

As God Makes a Home in Us 2020  
Deuteronomy 6:1-9 Matthew 22:34-40

Deuteronomy 6:1-9 (New Revised Standard Version)

Now this is the commandment—the statutes and the ordinances—that the Lord your God charged me to teach you to observe in the land that you are about to cross into and occupy, so that you and your children and your children’s children, may fear the Lord your God all the days of your life, and keep all his decrees and his commandments that I am commanding you, so that your days may be long. Hear therefore, O Israel, and observe them diligently, so that it may go well with you, and so that you may multiply greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, as the Lord, the God of your ancestors, has promised you. Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

Matthew 22:34-40 (New Revised Standard Version)

When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. “Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?” He said to him, “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”

When I operated a computer and office products business,  
from time to time I needed to stop, step back and consider  
what kind of stores we were going to be and operate,  
and how was our business going to be profitable and unique  
so that we stood out as different & better than our competitors?

Then, once I had that figured out,  
everything else would flow from that initial determination,  
because after that, every business decision I made  
either moved us toward that goal or further away.

When the Israelites reached the edge of the Promised Land,  
it have been a 40-year trek through the wilderness from slavery  
and now at last, God’s promises were about to be fulfilled.

In this, his final sermon, Moses reminds them of their history,  
of all that God had done for them along the way from Egypt,  
and reminds them of all that God had instructed and commanded.

Then Moses warns them,  
that **their relationship with God** must always define who they were,  
and that, must guide every decision they made once in the land,  
for from that, everything else would fall right into place.

Moses explains what their relationship with God will mean. vs 5-6, 2

You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart...so that your days may be long.

As God would reveal his purpose through the prophet Isaiah,42:6

I am the LORD, I have called you in righteousness, I have taken you by the hand and kept you; I have given you as a covenant to the people, **a light to the nations.**

In other words,  
let the truth of your relationship with the Lord God define you,  
so that other nations around you do notice the difference.

Rather than other gods or the corrupting influences all around you,  
stand faithfully and apart from your neighbors and their ways,  
as a light, that shines showing them the righteous way,  
by living within the grace, truth, wisdom and ways of God.

That was Israel's task & purpose having received the Promised Land,  
i.e. to demonstrate and model before all of the world  
what it means to be & to live in relationship of grace with God...  
... which was to testify to the truth of God's love and purpose.

### **But what does God want from us?**

a Buddhist monk spends his day and night in silent meditation  
a Hindu doing early morning puja on the shores of the Ganges  
a woman worships at a sacred shrine created in her home

Muslim men in line for prayer facing toward Mecca 6 times a day  
an African tribal chief pours libations over the village idol  
a Holiness pastor dances around waving a poisonous snake

### **What does God want from us?**

That is the fundamental question of theology and all religions.

But to narrow things down a bit, from a Christian perspective,  
what, does Scripture, and the life and ministry of Jesus  
teach us and reveal about  
the purpose, expectations and demands of our God?—

**-for if we don't know what God wants, then how can we fulfill?,  
and how can we possibly get our call to discipleship right?**

It was that one question, “**what does God really want from us?**”,  
that caused increasingly bitter and hostile conflict,  
and the religious authorities to reject the teaching of Jesus.

Although both Jesus and his critics, the religious authorities,  
all quoted from the same Old Testament Scriptures,

**yet they came to different and opposite conclusions**  
about how those same texts should be applied to life,  
and what they reveal about what God really wants.

And the way that Jesus interpreted the Old Testament texts  
was so radically different from the religious authorities,  
and was such a threat to their religious system and power,  
that they considered the torture of crucifixion necessary  
in order to protect God's truth & their religious traditions.

This difference in understanding and interpretation of Scripture  
really goes back to the time of Babylonian exile and captivity.

Despite centuries of warnings given through the Hebrew prophets,  
when Israel was defeated by the Babylonian armies,  
taken into exile, and the Temple & Jerusalem were destroyed,

the religious teachers and leaders pondered and asked,  
"How could this have happened,  
and why has God abandoned us to this terrible defeat?"

Many of them concluded that it was because  
they had rebelled against God by not observing God's Law,  
specifically, the 10 Commandments given through Moses.

Their solution to avoid breaking God's Commandments in the future,  
was to adopt more legalistic rules like a fence or a barrier,  
or as a safety buffer that would surround God's Commandments  
**to help them adhere more completely and strictly  
to the letter of the law in every possible way.**

Judaism developed into a highly ritualistic and legalistic system  
of endless rules, traditions and restrictions for holiness,  
and detailed regulations to govern over every aspect of life.

#### **What does God want from us?**

Their answer was strict adherence to the details of tradition & Law  
focused on avoiding any contamination from sinners or outcasts.

And the purpose of all their external religious rules and rituals,  
was to earn and justify God's favor, and gain access to the Lord  
through the careful observance of every detail of the Law,  
by which they hoped and expected to be deemed  
worthy and deserving of God's favor and mercy.

\* **So the focus was on diligent human effort, striving to please God.**

For some, their religion had become ritual and outward appearances,  
with little sense of mercy and compassion for the weak and outcast,  
that judged harshly, and failed to reflect God's love and mercy.

In contrast to the scribes & Pharisees, and their legalistic system  
Jesus taught that Israel's problems and failures were not  
for failing to perform the religious rituals well enough,  
but that their religion become mostly external and outward,  
and not an authentic expression of God's heart and truth.

As Jesus would explain in **Matthew 23:27-28**,

*Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which on the outside look beautiful, but inside they are full of the bones of the dead and of all kinds of filth. So you also on the outside look righteous to others, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.*

Or, **Luke 11:39-42**

*Then Jesus said, "Now you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness. ... and neglect justice and the love of God.*

Jesus severely chastised and condemned the religious leaders  
because their ritual religious practices all focused outward,  
and were more about making a good impression & looking pious,  
than in true expressions of heartfelt-godly-affections.

All through Scripture, we read of God's love, mercy and justice,  
and that because of our relationship with God **through grace**,  
we're to live within relationships of love for our neighbors.

The Commandments were never intended to earn or deserve God's love,

nor claim that our obedience makes us worthy of God's blessings.

**The purpose of the 10 Commandments was simply  
to define our relationships with God and with one another,  
and help us to live together in justice & peace God as intends.**

They tell us how to live better, more fulfilled and meaningful lives.

The commandments match the way God designed and created our world,  
showing us how to live into justice, caring for one another,  
and enjoy healthy-gracious relationships, as God intends.

But along the way,  
somehow it seems that the message got garbled,  
somehow the religious leaders drew the wrong conclusions.

**The mission & ministry of Jesus was to correct that misinterpretation  
and that misunderstanding became a source of conflict & hostility  
that caused of the religious authorities  
to reject, challenge and crucify Christ.**

In our Matt text, a group of religious leaders had challenged Jesus  
with a series of hostile questions concerning God's word. vs. 35-36  
and one of them, a lawyer, asked him (Jesus) a question to test him. Teacher, which commandment  
in the law is the greatest?

What is the essence, the foundation, the basis of God's law?  
What is the most important? **What does God really want from us?**

**What does God want from us?**

Jesus answers by quoting, Deuteronomy 6:4-5 and Leviticus 19:18.  
vs. 37-38

(Jesus) He said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."

**So what does God want?**

That we respond to God's love, grace & mercy with our whole being,  
with our whole heart, soul, mind and strength,  
which takes its form in our worship and love of neighbor...

... which is to testify to God's truth, grace, and healing purpose,  
by living out and reflecting the compassion and mercy of the Lord...

... not as an onerous requirement, duty or harsh demand,  
but our heartfelt desire to please the Lord in response,  
and reflect God's gracious love that we have received.

As I have been loved by God, so I must love others,  
even the unlovely, the difficult, the offensive and obnoxious.  
As I have been forgiven by God, so I must learn to forgive others.

What matters, the singular priority, is all out devotion to God,  
and we rightly respond to God's grace by loving our neighbors.  
**Point is, if we get that right, all the rest falls into place.**

As 1 John 4:19-21 explains, these two commandments are inseparable.

We love because he first loved us. Those who say, "I love God," and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.

In faithful response to God's gracious love and blessings,  
we ourselves become caring dispensers of God's love and grace,  
and God's commandments show us how to live  
in loving relationship with our neighbors as God intends.

As we read in Deuteronomy, vs. 5, 8-9

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. ... Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

on your hand;

God's grace and love, are to guide us in all we do (with our hands)

on your forehead

God's grace and love,  
are to guide our attitudes, our perspectives and goals.

on your house and on your gates

God's grace and love  
are to guide us where we live and every aspect of our lives.

What does this commitment to God, heart, soul, mind and might look like?

Our commitment to God is an on-going spiritual journey,  
as a growing and deepening walk in faith with God  
that changes us and transforms us along the way.

Our relationship with God is always in process. It's never static,  
and we are either walking toward Jesus or we are walking away,  
**either we are going deeper or becoming more complacent.**

Our call and task is to be responsive to God's love and grace,  
and as his disciples, to look for what God is doing,  
in the world, in the church and in people's lives,  
--- and join in whatever God is up to.

We truly need to hear and reflect that message today.  
So, how is my faith making a difference, and is it  
defining my relationships and how I live my life?

The grace of God in me that I have received,  
is it pointing beyond myself toward the steadfast mercy of God?

The ultimate question is, **what does God want from us?**  
We answer by asking, how can I more faithfully participate  
in God's grace and purpose, God's mission and Kingdom?

**What does the Lord want from us?** According to (Micah 6:8)

He has told you, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?