day. Most people want a religion that is personal but not propositional. They would rather feel than think. They don't want propositions which state clear-cut truth, rather they want experiences which help them feel closer to God and which allow them to express their love for God. One commentator described this view by saying that it is “the view that God does not reveal timeless truths propositionally, but simply acts in love and leaves to each individual his or her own interpretative conclusions as we respond in personal relationship to him or to one another.”¹
 - v. But that is not what is happening in our text, nor in the rest of Scripture. The call of Scripture is not “feel and interpret” but the call of Scripture is “Hear and believe.” That is why Moses says in verse 3 and verse 4 – “Hear, O Israel.” And then he follows that with direct and clear statements of propositional truth about God and about our relationship with Him.
 - vi. But we must also notice that this relationship with God is not merely propositional. It is also personal. These propositional truths about God must be on our hearts individually and personally. We must by faith place ourselves under these propositional truths about God and let these words instruct us about this God we are to love with this all-encompassing love.
- c. *With an All-Encompassing Love Ruled by the Word in Every Area of Life – vs. 7-9*
- i. And this all-encompassing love ruled by the Word is to be in every area of life. That is how we are to love God, and we find that in verses 7-9. This is the classic text describing the life-saturation of these words that are on the heart in verse 6. Parents are to diligently teach them to their children and God's people are to bind them to their hands and between their eyes so that they never forget these words. And they are to put them on the

¹ Chris Wright as quoted in Ajith Fernando, *Deuteronomy: Loving Obedience to a Loving God*; Preaching the Word Commentary Series, pg. 257.

doorposts of their house and on the pillars of their gates. This is what this all-encompassing love ruled by God's Word should practically look like. His words will be at the forefront of every action, relationship, and realm of responsibility. And in this way we will show that we love God in every way. Let's break down this every area of life described in these three verses into three pairs.

ii. Private & Public

1. The first pair is public and private. This all-encompassing love for God is to have His Word ruling over every area of life, namely, public and private areas of life. So, look again at the progression of thought here. These words are to be on your heart in verse 6. And then those words are to be prominent in your home in verse 7. And then they are to be prominent in your life as you prepare to leave the home in verse 8. And then they are to be prominently displayed on your home and in your community as evidence of public commitment to these words as evidence of your love for God. So, the progression is from individual to home to community. In every area of life these covenant words of the Lord are to be prominent, not just in outward display and not just in inward desire and inclination, but in both the private and public areas of life.
2. This is really important because we are so prone to think that my love for God is an internal and private matter alone. Or we are tempted to behave in such a way so as to treat this love for God only as a public matter for others to see about us. True love for God must start in the inner man and flow outward into life-shaping orientation of obedience to the Word of God in every area.
3. Jesus himself was greatly opposed to the most religious people of his day because they had the outward actions of commitment to the commands of God down. These scribes of the Law and these Pharisees had larger phylacteries on their hands and their foreheads than anyone else. But Jesus condemned their motive in Matthew 23 and said that they do it all so that their deeds can be seen by others. In other words, their obedience to this core text of their faith – the Shema – was compelled by their desire to have others know that they were obeying the Lord. Jesus also says in Matthew 23 that they love honor from others which is why they publicly and prominently do their law keeping – so that others will honor them. In fact, in Matthew 6 Jesus condemns how they pray so publicly by saying that they practice their righteousness to be seen by others. He summarizes the whole of their hypocrisy by saying in Matthew 23 that they are like whitewashed tombs. They look good on the outside, but inside they are full of dead bones.
4. So this road we travel of love for God in all of life has two ditches – one on either side. You can fall in the ditch of being all public and

no private. If you are in that ditch then you are missing the core element of this command, and that is a love for God which consumes your inner man. But you can also fall into the ditch of all private and no public. In this ditch you deceive yourself into thinking that your love for God can be a heart matter without being an all of life matter. This text shows us that what Jesus taught is true. Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. So, if these words are on my heart then they will come out of my mouth in the home and in the workplace and in society at large. This means then that my witnessing to others about the truth of the Gospel is not just about mere obedience to the Great Commission. Rather, that public witness is a much deeper heart issue of love for God in every way. And you will find that you are most prone to speak to others about God and His Gospel when you are most captured in the entirety of your person with love for God. This all-encompassing love must be public and private.

iii. Planned & Spontaneous

1. And it also must be planned and spontaneous. As your love for God is ruled by the Word of God in every area of life there must be planned and spontaneous expressions of that love. The overflow of this love from the heart in verse 7 is immediately seen in the home in planned and spontaneous ways. Parents are to teach these words diligently to their children. And they are to talk about them at every opportunity – when they sit, when they walk, when they lie down, when they rise. In other words, whenever and wherever they can in the course of life they are to speak these words to their kids.
2. Teaching them diligently translates a word which has the meaning of repeating something so as to leave an unforgettable impression. It is an inculcation of these truths from God through planned and spontaneous repetition of these words. It is more like carving words into a marble slab that it is like writing these words on a pad of paper. And this chisel and hammer work to mark your children's hearts with these words from God takes planned and painstaking effort. But it also takes the totality of life which is spontaneously ready to speak these words of truth about God into the lives of the next generation whenever the opportunity presents itself.
3. So parents, this means that God has privileged you with a unique role in the life of your children to be their main discipler in their knowledge of God and their love for God. God has uniquely positioned you to have time and the context of a loving relationship with your kids to be able to indelibly etch in their hearts the truth about God and His Word that is so important to

you. And this will take planned effort. This will require you to be diligent to intentionally create ways in your family life to talk to your kids about God and His truth. This should look like regular times of family worship where you simply read the Word together and pray in response to that Word and even sing the truths of the Word together. It doesn't mean that you need to be a drill sergeant and drag family worship on for an hour every day, but it also doesn't mean that you can just let their SS teachers and youth workers be the primary agents of speaking the Word into their lives. You must be intentional and planned.

4. And you must also be spontaneous. As your children need disciplined you need to bring their attention to the why of their sin and the what of their sin as it relates to you and to God. You need to preach the Gospel to your kids even as you interact with them about their lying or about their disobedience or about their anger. They don't need a sermon, but they do need truth applied as a healing balm. They need the hope of the gospel brought to the despair of their sinful hearts.
5. And as you think through this planned and spontaneous teaching of the Word, you must never forget that this is an overflow of your love for God. If you are not captured by the greatness of God in verse 4 and responding with the all-encompassing love of God in verse 5 and filled with the words of God in verse 6, then your efforts to teach them to your children in verse 7 will be hypocritical and damaging.

iv. Home & Community

1. Lastly, notice that these words of God are to rule over home and community. This is the inner to outer pattern again. These words are to be in our hearts and then in our homes and finally then in our community. There is a lot of debate about whether the people of Israel were to literally bind these words on their hands and foreheads in leather boxes and whether they were to write them on their doorposts and on the gates of their cities. There are good points to be made for both sides – both the literal obedience side and the figurative side.
2. Whether they were literally to do this or not, the point is that these words from God were to be ruling over every sphere of life in the home and in the community. The testimony upon entrance into their home was to be that the Word of God rules here because we love Him in every way. The testimony of their towns was to be that the Word of God rules here because we love Him in every way. Now, it is easy enough to post Scriptural truths on the wall and forget about actually living in light of it. We have 1 Corinthians 13 plastered in our dining room at home, and I have

often been struck by how I can fail to walk in that love toward my family in that room where the reminder is so prominently placed. It's not wrong to put Scripture up in prominent places in your life. But just know that this means little if there is no all-encompassing love for God ruling in your inner man. But if that love is there, then these words of God should be ruling over your every relationship and every interaction in the home and in the community at large. Meaning that at any moment you can stop and ask yourself – am I loving God right now like I ought to be?

Conclusion: And if we are honest, the answer to that question is always no, isn't it? We'll never love God with this all-encompassing love. So this core of the Law of God – this Great commandment stands over us like a judge and condemns us before God. He deserves more. He is greater and more worthy of the love we show Him in any given moment. But though our love will fail, His love has never failed. He has loved us first by giving His Son for us and redeeming us through the precious blood of His Son sacrificed for us. He was condemned so that we can be forgiven. And if you know this love from God in Christ, then you can fan into flame this love for God which is all-encompassing and ruled by His Word in every area of life. Let's pray.