

Deuteronomy 6:5-9

5 You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. 6 Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. 7 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. 8 Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, 9 and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

Deuteronomy is about the law; it is divine guidance and God's will for the people. When you think of the law, you think of it as a requirement, a burden, something that you have to do because you are supposed to. Driving the speed limit is the law, it is something that we should do, but most of us, if not all of us, can confess that we really don't do it all the time. That's because the authority of the law does not motivate us. We know it is there and we know what we should do but we lack motivation.

In Deuteronomy Moses is the law man the new sheriff, or marshal that God has hired to protect the people from the bad guys. But before he can get his job done he has to educate the people in regards to what is expected. The words located in the Bible are spoken by Moses but it is not the word of Moses, it is the word of God. It is not the Law of Moses, though it is frequently referred to as such in the Bible, it is the Law of God. The law commands obedience. However, like dike driving the speed limit, we know we should, we know it's the law, but we continually fail to obey. In chapter 5 we have The Ten Commandments. In chapter 6, we have The Great Commandment. It is emphasized. It stands out above all the other commandments. You have to love God completely, with all your heart, soul, and strength. But our problem is that authoritarianism does not motivate us.

When we get into the New Testament we see Jesus during Passion Week being challenged by a teacher of the law who asks "Which is the most important commandment?" The rabbis had 613 different commandments and often discussed which one of these is the greatest. The answer that Jesus gave them is verse 5 of today's Scripture. Love God one hundred percent, with all of your heart, soul, mind, and strength. It is authoritative, you have to do it, it is the law, it is God's requirement, and it is endorsed by Jesus. You might be thinking "Now wait a second preacher, you give a good pep rally here but I have to make it through the rest of the week surrounded by a bunch of rude and obnoxious people and demanding this commandment does not motivate me enough to make it through the rest of the week."

I was in Nashville in February 2007 at a club that hosted a writer's night. In Nashville there are several clubs, restaurants, and bars where songwriters can play original material. Most of the people are friendly and engage in conversation with one another. I was talking with the bartender and a man sitting next to me. The bartender was talking about how she had been in several failed relationships but was finally happily married. I asked her "What is the difference, what is different about this one?" She said "He loved me back" That explains a lot, it means that before this she was in lopsided relationships. When she gave me the answer I looked over at the guy sitting next to me and said "That's a song, we have got to write this."

I'm going to ask you to put your imagination caps on once again and imagine your very best birthday present you have ever received. Maybe it was a ring, or a bicycle, or something that you dreamed about and wished for. There is a hidden beauty in the law, something that is truly fantastic once you discover it. The law is part of the covenant and the covenant is based on love.

God loves the world and the people in it. God desires a relationship with humanity. The reward of the relationship with God is loving care. When you understand this as a commandment then it is a burden, authoritarianism, something that you have to do. You view it as demanding you have to do this or pay the consequences. But what God really wants is to be loved back. What God wants is a loving relationship where you get the warm, glowing, fuzzy feeling of love. God is in love with you.

God gives us the best gift we have ever received - God's love. So, we are here to celebrate it out of our appreciation. We come to church enlightened. When we come to worship, we come to celebrate a love relationship with God. This is what makes our religion so special - God reaches out to us. What makes our Sunday morning worship so special is that we celebrate the best thing ever – the love of God. It is out of love that God gives us these wonderful resources of food, clothing, and shelter. We not only get a surplus of comfort and entertainment, we get the very best gift of all – God's son Jesus. Now think of your children. For many of them coming to church is boring because they view it as something that they should do out of duty and responsibility. We have lost our children to a Nintendo world of doing what you want to do. In this world duty and obligations have no appeal. But we see the light of revelation. We understand that God just wants to be loved back. The entire Bible, all of the law, all of the commandments, is not authoritarianism; it is God wanting to be loved back. Our children and our friends who are lapsed need to see and understand what we know. It is joy to worship God because it is part of a celebration of love given to us. We rejoice because God loves us.

What we have is love and love is all we need. Love is the foundation of the law. It is not legalism that demands obedience as a necessity or duty, it is God having affection for the people. We have an intimate relationship with God. The obedience that the Bible teaches is like a wedding vow where you promise to be true to one another. When we fall in love it is a life changing event. You change to be a better person where your focus is no longer on the self but a new focus on the relationship. This is such a beautiful thing. God love us and only wants to be loved back in the relationship.