

Teaching children to love God

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- [0 : 00] If we turn to the chapter that we read in Deuteronomy, Deuteronomy chapter 6, I want to think especially of the words that we find from verse 4 through to verse 7.
- They may be making one or two references to other parts of the chapter as well. Now last week there were three baptisms and vows were taken concerning the bringing up of children.
- And many of us have taken those same vows or very similar vows to bring up children. And maybe even those who haven't taken them for their own children, but as part of the congregation look on, there is also a responsibility, not as immediate certainly as the responsibility that lies upon parents, but nonetheless a responsibility concerning the children that are being raised within our church family.
- And my concern today is to think as to the manner in which we are to instruct our children. We promise to do that. We promise to bring them up in the fear of God.
- But my concern is to ask the question, well, how do we go about it? And to see what answers we find in the chapter that we've read, and particularly the verses that I've highlighted.
- [1 : 26] We find in the verses a promise or a concern. There in verse 2 it says that thou mightest fear the Lord thy God to keep all his statutes and his commandments, which I command thee, thou and thy Son and thy Son's Son, all the days of thy life.
- And so the concern that there is, is not only for us, but for our children, and indeed our children, that they would all fear the Lord. Now before looking at maybe the matter of the how, as to how we should instruct our children, I just want to notice a couple of things almost by way of introduction.
- First of all, there is, in that verse that we read, in verse 2, an expectation concerning the spiritual destiny of the children of believers.
- This verse, and indeed the scriptures from start to finish, work on the assumption that the children of believers will, in the normal course of affairs, follow in the faith of their parents.
- That is the norm. Now we know, of course, that there are exceptions, and for maybe some here, painful exceptions, and we're conscious of that. And we almost hesitate to say this for fear of maybe causing pain.
- [2 : 51] But the reality remains that the Bible's expectation, and God's expectation, is that the children of believers will, in due course, follow in the faith of their parents.
- That is the norm. It's not a lottery. It's not a case where some are fortunate and some are. That is not what the Bible leads us to believe. The Bible does not lead us to expect rebellion in our children, or expect rejection in our children.
- It happens. But that ought not to be the norm, and we certainly ought not to expect it in our own children. The norm, the expectation that the Bible has is that if a child is brought up to love God, if he is brought up, taught from the Word of God, then we can reasonably expect that that child will follow in the faith of their parents.

Now, we're going to develop that a little in a moment, but I leave that down as a ground rule from which to begin. Another point I want to make also, almost by way of introduction, our concern is that our children would grow up to fear the Lord.

There in verse 2, this is the concern that we would fear God. Now, today, the very suggestion of wanting a child to fear God might, that alone, cause a bit of rejection among some.

[4 : 20] We say, well, do we want our children to fear anybody? The last thing we want is our child to be afraid. What's this business of fearing God? Well, certainly it is not the picture of being terrified of God.

It's not the picture of painting God as some kind of big bogeyman in the sky who will punish us and send down flashes of lightning if we disobey.

But what it does paint, and the picture that it does present to us, is that we and our children, even a child, should know something of the reverence and the awe that is appropriate in the light of who God is.

And maybe to use a word that is more current in usage, that we should respect God. That our children should respect God.

And the respect of God comes with the knowledge of God. As we know who God is, what kind of God he is, what a great God he is, what a powerful God he is. It is right and fitting that even a small child should know what it is to respect God.

[5 : 22] To know that the worship of God is something important and something solemn. It is not just something where they can muck about and, well, it is just like any activity. There should be a respect for God.

A fear of God in that sense. And it is an interesting thing. With the knowledge of God comes this respect of God. A respect for God leads us to obey him because we realize that he is worthy of our obedience.

It leads us to trust in him. And that in turn expels fear. The psalmist in Psalm 56 speaks of not fearing man, of not fearing anything precisely because he is trusting in God.

So you begin with the fear of God, which in due turn leads other fears to be expelled. And so it is in no way a morbid thing or something that we would not want our children to be subjected to.

Today, of course, you hear the phrase, sometimes you hear it mentioned in jest. Somebody is a God-feeder. Or somebody will say, oh, you're a God-fearing woman or a God-fearing man.

[6 : 31] And it's said in jest. And the reason why the idea of fearing God is seen as quaint or even unsavory is precisely because there isn't a knowledge of God.

People think it an odd thing, a strange thing to speak of fearing God precisely because they don't know God. If they knew God, then they'd be able to say, ah, yes, this is right and this is proper.

That there should be a reverence and a respect and a fear of God. So, again, that almost by way of introduction. We want to bring up children who fear God.

We have an expectation that our children will grow up in the fear of God. Now, does that mean that it is an automatic thing? Does that mean that it's simply a case of, ah, solely because the parents are believers, we can, ah, assume with no effort on our part that this will happen?

Well, no, ah, that is not the case. Ah, there is action that we must take. There is an onus on us. It's up to me. It's up to you.

[7 : 39] And what is it that, as parents, ah, particularly, ah, we must do? Well, I want to notice three things that are highlighted in this, ah, ah, passage.

First of all, it's up to you to know your God. It's up to you to know your God. Secondly, it's up to you to live the life, to live the Christian life.

And then thirdly, it's up to you to instruct your child. Now, look at these three things in turn. First of all, it's up to you to know your God. In verse 4, it says, Here, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord.

The writer is setting down the foundations concerning who God is. And in these very few words, you actually have a remarkable amount of truth concerning who God is.

In the first instance, and maybe again just almost going off of the tangent, we have to notice that it speaks of the Lord our God. And if we are to bring up our children in the feet of God, a necessary prerequisite is that we can say that the Lord is our God.

[8 : 52] If we are incapable of saying the Lord is my shepherd, he's my God, my Savior, then we are going to have great difficulty in presenting such a God to our children.

But apart from that point, what does this phrase tell us concerning a God? Well, the first thing it tells us is that God is a personal God because he has a name.

The Lord, or Yahweh, or Jehovah, our God. And so in this little phrase already, we know something concerning God, that he is personal. Yes, he's great.

Yes, he is one who is worthy to be feared, but he is a personal God. He is one with whom we can enter into a relationship. He has a name, and we can address him by that name.

And what does that name mean? The name Yahweh or Jehovah. Well, it means he is. Remember Moses when he was sent to rescue the people of Israel.

[9 : 49] And he said, Well, who shall I say has sent me? And God said, Say, I am has sent you. God calls himself I am. And of course we call him he is.

It makes sense. It grammatically makes sense. God says, I am. And we say, he is. Jehovah, Yahweh. What does that speak of? Well, it speaks of one who is self-sufficient, self-existent, eternal.

He is the great I am. He is. He's always been, always will be. People think of God as some kind of 80-80 notion. Nothing could be further from the truth.

God is the great I am. Absolute reality. Absolute reality. This is the God whom we must know. This is the God with whom we must deal. But this little phrase tells us more concerning God.

The Lord our God is one Lord. He is one Lord. There is no other. He is the only living and true God. And this is the God whom we present.

[10 : 50] And we present it confidently and unashamedly. And if you wish dogmatically, because we know it to be true, there is one God and he is Jehovah. There is none other.

One God. And a God of unity. One Lord. It is interesting, maybe just as an aside, and perhaps helpful for you, maybe if you are in discussion with others who would take a different view concerning God.

And they would point to a verse like this, maybe Jehovah's Witnesses or Muslims or Jews, and they would say, Oh, here, look at this. The Lord our God is one Lord. What is this business of the Trinity?

What is this business of Jesus as being divine? How can you believe such a thing in the light of this verse? Well, this unity that is spoken of here in verse 4 is a unity, a oneness, that does not in any way preclude there being parts to this unity.

It's interesting that the same word that is translated here in verse 4, one, is also used in Exodus. If you want to look it up, maybe later on in Exodus chapter 26, there's a description of the tabernacle.

[11 : 59] And it speaks of all the different parts, the curtains and the railings and all the rest of it. And it concludes by saying that all these things come together that it might be one. So there's one tabernacle made up of many parts, but all the same, one.

And that is the God we believe in. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one God. That's almost as an aside. But we must know this God. We are to bring up our children.

To fear this God, we must know him for ourselves. We must get to know him better. We must think about him. We must meditate about him. We must be excited by who he is and by what he does.

We want to hear the kinds of things that our God does. And be excited by that. And that would be seen that our children would see that we are consumed by our God. We're interested in our God.

We love our God. And they would go up seeing this. And they would say, well, my dad knows God. My mom knows God. My dad's in relationship with them. My dad speaks to him.

[13 : 00] My mom speaks to him. That we should know God. We must know our God. And it's up to me and it's up to you to know your God. So what else do these verses tell us concerning our responsibility?

Well, we must also live the life. It's up to you. It's up to me to live the life. I'm thinking especially of the matter of our example, the way we live.

Then in verse 5 it goes on, And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, with all thy soul, and with all thy might. We are to be role models for our children.

It may be a frightening thought that that is the case. But of course it's true. That is what we are. And we must live a life of loving God. Now, to love God is, in and of itself, a command.

We are commanded to love God. And yet, the evidence that we are obeying this command, this fundamental command, is found in our obeying all the rest.

[14 : 07] So we're commanded to love God. And how can we know that we're obeying that command? Well, we know that we're obeying it by obeying the rest, the other commandments. And as we obey them, so we obey this fundamental one, or give evidence, that we are obeying this fundamental command, to love God.

Again, a verse I often quote, the words of Jesus, if you love me, obey my commandments. And so, we must love God. And to love God really follows on, necessarily, from knowing God.

If we know who he is, and what he's like, the kind of God that he is, it seems inconceivable that we could then say, well, I'm not going to love him, I'm not going to follow him, despite who he is.

I think a true knowledge of God almost necessarily results in us, then, living the life, and loving him, also. But, these verses give us instruction concerning the manner of our obedience.

What kind of obedience is it that God requires of us, and instructs us in? Well, the verse that we read, verse 5, there is much that could be said, but if we simply highlight this, it's wholehearted obedience.

[15 : 27] Indeed, wholehearted doesn't do justice to it, because that would only be making reference to the first part, love God with all thine heart. But you know what I mean. Wholehearted, using all our faculty, everything we are, our whole being, and harness in the service and in the love of God.

Our emotions, our intellect, our physical strength, all of these things being used to render obedience to our God. Wholehearted obedience.

Now it follows that if that is the type of obedience that we are rendering to God, that we will do what is asked of us in verses 2 and 3, which gives us further instruction concerning the commandments.

First of all, it says in verse 2, that thou mightest fear the Lord thy God to keep all his statutes and his commandments. We are to keep them all. We are to be concerned to turn to God's word and say, well, what is it that he asks of me?

And to be careful to find each and every one and to be careful to obey each and every one, to be meticulous in the obedience of God as we were seeing Noah was in his life.

[16 : 41] All the commandments. And it goes on that it would be all the days of our lives. And we are also told that that should be a feature of our obedience.

All the commandments, all the time. And to do so with a great care and diligence. Observe to do it. There the verse, or the word in verse 3, the picture is of being careful to do all that is commanded of us.

Now this is no easy task. And if we are to even approach this kind of standard, it will be necessary that what is said in verse 6 be true of us.

And these words which I command thee this day shall be in thy heart. They need to be ingrained in our heart. You see, if we have to turn to the Bible every couple of hours during the day and say, well, what does the Bible say about this?

We'll be struggling. If we want to obey all the commandments, it's necessary that what the Bible says be in our hearts so that we are faced with a situation and we are able to respond in a way that is fitting, in a way that does take care to do what God says.

[17 : 49] Because it's there, it's ingrained in us. We know what the Bible says. We know God's likes. We know his dislikes. And we are able to respond appropriately. It's necessary that these commandments be on our hearts.

Our children, your children, need to say that the Lord is in absolute control in your home. That he is the one we turn to. That he is the one we want to please.

That he is the one who commands our loyalty and our affection. You see, if my child, that if your child sees that our job is more important, that our car is more important, or the holiday we're planning is more important, or the football team is more important, or even the children themselves are more important than God, then there is a very clear message being given to them.

And you can teach them the catechism back to front. You can teach them the confession back to front. That it will be to no avail if they look to you and say, well, my dad doesn't treat God as the most important thing.

He has other things that seem to be of more importance to him. We must be an example. We must live the life that they can look to us and see that there is a consistency between what we say and what we do.

[19 : 07] We must live the life. But the third element that this passage highlights is that it's up to you, it's up to me to instruct your child.

You must teach your child. You must tell him, you must tell her all about Jesus. And you must present the core truths of the Bible as absolutely true.

And you must, I remember the words come to mind of the, is it the American Declaration of Independence with a Jefferson who said, and these things we hold to be self-evidently true that all men are created equal.

You see, he was saying he would have no trust with this agreement. He says, these things are true. And so we must present the truth of the Bible in that way. He will have nothing of this nonsense of saying, well, this is what the Bible says but then there's also this other opinion and this opinion and well, I'll leave my child to decide.

I'll wait until he grows up and he can decide for himself. That is utter nonsense. That is not your responsibility. Your duty is to present these things as true. You wouldn't, would you have any time for your child doubting that you were their father?

[20 : 17] Well, how much more? Can you have any time for your child doubting that there is a God who is their father in heaven? Present these things as true. If you wish to do not have a indoctrinate your child and do not have a indoctrinate your child, do not have a indoctrinate.

To teach systematically or for a long period of time to accept ideas uncritically. Not unthinkingly, but there are certain truths that we must present as being so self-evidently true that the child would have no reason to question them, no reason to doubt them.

And I don't care if educational psychologists and experts of one kind or another say, well, this is a scandalous way to do things. God says, this is the way. You teach your child that there is one God and the only God and that he loves them and he can be their father and he can forgive their sins and present them as absolute truths that you are persuaded of and that they should be persuaded of also.

And if others mock, so be it. You have a great duty to bring up your child to fear God, the only living and true God. Instruct your child.

Present these things as absolute truths to them. But how is this instruction to take place that is detailed and help for us as to how we are to go about this?

[21 : 42] There in verse 7, thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children. The idea here is of teaching them again and again and again of impressing upon the child these commandments and these truths to teach repeatedly.

And that should be a feature of our instruction time and time again until the truth begin to filter in, until they become part and parcel of the way the child thinks and responds and reacts.

Also, the manner of our instruction should be both proactive and reactive. we, on many occasions, will take the initiative in teaching our children.

We find that very much in that same verse. Thou shalt teach them diligently the ideas of the parents taking the initiative, sitting the child down and explaining to them the truths of the Bible.

We don't wait to be asked, but there will be occasions when we do respond to questions that are posed to us. There in verse 20 there's a specific example of that kind of thing.

[22 : 51] When my son asks thee in time to come saying what mean the testimonies and the statutes and the judgments, etc., etc., then thou shalt say unto thy son. And so you're ready to respond to questions that are posed.

Now I was saying earlier and maybe almost to provoke a reaction that you are to indoctrinate your child. Now that's not to say that he doesn't ask questions, that he doesn't think. Nonetheless, when he does and he asks questions, you have an answer for them and you explain to him those things that maybe he has difficulty in understanding or wants to grasp better.

What else concerning the manner of instruction? Well, in verse 7 it says, it goes on to say that this instruction isn't restricted to some kind of formal period when you will do it, but it's everywhere and anywhere.

It says, thou shalt talk of them, that is the truth, the commandments, when thou sittest in thy house, when thou walkest by the way, when thou liest down and when thou risest up.

Really, what it's saying is everywhere. Take every opportunity that presents itself to in a very natural way, a very spontaneous way, present Jesus to your child.

[24 : 04] Present what God requires of them to your child. That may be just for the sake of integrity and worth making the point that though in the verse, verse 7, it would seem to be that all that is being said is in respect to the raising of children.

And so when it says, talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, the assumption is that the reference is with your children. It isn't necessarily only that. The form of the verse could mean that you would talk about them not only with your children, but with others also, similarly as you walk and as you rise and as you lie down.

But given that the focus of the verse is very much in the home, it seems reasonable to assume that this is the primary emphasis of this verse. That in all these occasions with your children, speak about the things of God.

Let's look at them in turn as you sit in your house. Now there's something very obvious here and yet it's worth making the point. This assumes family conversation.

It assumes that there are occasions when the family is at home and there is the opportunity to chat and to speak. Now, you say, well that's pretty obvious and yet, isn't that often a problem?

[25 : 20] You see, it's not just that we don't speak about God but we don't speak about anything because the opportunity isn't given. We don't have a time when we sit down and we're able to chat and to discuss. The picture here is of a family who speaks about lots of things and God is saying, well, as part of that, there should also be talk concerning myself and my commandments.

And so we have to think, well, do we give that opportunity or is it that maybe the television has taken over our living rooms and there isn't an opportunity to talk and to chat in every living room and I speak of my own living room as well, so often the TV is the focus of attention.

The whole furniture revolves around the television. It's very much at the center and it's immediately put on and what opportunity is there to speak and to discuss. Now, I'm not legislating on what you watch and what you don't watch and if you watch, it's none of my business.

But what I would say is think about these things. Is there even the opportunity to speak and to chat and to present these things as you sit in your house? It speaks also of when you walk by the way.

It's saying even when you're outside of the home as you are involved in activity with your child outside as you go for a walk as you take them to a football match or whatever it is. As you walk by the way, as you go about your business, think it not an unnatural thing to speak about God and about his word and about his commandments.

[26 : 44] As you lie down, as you rise up, the picture really is of the morning to night, all day, every day, that this would be part of your conversation.

Not to deny that at these specific times also it's perhaps particularly appropriate to make memory of God and to make reference to God as you put your child to bed and as you rise your child in the morning.

Notice that in all the examples here the home very much takes pride of place. There's four examples given and three of them are focused very much on the home.

I think there's a lesson there for us too. The home is the center of Christian instruction. We thank God for the Sunday school and for the Sunday school teachers and for youth fellowships and all the rest of it but let us make no mistake the center for Christian instruction the very heart of Christian instruction is the home and as parents we can't delegate that responsibility to somebody else.

We can't abdicate that responsibility. The focus of Christian instruction is our homes. It's up to you. It's up to me. Let's come to a close.

[27 : 57] I want to just notice the prize if you wish of doing what God tells us to do. Maybe that's not the best way of putting it the prize that I've come up with.

Well the prize that what we look forward to what we want most of all is that our children would indeed fear God. That our grandchildren would fear God.

Now it may be that as we instruct them day by day week by week that will come about with no great drama no great crisis and yet as they are taught and as they see the example so they too follow in the ways of the Lord.

I was speaking with a parent and he was saying that he had been speaking to somebody else about bringing up children and he was saying that his child who was just a young child trusted in Jesus and the person he was speaking to said well how do you know that?

He said well I've asked him I've asked him do you trust in Jesus? And he said yes and I asked him has Jesus died for your sins? And the child said yes Jesus has died for my sins. And the person he was speaking to said ah yes but he's just saying that because you've taught him.

[29 : 07] And he said precisely that's exactly it yes I have taught him and he agrees with me and he believes me no drama no crisis. The parent had taught these things to be self-evidently true and the child had accepted them as self-evidently true and had taken them to himself.

And that is what we want to see that is the pattern we want to see. Now God works in other ways of course he does. Not every child will follow that pattern I'm not saying he will I'm not saying that if he doesn't somehow it's necessarily the fault of the parent I'm not saying that.

But what I am saying is that that is the norm that is presented to us in scripture. And what great prize to have a child who fears God to have a family where every member trusts in Jesus Christ.

We are rightly proud of our children's achievements maybe academic achievements maybe a good job that they've got a happy home that they've been able to form and that's all great.

But if we're Christians all these things surely pale pale in comparison to seeing our children trusting in Jesus Christ. See them raising their children in the feet of God.

[30 : 16] This is the great prize. This is the great burden that we have. But let me say one thing also. Maybe as you listen to what the Bible says not what I say but what the Bible says about these things maybe you recognize failure on your part.

And I'm not speaking only of lapses. We all make mistakes. We all do things we are not to do. We all will very often give a bad example on occasion. Not really so much speaking about that I'm speaking about somebody who perhaps here is able to say well it's more than that.

There has been in the raising of my children a systematic failure of not living the life of not knowing my God of not instructing them in the way that I ought to have done.

And you recognize that and the word of God convicts you of that. What can you do? Well you can do what we all must do when we sin. You can repent.

You can say sorry to God for not having brought up your children in the way that you ought to have done. Maybe there's still time. There's still time to change the way you're doing it. Maybe for some of you you say oh but my children are grown up now it's too late now.

[31 : 31] Not too late to repent. Not too late to say sorry to God nor is it too late to say sorry to them. If they have been victims of your not bringing them up as you ought to have done.

They may think it a very bizarre thing if you were to go and say sorry to them but maybe that's what you should do. And if your apology is to carry any weight it has to be together with a change in your life that they would see that now it is true of you that you know you're God and that you live the life and that you are seeking as opportunity affords to instruct them in the things of God.

And ask God to be merciful. Ask God to be merciful to your grown up children who have no interest in God who have no time for the church. And if that pains you and surely it does well then ask God plead with God to be merciful and say despite my failings despite not having done things as I ought to have done oh Lord God be merciful and draw them yet to yourself that they might yet bring up their children in the feet of God in a way that I did not do so.

I am not believe me I am not pointing the finger at anybody I am pointing you to the word of God and if the word of God convicts you on these things then do something about it. Because that is what is necessary to respond in a meaningful way to what God says to us.

Let me conclude Christian parent believing parent the eternal destiny of your child and concerning the eternal destiny of your child the ball is very much in your court.

[33 : 04] Very much in your court. Yes God is sovereign. Of course he is. But the ball is in your court. Why? Because God has placed it in your court and he has given you a child a wonderful gift. And he is saying you bring that child up.

You bring him up the way I tell you in the way that I have instructed you. And then you look forward to seeing that child following in the faith that you have loving the Lord that you love.

Let's pray together. Heavenly Father we come before you and we confess that we all fall short. There is no one perfect, no and not one.

We recognize also that your providence is something that we don't pretend to be able to understand fully. And we are conscious and we know that for many there can be sincere and an obedient bringing up of children in the feet of God and yet they see these same children turn their backs on God.

We know that to be the case. And we pray for such. We pray for any here who know that in their own experience. Or perhaps for some of us who may have brothers or sisters who are in that situation.

[34 : 16] We pray for them. Lord we plead that you would yet draw them back. And that you would show them the folly of rejecting the only living and true God. And we pray for those of us who now have the privilege and the honor of bringing up children.

That we would present to them a God who is very much alive. A God who is the most important thing in our life. The one who commands our loyalty. The one who commands our affection.

And that they would follow in the faith of their parents. Grant that it would be so. There's not a single child of this congregation who would be lost. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

The following thing is we're trying to to to to