

Deuteronomy 6:4

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Date: 01 October 2017

Preacher: Paul Levy

[0 : 00] I want to speak on one verse. It's a very famous verse, we've read it twice already this morning. It's Deuteronomy 6 verse 4.

! Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and with all your might and all your strength. So the great commandment, Jesus says it's the greatest commandment, is to love Yahweh, the God of Israel.

It's to love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your strength. And if you know your Bibles at all, you've heard this passage talking about, it's known amongst the Jews as the Sheba.

And it was as well known to the Jewish people as the Lord's Prayer is to us, or the Creed, or the Grace. And a lot of Jews repeated this every day.

They began every morning when they got up, the first thing they said was to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. And they said it to themselves every day. And since the Bible says that you and I, we are now our children of Abraham, if we're believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, there's no reason at all why you and I shouldn't get up tomorrow morning and say, Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.

[1 : 31] You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. There's no reason why we shouldn't say that as the children of Abraham. And this commandment is endorsed, isn't it, by Jesus in the New Testament.

He's asked, what is the greatest commandment? And he quoted it. And he went on to say that the second greatest commandment is to love your neighbour as yourself, quoted from Leviticus. And the two commandments, they always go together.

You cannot have one without the other. And together, these two commandments sum up the whole of the law of God. They sum up the ten commandments. But the greatest, Jesus says, is to love the Lord God, Yahweh, with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.

And so I want to look at that in a little bit more detail this morning. What does that mean? We're talking only a total, wholehearted love. That's the command. All our heart.

The heart is our innermost being. The heart is the centre of a person. It's what drives us.

[2 : 36] It's what motivates us. Only we know our hearts. And actually, sometimes we don't know them that well, do we?

Because the heart is so full of all things the Bible tells us. We don't know the hearts of our children. Do we? We don't. You can't know it. Neither can I.

In fact, God is the only one that knows what is going on in our hearts. The Bible says, man looks at the outward appearance. The Lord looks on the heart.

And so when the Bible speaks about the heart, it's speaking about the real you. What drives you. What motivates you. Behind all of the outward stuff that you put on.

So the great commandment is to love God with all our hearts. Not 50% of our hearts. Not 90% of our hearts. Not 99% of our hearts.

[3 : 37] But 100% of our hearts. With everything that we've got. And then the soul and the strength, I think, are just different ways of saying the same thing. And Jesus adds, I don't know whether you've noticed, he adds for good measure the mind.

So in other words, the great commandment, the most important thing that you and I learn, is to love Yahweh, our God, with everything we've got.

And the reason for that, can you see the verse? The reason here, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. He is one. There is only one God.

There is only one God to love. If there were lots of gods, we could parcel out our love amongst the different gods. And that is what people did in the ancient world. It depended on what they wanted, as to which God they consulted.

So if they wanted rain, they would go to Baal. God of the rain. If they wanted knowledge of the underworld, there were the gods or goddesses of the underworld.

[4 : 47] And they went to them. And you would parcel out your love amongst different gods. And it would depend on what you needed. Or where you were. And so if you were in a territory where people worshipped a particular god, you would respect that god while you were there.

And you would worship him there. And that's why the Bible begins with Genesis chapter 1 verse 1. Genesis chapter 1 verse 1. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

It's an absolutely revolutionary chapter. The whole point of Genesis chapter 1 is that the God of Israel, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob created everything.

And so Genesis 1 verse 1 is telling you that therefore he is the God of the rain. And he is the God of the underworld. And he is the God of absolutely anything you can think of.

And he is the God of everywhere, no matter where you come from. He's the God of everywhere because he created everywhere. There is nowhere that God is not.

[5 : 53] And therefore he is the only God. That's the main message of Genesis 1. He is the only God. And that is why we have to love him with all our heart and soul and strength.

And that is why God describes himself in the Old Testament as a jealous God, doesn't he? What does it mean by that? If somebody says to you, is your God jealous?

What does it mean that God is jealous? Well, it means this. Like any devoted husband who loves his wife. It means that he will not share that love with his rivals.

What would you think of the wife who said to her husband, for years I've had your photograph on my bedside cabinet. And for years you've been the number one, but I've decided to put someone else there.

Alongside. And so there's two photographs there. From now on. If you were that lady's husband, you wouldn't be pleased, wouldn't you? And that is why God is a jealous God.

[6 : 53] God will not have any rivals to his love. We've got to love him with all our heart and mind and soul and strength. So I want to ask, first of all, what does it mean to love God?

Then I want to ask, how can we love God? And there's a question in the middle, but if I tell you that it'll ruin the sermon. What does it mean to love God? What ideas come into your mind when you think of loving God?

If I asked you to put a photo with loving God next to that tweet, what photo would you put? What photo would you use to describe loving God?

Would it be someone entranced in worship? Would it be someone on their knees? What would you think? Quite likely the first idea, the thing that you think of immediately, when you think about loving God, is having emotional feelings about God.

That is, isn't it, the first thing that people think of when they think of love. They think of romantic feelings. That is what love is, people think. Romantic feelings. And the stronger the feelings are, the greater the love.

[8 : 07] I love you so much I feel like I could burst. Whatever that means. But I don't know that you picked it up. What is the emphasis of Deuteronomy chapter 6? What is the emphasis of Deuteronomy chapter 6?

Does Deuteronomy chapter 6, when Natalie read it to us, does it focus on romantic feelings about God? Does it mean we have to go around having fuzzy feelings all the time? And does it mean that we have to really worry if the feelings aren't there?

No, the emphasis of Deuteronomy chapter 6 is on obedience. You love God by wholehearted obedience. You love God wholeheartedly by obeying him wholeheartedly.

And the verses that precede this verse, they make that really clear. That we love him by obeying him. And the verses immediately after verses 4 and 5 make that abundantly clear.

That we are to love him to the point where we are constantly thinking of his law. And we're constantly discussing his commandments. And we teach them to our children enthusiastically.

[9 : 19] And we even think of ways, revolutionary ways, where we can help ourselves remember God's law. And so we write them on the door frames of our house or our gate.

We stick post-it notes on our laptop. We tie them as symbols on our hands. We make knots in our handkerchief. It talks about binding the law on our foreheads.

And so we are obsessed with thinking of ways that we can remember God's law. So that we can obey him. That is how you show love in the Old Testament. And do you know what?

Jesus said exactly the same thing. He said to his disciples, If you love me, you will keep my commandments. The man who keeps my commandments is the man who loves me.

That is the kind of love that Jesus wants. Passionate obedience. Not necessarily passionate feelings. I'll say more about that in a moment.

[10:21] But passionate obedience. That is what the Bible thinks of when it thinks of love. We think of feelings. The Bible thinks of obedience. And therefore, if we're loving God with all our hearts.

His law, he says, will be on our hearts. And we won't be satisfied, to quote Jerry Bridges. We won't be satisfied with cruise control obedience. We will want racing car obedience.

Apparently, some cars are fitted with cruise control. You know what cruise control is? And you get up to a certain speed. And then you, I suppose you press a button, do you?

And that applies to cruise control. And you can cruise along at that speed. Presumably, if there's stationary traffic in front of you. You try to remember. I don't even know if you put your brakes on. Or if you're parking in your garage. Which you try to remember to put the brakes on. It's probably not a very good idea for me to ever have a car with cruise control. But the cruise control, you don't have to think about it very much, do you?

[11:26] I can imagine. And most of us are on cruise control as Christians. We have an average level of Christian commitment.

And obedience. And that level of Christian commitment and obedience is usually dictated by the obedience and commitment of our fellow Christians.

We don't want to get too far ahead of them. Although we think we're a bit over the top. And we don't want to get too much behind them because we think, well, they'll disapprove of us. So we cruise along.

And we cruise along very nicely as fellow Christians. But racing drivers are not interested in cruise control, are they? A racing driver, their foot is on the accelerator all the time.

Well, not all the time, but as much as they can be. And we should see ourselves as Christians, as racing drivers rather than cruise control drivers. So we've answered the question, what does it mean?

[12:28] What does the Bible mean by loving God? And we've seen that loving God means obeying him passionately. Wholehearted obedience to God. Now the question that I want to ask, and it's really important so I want to spend the rest of my time on it.

Is this. If there is no love without obedience, if you're not obeying God and you don't love him, it's as simple as that. So the question that we need to ask is this.

Is obedience the same as love? Do you get that? If there's no obedience, there's no love. If we're not obeying God, we don't love him.

And so is obedience the same as love? Is obedience the same as love? And the answer to that question is no, it isn't. Because obedience can take place without love, can't it?

And in fact, in my experience, obedience is rarely motivated by love. You can obey for all sorts of reasons. You can be motivated, you can obey motivated by fear.

[13:33] So you think of the soldier who's on a drill. He obeys as the sergeant major shouts at him. But his mind is not full, is it, of loving thoughts about that sergeant major. You probably can't stand the sight of him, but he obeys him.

Because he has to, out of fear. Slaves obey their masters out of fear. Fear of losing their jobs.

Maybe that's you and your work. You obey your boss out of fear.

You get up and you get into work on time. You clock in on time. Not because you love your master, or you love your work. But because you know what will happen if you don't.

Schoolchildren. You don't obey your teachers because you just love your teachers, do you? You obey them in order to avoid punishments.

Criminals meekly obey a policeman after they've been arrested. But they hate that policeman who's arrested them. So obedience might well be motivated by fear.

[14:37] We may obey God because of fear of punishment. Or the fear that he might withhold his blessing if we don't obey him. Or it might be motivated by guilt.

And guilt isn't very pleasant. So we avoid, don't we, a sinful action. Because we know that if we do it, it will make us feel rotten and it will make us feel guilty. And that's often the case with besetting sins.

And besetting sin is a sin that we're particularly tempted to. And we've committed it time and time again. Even though we don't want to fall. And every time we commit that sin, we know that we are riddled with guilt.

So we usually try, don't we? We think, I don't want to feel like that again after that. So unsuccessfully, we try to avoid that sin in order to avoid guilt. But we know we'll follow.

Not because we love God. Because we don't want to feel guilty. We might obey God out of greed.

[15 : 39] There are TV evangelists. Joe Losty. Joyce Mayer. They exploit this blatantly. Give to our ministry. Sow.

That's the language, isn't it? Sow to our ministry. And see how the Lord blesses you and prospers you. But we may obey God out of pride.

We may obey certain rules. We may conform to a certain standard. Because we want to be accepted by fellow Christians. We want to avoid their disapproval. We don't want people to disapprove of us.

We want to impress them. We want to be known and admired for our zeal and for our piety. And we don't want our fellow Christians to think badly of us. And that's why we obey God. That's actually the motivation for a huge amount of Christian obedience.

A huge amount of Christian obedience. Some of us are naturally compliant. We're just compliant people. We just obey.

[16 : 42] Anyone with children knows, don't they, that some are kind of more naturally prone to be rebellious. Some are more naturally compliant. You think of the two sons with the prodigal son. In the story of the prodigal son.

There was a rebellious one. And there's a compliant one. He always did what his father wanted. And his father never worried about that eldest son.

A bit. But which is the one who is in the party. In the end and who is outside. Things aren't necessarily how they seem. Okay, so are you following me?

If you love God. You will obey God. But obeying God isn't necessarily the same thing. As love.

There is an obedience that is motivated by fear, by guilt, by pride, by habit, by respectability, by repetition.

And such obedience might look really outstanding. Outwardly. It may be very impressive. It may be totally acceptable to other people. But it's totally unacceptable to God.

[17 : 46] Because God wants us to obey him. Because we love him. Do you get that? God wants us to obey him. Because we love him.

Jerry Bridges has this story about how he wanted a job done on his garage. So he was going to book a tradesman, a professional. But his son, who was in his early twenties, offered to do the job without charge.

Just as an act of love for his dad. So Jerry Bridges accepted the offer of his son. His son had never done the job before. Never built anything before. And yet he learned as he went along.

And the result was perfectly acceptable. But if a professional had done it, it would have been that bit better. Much better. But the point is that the motivation was more important to Jerry Bridges.

Than the level of performance. The motivation was more important than the level of performance. And so now, when Jerry Bridges is diagnosed with him.

[18 : 53] And when he went into the garage, he sees the evidence of his son's love. That's what he wants. That's what he wanted.

And that is what God wants. He wants us to obey him because we love him. Incidentally, why do we go on about sin so much?

Why do we say with the Bible, there is no one good. There is no one who does good. Paul says that in Romans chapter 3.

There is no one who does good. Does he mean that no non-Christian act. Somebody who's not a Christian. They never do an act which is socially acceptable. Socially helpful.

Socially good. Of course he doesn't mean that. He says in Romans 13. That the governing authorities are there to reward those who do good. And to punish those who do evil. So it is possible to do good socially. But Paul says there is no one really good.

[19 : 52] There is no one who seeks for God. No one actually does good because they love God. Because they desire God. Because they desire to please him.

Because they want to be like him. That is why we're all sinners. Sinners are perfectly capable of doing outwardly good things. Your neighbours. Your work colleagues. People in school.

They do lots of outwardly good things. But they never do them for the right motive. And the right motive is love for God. And so here's the question I'm building up to.

The third question is. How do we get to love God? How do we grow in our love for God? How can we grow in our love for God? How can we grow in our love for God? How can we grow in our love for God? Do we grit our teeth this morning?

And say from now on I'm going to determine to start loving God? Or I must start loving God more? How can we be attracted to God?

[20 : 58] And want to know him. And want to be like him. I said earlier that love in the Bible isn't primarily about feelings. But obedience. But I do want to say this.

It is motivated yes. By feelings. Attraction. And devotion. So how do we get those feelings. Of attraction.

Those affections. Of devotion. How can we get that love for God? Let me sum it up in one sentence in the New Testament. John says in his letter.

He says. We love. Because he first loved us. We love. Because he first loved us. You see it's all about his love for us.

God's love for you. Comes before your love for him. And our love for him. Can only be. A response to his love for us.

[21 : 59] And you get that in Deuteronomy. Just go to the next. Chapter in Deuteronomy. Chapter 7. Verses 6 and 7. Let me read them to you. Where God says. For you are a people. Holy to the Lord.

Your God. The Lord your God. Has chosen. You to be a people. For his treasured possession. Out of all the peoples. Who are on the face of the earth. It was not because you were more in number. Than any other people. That the Lord set his love on you. And chose you. For you. Were the fewest of all peoples. But it is because the Lord loves you. And is keeping his oath.

That he swore to your fathers. He chose you. As his special people. Of all the peoples. On the face of the earth. It wasn't because you were special. He loved you. Because he loved you.

Why does he love you like this? Why does God love you? Well because he promised. To Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. That he would love you. And why did he love them?

[22 : 55] Well don't ask me. You've got to ask God about that. He just loved them. And because he loved you. He says to the people in Deuteronomy. Because I loved you. I brought you out of Egypt.

And because I brought you out of Egypt. Because I redeemed you. Because I saved you. You must show your love for me. His love for you.

Must come before your love for him. And we will only ever love God. To the extent and to the degree. That we appreciate and enjoy. His great love for us.

If we think that God is against us. We won't love him. If we think that God is waiting. To see how well you'll do. Before he decides to love you.

You won't love him. We might respect him. We might fear him. We might give him some outward level of obedience. But we'll never love God. If we think we're under his judgment. And under his condemnation.

[23 : 55] And we think that we. What we have to do is. We have to achieve something. In order to win his approval. And our love will be burdened. By guilt and fear and wrath. We will never love God.

If we fear his frown. It's only when we sense his smile upon us. That we will love God. We love him. Because he first loved us. And he loves us.

Not because we were lovely. What would be marvellous about that? What would be great about that? What would be special about that? If God loves me. Because I'm such a special person.

And I'm such a nice person. And that's why God loves me. There wouldn't be anything special about that. There wouldn't be anything divine about that. God loved us when we were his enemies. According to Romans 5. When we were hostile to him. He so loved the world. That he gave the world.

[24 : 51] In all its rebellion against him. His only son. And the son of God. The eternal son of God. He united himself. He had a divine nature.

He had always had a divine nature. And yet he added to it. He united himself to a human nature. Can you believe that? The eternal son of God. United himself.

To human nature. He took our nature. And he made it his nature. And so from that on. From that moment on. He was as fully human.

As he was fully God. That was an act of incredible love. And he did it for sinful humanity. And he took the wrath and the condemnation.

That we deserve. And that separates us from him. And separates us from God. And it makes us impossible for us to love him. Truly without fear or guilt.

[25 : 51] And he took that fear of condemnation on himself. When he died upon the cross. Greater love has no one than this. That a man should lay down his life for his friends.

And so if you want to know how much God loves you. You come to the cross. The cross of Jesus. And this is how we know what love is.

John says. Christ Jesus laid down his life for us. God shows his love for us in this. That while we were still sinners. Christ died for us.

And Jesus has not only united himself to us. But he has united us to himself. Like a bridegroom unites himself to his bride.

So that we are now one with him. And God the Father loves us with the same love with which he loves his son. And the bridegroom Jesus took upon himself.

[26 : 54] All our debt and all our sin. All the debt and sin of his bride. And he shares with his bride. His death and his resurrection. And his relationship with the Father.

So. Ed and Fernando will hear these words. A week on Saturday. All that I am. I give to you. All that I have.

I share with you. That's marriage. What do we give to Jesus? We give him our guilt. And our sin. And our debt. And our death. He takes it.

He takes it at the cross. On behalf of his bride. And what does he give to us? He gives us relationship with the Father. We become sons of God through faith in Christ. He gives us his death for sin.

It is our death. He gives us his burial. His resurrection. His ascension. And God looks on us now. As if we had done all that.

[27 : 55] The penalty has been paid. The future resurrection has already taken place. In our head. In our bride group. Jesus. And it's only a matter of time before it happens to us.

Now are you getting excited by this? No. I'll have a look at you. Let me try it a bit harder. We are fellow heirs with Christ Jesus. We're sons of God.

Paul contrasts the obedience of a slave. With the obedience of a son. John Wesley was the founder of Methodism. He was an Anglican vicar in Oxford. He found what was called the Holy Club.

At Oxford University. Students of Oxford. They spent their time reading the Bible. And fasting. And they visited prisoners. They visited the sick. He even went out as a missionary.

To Georgia in America. Which at the time belonged to the UK. And after two years. He came back. A complete and abject failure. He went to a little meeting. And he says in his journal. That about quarter to nine that evening.

[28 : 55] I felt my heart strangely warmed within. And I felt that Christ had died for my sin. Even mine. And he describes that experience.

From moving from being a slave. To being a son. He was just as active after. In fact he was more active after that. But he was active from a completely different motive.

He wasn't earning his salvation anymore. He wasn't trying to impress God anymore. He was doing it because he loved Jesus. And Jesus had died for him. And his heart had been warmed by the love of Jesus.

So what I hope will happen to some of you this morning. That these are the truths the Holy Spirit must show us. It is the Holy Spirit that pours the love of God into our hearts.

So that we begin to grasp. The height and the length and the breadth and the depth. To know the love of God. Which surpasses all knowledge.

[29 : 49] And that is what happens when the Holy Spirit works in your heart. You know that you are loved. Let me finish with this. Luke records in his gospel.

A dinner party. In the house of a Pharisee. And Jesus is invited to the dinner party. And the purpose of it is that they can get Jesus into conversation. So that they can criticise him and condemn him. And so Simon the Pharisee. He omits the norms of etiquette. In that culture. There is no kiss of greeting. The equivalent of a handshake.

There is no anointing with fragrant oil. No washing of feet. People either went barefoot or sandals. And the road was grotty. It would be the equivalent of arriving at someone's house.

For a dinner party. And not being offered a drink. Not being given a handshake. Not being told where the bathroom is. In other words Jesus is snubbed by the Pharisee. And during this posh meal the theologians were disgusted.

[30 : 50] When a woman came up behind Jesus. And anointed his feet with expensive fragrance. And then dried her hair. His feet with her hair. It is an embarrassing display of affection.

From a woman. A woman who Luke describes as a sinner. Which possibly means that she was a prostitute. Or happy. And Jesus senses the disgust among the theologians.

Amongst the clergy. And he tells Simon the Pharisee a simple story. He says. Simon there were two debtors. And one owed a really small amount. And the other owed 500 denarii.

Which is the equivalent of a year and a half's wages. And the creditor cancels both those debts. Which of the debtors will love him most. And Simon says.

Well I guess the one with the biggest debt is cancelled. And Jesus says. You're right. You've got it in one. And the reason why you snubbed me. The reason why you treated me with outward respect.

[31 : 50] And you really snubbed me. Is because. You don't know how much you've been forgiven. Or you don't know how much you need to be forgiven. You've no idea.

How much you need to be forgiven. The cost of forgiveness. And this woman. Who you look down upon. She knows how much she's been forgiven. She knows the cost of that forgiveness.

And that is why she loves me. Because those who've been forgiven most. Will love most. And those who forgive much. Will love much. And how do you get to love God?

The only way that you can get to love God. Is by seeing how much you need to be forgiven. By coming to see that you are a sinner. And in spite of that.

Jesus did all of this for you. Because he loves you. And when you see that. When the Holy Spirit shows you that. That it's not just reading in a book. Not even in the Bible. But when the Holy Spirit shows you that.

[32 : 46] You start loving God. And increasingly you love him with all your heart. And mind. And soul. And strength. A friend of mine wrote in a local newspaper.

The other month. He was very proud of it. And he gets asked to write very occasionally. On local newspapers. And people put comments online. And here is one comment that I saw this week. Worship the Lord thy God.

Well no thanks. I prefer not to be watched 24-7. And then sent to eternal boredom. If I'm well behaved. There's quite a few things wrong with that comment. Isn't there? As if God watches over him 24-7.

He just wants me to stand out of lying to punish me. And even if I'm well behaved. Well I'll be eternally bored. That is non-Christian obedience.

Disobedience. That is disobedience. Contrast that with what Paul says in Colossians 2 verse 20. Where he says. The life. That I now live.

[33 : 44] I live by faith. In the Son of God who loved me. And gave himself for me. John Owen. The greatest of the Puritan theologians. The greatest sorrow and burden.

You can lay on the Father. The greatest unkindness. You can do to him. Is not to believe that he loves you. The greatest sorrow and burden.

You can lay on the Father. The greatest unkindness. You can do to him. Is not to believe that he loves you. if only if only you would realise how much he loves you and that's our problem that's my problem in the Christian life we have no idea how much he loves us think of any human love you've ever come across wrench it up a million times and you get some idea that God loves you and it is only when you realise that God loves you like that with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his mind and with all his strength that you will begin to love him that way in return let's pray