

Remember two things – Here's what hit me SERIES, #6 – 2.21.10

Sometime around June of 1983, I received my Student Handbook from Johnson Bible College. I had just spent a year at a state university where there were very few rules, so it was a bit of a shock to read through all the things I was responsible to know. I couldn't let my hair touch my collar. I had to wear a shirt with a collar to class. I had to wear a jacket and tie to chapel (along with shirt and pants). But the jacket and tie were required for evening chapels on Tuesday and Thursday. For the Wednesday and Friday morning chapels, I didn't have to wear them. I could wear shorts, but only outside "the circle". Inside the circle was the building that contained most of the classes and offices, so if you stepped across the circular road, you better have long pants on. There were many other rules, and they were nothing I couldn't live with, but those first couple of weeks, there was a lot of talk about what was allowed and when and where. There were many things to remember.

The toughest thing about living under the OT Law would have been remembering everything. There are hundreds of commands, and it wasn't like everybody got their own copy either.

Then Jesus came along and said to remember two things: **Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.** And: **Love your neighbor as yourself.** He added: **There is no commandment greater than these.** (from **Mark 12:29-31**).

That's it. Just remember those two. On another occasion (**Matthew 22:40**) he added: **All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.**

This hit me this week as I listened through the first half of **Deuteronomy**. I kidded Joanie early in the week saying, "Do you know what hit me about **Deuteronomy**? It hit me that I wish I was in **Matthew!**" But **Deuteronomy** isn't as hard as **Leviticus**. It isn't just one commandment after another, but rather a summary of their journey from Egypt through the wilderness and a summary of the commandments too, along with some beautiful descriptions of how good things could be if the Israelites would only be faithful in two things: Love God, and love one another.

Now for the Israelites, that's a little too simple. It's like the joke about golf where someone says, ""There are only two things wrong with your golf shot. Distance and direction. You take care of those and you'll be a golfer!" The Israelites had to keep ALL these commandments even if they didn't have the slightest notion of how they contributed to loving God or loving their neighbor. And yet, over time their teachers saw what Jesus made official: There are two commandments that stand above all – Love God with every part of yourself and love your neighbor as you love yourself. For those of us no longer under the detailed Law of the Old Testament, those two commands really do sum up the Christlike life.

Where did Jesus get these two commandments? The first is found in **Deuteronomy 6:4-5**:
⁴ **Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.** ⁵ **Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.** What's missing from that when you compare it to the way Jesus said it? "Mind". Two thoughts on that: 1) Scholars say that "heart" included the mind to the Hebrew way of thinking, rather than just the emotions, which is how we use "heart". When Jesus said both "heart" AND "mind", he was speaking to Greek and Roman and even the American way of thinking, but the idea is to love God with the whole person. 2) In **Galatians 4:1-7**, Paul compares the time of the Law to the childhood of God's people. This doesn't mean that Abraham or Moses were more childish

than we are – quite the opposite in many cases! But they had less revelation about God’s plan. They didn’t fully comprehend about Jesus Christ, about grace. We have that knowledge. Now with a child, you sometimes have to say: “Do what I tell you and don’t ask why!” They cannot possibly understand all of your reasons. But in these days of Christ, these days when the faith is under attack by people who say it is primitive and doesn’t stand up to an educated mind, we have to learn to love God with all of our MIND as well as with our heart and soul and strength, and we have to teach our kids to do the same.

And actually, that’s what the next part of **ch. 6** is about – teaching God’s commands to your children, which we could say is God’s way for you to apply to your kids that second great command about loving your neighbor as yourself, which Jesus got from **Leviticus 19:18**. **Deuteronomy 6:6-9** says: **⁶ These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. ⁷ 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. ⁸ Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. ⁹ Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.**

Up until the modern era, most young people learned their life’s work by serving an apprenticeship. You went to work with a candlestick maker at his shop and learned every aspect of the trade from candle-making to collecting money to buying your materials to dealing with hateful customers. Very often, the master and teacher of the business was your own father or mother. And that’s exactly how God tells them to go about passing on the faith.

We do education differently. Unless you home-school, you send your kids off for 13 years to public or private school where someone else teaches them math and science and history. I’m not against that. It has its advantages. That’s how I was raised, which is a testimony in itself. ☺ And the church has followed a similar pattern. How do you train your kids in the Lord? Sunday School, Youth Groups, VBS where the professionals and committed volunteers teach them what God has said.

That’s a system that has advantages too, but the problem is that you can learn facts from someone you don’t know very well, but faith grows when you see it lived out in day to day problems and challenges. So if your plan, parents, is to let the pros – the Children’s Director, the Youth Minister – teach your kids the faith, then read again this word from **Deuteronomy 6** about how to love your children as you love yourself. I had some fine Sunday School teachers growing up, but I am a Christian today because my Mom and Dad talked about the Lord when we sat at home and when we drove along the road, and when we lay down and when we got up.

Remember two things. Love God. Love your neighbor. This hit me in **Deuteronomy 5** when I ran across the Ten Commandments again. Now when I want to look up the Ten Commandments, I usually turn to **Exodus 20**, their first appearance. But if they only appeared in **Exodus 20**, they may not have stood out to people over the years and we wouldn’t be talking about where we can and can’t post them, because it’s this repeat of them in **ch. 5** where they are really brought out as not just any 10 commandments but as The Ten Commandments.

And as you have probably heard before, the first four commandments tell us to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength.

The first one: **⁶ "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. ⁷ "You shall have no other gods before me.**

The second one: ⁸ **"You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. ⁹ You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, ¹⁰ but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.**

The third one: ¹¹ **"You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.**

And the fourth one: ¹² **"Observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy, as the LORD your God has commanded you. ¹³ Six days you shall labor and do all your work, ¹⁴ but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work...¹⁵ Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the LORD your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the LORD your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day.**

Those four commands are about loving God by honoring him as holy and keeping the relationship exclusive. But they aren't just about him, because any god other than YHWH is no god at all, and to follow another is at best to waste your time and at worst to enter the realm of the deceiver.

I could do a whole lesson on the Sabbath day. If I did that, I'd say that the idea of working six days and saving one day for worship and rest is such a good idea that God modeled it for us when he created the universe. And I'd say that Jesus reinterpreted the Sabbath when he said that he was Lord over the Sabbath (**Mark 2:28**), and that the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath (**Mark 2:27**), meaning that the Sabbath isn't a master that confines us but rather a gift that brings us rest and refocus and joy. And I'd mention that Paul applied this in **Colossians 2** by naming the Sabbath among other things that were a shadow of things to come, the reality of which is found in Christ, and he said "Don't let anyone judge you with regard to a Sabbath Day" (**Colossians 2:16-17**). And if I did a lesson like that, I might even make a snide remark about how we want to post the Ten Commandments, but we only intend to keep nine of them, the Sabbath being the exception!

But I'm not even going to mention those things. Instead I want to simply point out that remembering the Sabbath was a way the Israelites showed their love for God by remembering their deliverance from Egypt where they were slaves for centuries and where they never got a day off. The first four commands say: Love the Lord your God.

The six following say: Love your neighbor as yourself. It starts at home with: ¹⁶ **"Honor your father and your mother, as the LORD your God has commanded you, so that you may live long and that it may go well with you in the land the LORD your God is giving you.**

And then it goes out to how you treat the people in the larger community:

¹⁷ **"You shall not murder.**

¹⁸ **"You shall not commit adultery.**

¹⁹ **"You shall not steal.**

²⁰ **"You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.**

²¹ **"You shall not covet your neighbor's wife. You shall not set your desire on your neighbor's house or land, his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor."**

Some of these are so basic that we would hardly call them love. “Honey, do you still love me?” “Well I haven’t murdered you, have I?” But as you know, Jesus reinterpreted some of these too by driving the meaning deeper (**Matthew 5:21-30**). “If you harbor anger against your brother, you have murdered him in your heart.” He may not even know it, but it has poisoned you. “If you harbor lust, you are an adulterer in your heart”. So love your neighbor by taking these to the extreme.

Remember two things: Love God with everything you are. Love your neighbor as you love yourself. I have heard that second command smeared with a little modern psychology that says that you have to learn to love yourself before you can love your neighbor. But the command isn’t about self-image but rather self-protection. We want others to treat us well. We get mad when they don’t. We feed ourselves. We lay down to sleep. We have to fight the urge to grab the best for ourselves. The Bible just tells us to apply that to others.

The passage I had you read for today is about that. **Deuteronomy 15:1-11** describes a beautiful way for the Israelites to live in community, and one that goes against every natural inclination we have to look out for ourselves and make people pay their own way: ¹ **At the end of every seven years you must cancel debts.** ² **This is how it is to be done: Every creditor shall cancel the loan he has made to his fellow Israelite. He shall not require payment from his fellow Israelite or brother, because the LORD's time for canceling debts has been proclaimed.** How do you like that? It depends on whether you happen to be a lender or (like most of us here) a borrower! ³ **You may require payment from a foreigner, but you must cancel any debt your brother owes you.** ⁴ **However, there should be no poor among you, for in the land the LORD your God is giving you to possess as your inheritance, he will richly bless you,** ⁵ **if only you fully obey the LORD your God and are careful to follow all these commands I am giving you today.** ⁶ **For the LORD your God will bless you as he has promised, and you will lend to many nations but will borrow from none. You will rule over many nations but none will rule over you.** It’s going to be such a rich land that no one should be poor in the first place, if only you will stay faithful to God. However, since that’s not likely...

⁷ **If there is a poor man among your brothers in any of the towns of the land that the LORD your God is giving you, do not be hardhearted or tightfisted toward your poor brother.** ⁸ **Rather be openhanded and freely lend him whatever he needs.** ⁹ **Be careful not to harbor this wicked thought: "The seventh year, the year for canceling debts, is near," so that you do not show ill will toward your needy brother and give him nothing.** (That’s a wicked thought? My brother shows up two days before the new year and wants to borrow \$50 bucks? Sounds only prudent to reject him. God calls that a wicked thought!) **He may then appeal to the LORD against you, and you will be found guilty of sin.** ¹⁰ **Give generously to him and do so without a grudging heart; then because of this the LORD your God will bless you in all your work and in everything you put your hand to.** ¹¹ **There will always be poor people in the land. Therefore I command you to be openhanded toward your brothers and toward the poor and needy in your land.**

It’s astounding to me that God says in one verse that there shouldn’t be any poor people in the land, and then a few verses later that there always will be. Some folks just can’t get it together. They aren’t smart enough to keep it together, or they inherit a mess for their parents, or (these days) the jobs they can do don’t pay enough to live on. I read this week about a young woman who works for a government-sponsored program and she makes \$11,000 a year plus health insurance. She went to the

doctor for a fairly serious problem and the bill was nearly \$1,500, and her government-sponsored medical insurance denied payment. There are lots of reasons why there are poor people in the land. So every seven years, God's Law required the Israelites to hit the reset button and start fresh, and every fifty years, there was an even farther-reaching reset button called the Year of Jubilee.

I put this in your reading for today because there is no greater temptation before us to refuse to love our neighbors than with our money. We don't like handouts and we want people to work hard, and the Bible supports that too. But when we listen too much to voices other than God's, we start to think that the highest values in life are protecting our money, saving for retirement, looking out for ourselves, and turning a blind eye to those who really don't have a chance to keep their heads above water. Jesus said, "No, you love your neighbor as you do yourself."

We're not obliged to institute the Sabbatical Year and forgive all debts every seven years. We aren't under the Law. But do you see the principle of loving your neighbor that supports this law? You go to a cheap restaurant and enjoy a meal. How much tip do you leave? The person waiting on you is probably either trying to pay for college or else supporting two or three kids on a tiny wage. Maybe you could show a little neighbor love by adding a few dollars to the tip, right? Or maybe someone actually owes you money and you sense that they're trying hard to make it all work. Could you afford to forgive that debt in the name of Christ, both as an encouragement and a witness? A lot of folks I know have problems with the health care reform that is pending before Congress. I get that. What are we willing to do, though, to help those who pretty much can't go to the doctor in the current situation? Maybe they work for you or live next door or go to school with you or sit next to you in church. Love your neighbor as yourself.

I invited you to read **chapter 8**, but I have time for just two verses: **You may say to yourself, "My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me." ¹⁸ But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your forefathers, as it is today.**

The easiest time to forget God is when things are going great for us. I think America has been guilty of that. Maybe you have too. God's blessing can make us arrogant and unloving when we forget the God who gave it. But the correction is simple. Not easy to do, but simple.

Remember two things.

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and mind and strength.

Love your neighbor as yourself.

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