

# Family: Distinct and Obedient

Devotional Reading: 2 Samuel 7:25–29

Background Scripture: Matthew 19:3–9; Ephesians 6:1–4;  
2 Timothy 1:3–5

## Deuteronomy 6:3–9

<sup>3</sup> Hear, Israel, and be careful to obey so that it may go well with you and that you may increase greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, just as the LORD, the God of your ancestors, promised you.

<sup>4</sup> Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. <sup>5</sup> Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. <sup>6</sup> These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. <sup>7</sup> 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. <sup>8</sup> Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. <sup>9</sup> Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

## Matthew 19:3–9

<sup>3</sup> Some Pharisees came to him to test him. They asked, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?”

<sup>4</sup> “Haven’t you read,” he replied, “that at the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female,’ <sup>5</sup> and said, ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh’? <sup>6</sup> So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.”

<sup>7</sup> “Why then,” they asked, “did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?”

<sup>8</sup> Jesus replied, “Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning. <sup>9</sup> I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery.”

## Key Text

*These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. 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.*

—Deuteronomy 6:6–7

# Social Teachings of the Church

## Unit 2: Fulfilling Our Obligations to Family and Community

Lessons 5–8

### Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. List the main points of Deuteronomy 6:3–9.
2. Explain the context of Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 19:3–9.
3. Write a letter to encourage the faith of a younger believer.

### Lesson Outline

#### Introduction

- A. The Crossroads of Life
- B. Lesson Context

#### I. Receiving the Law (Deuteronomy 6:3–9)

- A. Blessing for Obedience (v. 3)  
*Repeat, Repeat, Repeat*
- B. Right Response to the Lord (vv. 4–5)
- C. Internal Inscription (v. 6)
- D. External Repetition (vv. 7–9)  
*The Treasure of Traditions*

#### II. Applying the Law (Matthew 19:3–9)

- A. The Question (v. 3)
- B. The Response (vv. 4–6)
- C. The Rebuttal (v. 7)
- D. The Clarification (vv. 8–9)

#### Conclusion

- A. Walking the Walk
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

## Introduction

### A. The Crossroads of Life

Born and raised in the middle of scenic nowhere, North Dakota, the greatest degree of religious and philosophical variety I encountered growing up was the difference between Protestants and Roman Catholics. When I lived in Chicago for three years, I encountered a great diversity of ideas. I interacted with Muslims, Mormons, Christians of various denominations, and countless secular philosophies. This experience forced me to ask one fundamental question: “How should a person live?”

Across history, this question has been answered in as many ways as there are people. Myriad philosophies, religions, and walks of life from thousands of years past are on offer, and the internet allows anyone access. But in the cacophony of all these ideas, the question stands: How should the follower of God live? This is just the question that the book of Deuteronomy answered for the Israelites when God renewed his covenant with them, and they prepared to enter the promised land.

### B. Lesson Context

Deuteronomy has been described as a “farewell speech.” The people of Israel were about to enter the promised land. Although Moses had led them since their freedom from Egypt, they were to enter a land forbidden to Moses (Deuteronomy 3:25–27). Even on the eve of his death, Moses prepared the people to move on without him.

Deuteronomy begins with a summary of the people’s journey to that point in the text (1:1–4:43) before shifting into a list of laws and commandments (4:44–28:68), the renewal of the covenant (29:1–30:20), and then the final deeds and death of Moses (31:1–34:12). Many of the laws and commandments found in this middle section of Deuteronomy, where our passage occurs, are similar to the earlier books in the Pentateuch (first five books of the Bible). But specific commandments are worth repeating on the eve of Israel’s transition.

The second passage in today’s lesson, Matthew 19:3–9, describes proper application of the Law of Moses. By the time of Jesus, some 15 centuries had

passed since the Law of Moses was given. But people still had questions regarding its application.

Various branches of first-century Judaism—particularly the Pharisees and the Sadducees—regularly debated the interpretation of the Law of Moses. This situation is no different: Jesus is challenged to provide his interpretation of a particular subject in the Law of Moses. The sparring partners here are Pharisees, but the Pharisees were not a united front.

## I. Receiving the Law

(Deuteronomy 6:3–9)

### A. Blessing for Obedience (v. 3)

**3. Hear, Israel, and be careful to obey so that it may go well with you and that you may increase greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, just as the LORD the God of your ancestors, promised you.**

Our text from Deuteronomy begins the third part of a three-part exhortation. The first of those three parts affirms God as the source of the commandments (Deuteronomy 5:32–33). The second affirms Moses as God’s spokesman of the commandments (6:1–2). The third, now before us, focuses on the people as doers in obedience to the commandments. The reason for doing so follows. For the Israelites, the reward they seek is the fulfillment of the promise to their *ancestors*. This verse reinforces the importance of the ensuing blessing; acquiring that which had been promised to their forefathers depends on obedience.

Note that it is not enough simply to *hear* the

word. One must *be careful to obey* what is heard (compare James 1:22–23). Those who built the golden calf were the same people who had just received the commandments from Sinai (Exodus 24:3; 32:1–6). The Israelites were expected to keep these words close and to live them out. Simply being a part of the chosen people was not enough; they had to keep God’s commandments.

#### What Do You Think?

What steps can we take to help us remember and obey the Lord’s commands?

#### Digging Deeper

What Scripture texts have you found most helpful in this regard? Why?

### Repeat, Repeat, Repeat

Repetition is a crucial part of education. As a mathematics teacher, my husband believes that the number one way to ensure children not only retain but understand the material is through repetition. It secures new learning into long-term memory. It disciplines the mind and cements concepts so that students are more likely to master a subject.

For many of us, repetition sounds incredibly boring. Regardless, it has shown time and again to be an effective strategy for both learning and habit formation. The Israelites were to talk about God’s law throughout each day to remind them of God’s love—and how they were to respond to such love. God calls his people to live in constant awareness of his commandments, which are to be treasured, and with good reason: “That it might go well with you, and that you may increase greatly.”

How might you go beyond simply reading Scripture to internalizing it so that it shapes your daily life? —N. V.

### B. Right Response to the Lord (vv. 4–5)

**4. Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.**

Because the Hebrew verse does not contain any verbs for “is,” the exact rendering of the verse has been subject to much discussion. As it appears in

## How to Say It

Baal	<i>Bay-ul.</i>
Deuteronomy	<i>Due-ter-ahn-uh-me.</i>
Hillel	<i>Hill-el.</i>
Marduk	<i>Mar-duke.</i>
patriarchs	<i>pay-tree-arks.</i>
Pentateuch	<i>Pen-ta-teuk.</i>
Pharisees	<i>Fair-ih-seez.</i>
phylacteries	<i>fil-lak-ter-eez.</i>
Sadducees	<i>Sad-you-seez.</i>
Shammai	<i>Sham-eye.</i>

Hebrew, the verse literally reads, “Hear, Israel, the Lord, our God, the Lord, one.” Some students suggest that the word for *one* may also be rendered *alone*; however, “one” is the most accepted translation. Certainly, the oneness of God that this verse declares implies that he alone is God, and there is no other.

This doctrine is affirmed elsewhere in Scripture (Psalm 18:31; Isaiah 44:8; 45:22; 1 Corinthians 8:4–6; Ephesians 4:6). Such a belief stands in stark contrast to the pagan religions of the Old Testament world, which are characterized by belief in many gods. The fact that the singular God has clearly revealed his will eliminates the guesswork and uncertainty accompanying belief in many gods.

The church father Augustine (AD 354–430) cites this same verse in asserting that the Trinity is one God while affirming that the Father, Son, and Spirit are personally distinct. If Israel would obtain the promises to the patriarchs, they must have the same faith as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob: faith that the one God who covenanted with them would see his plans to fruition—and that one God alone! It was not Baal who brought Abraham to Canaan. It was not Marduk who split the Red Sea. The God of Israel alone—the only God there is—did so.

**5. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.**

This allegiance is established abstractly in this verse: to love the Lord with one’s whole *heart, soul,* and *strength*. Notice that in this most fundamental of beliefs, the Bible does not prescribe particular rituals or deeds that fulfill what God desires. Instead, it provides the foundational principles that can be applied anywhere in life. This, the appropriate human response to God, is what Jesus declared “the first and great commandment” (Matthew 22:38): to love him without any reservation, to love him with the totality of one’s being. Indeed, on this and the command to love one’s neighbor hang all the Law and the Prophets (22:40).

### C. Internal Inscription (v. 6)

**6. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts.**

This verse reinforces the universal scope of the blessing by commanding it to be *on your hearts* at all times. This is not a command to fixate on or compulsively repeat the prayer as a reflex, but rather that it should be so familiar as to inform everything one thinks and does. To love God with the devotion described in the previous verse implies keeping his *commandments* treasured within one’s heart. The psalmist recognized the importance of this when he wrote, “I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you” (Psalm 119:11). The commandments of God are to be internalized, not superficially listened to and then ignored.

### D. External Repetition (vv. 7–9)

**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.**

It is not enough, however, for the people of God to discipline themselves. If the Israelites did not educate their *children* on how to think about God, then their pagan neighbors would happily do so. Later rabbis interpreted the “children” referenced here as students, suggesting that, at least in later Judaism, one’s responsibility for instructing the next generation did not apply exclusively to one’s progeny. Similarly, while the book of Proverbs refers to the recipient of its wisdom as “my



Visual for Lesson 8. Display this visual as you lead a whole-class brainstorming session regarding how families can walk in God’s ways.

son,” we understand it as applicable to all (Proverbs 1:8; 2:1; 3:1; etc.).

The verse now before us is not an exhaustive list of the times the Israelites should educate their children about this blessing. Instead, the examples show its extensiveness: this imperative ought to permeate one’s entire life.

### What Do You Think?

How will you help encourage and strengthen a younger believer in their faith journey?

### Digging Deeper

Which is better: to shelter younger believers from exposure to the world or to allow the exposure to test and strengthen their faith? Explain.

## The Treasure of Traditions

My mother is an excellent cook. Growing up, my parents encouraged my brother and me to order meals from the adult menu and not the children’s menu in an effort to teach us to enjoy various foods and develop a mature palate.

It sure worked! As part of our wedding presents, my mother gave us each a recipe book full of her treasured culinary secrets and foundational elements of hospitality. To this day, it is one of the best presents I have ever received. Her years of cooking experience are distilled onto pages and passed down to the next generation.

God gives his people his own recipe to fullness in Deuteronomy 6:3–9. He teaches his people to treasure his commandments, pass them on to future generations, and even “write them” on their hearts. What is something passed down through generations that is still important in your journey of faith today? —N. V.

**8–9. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.**

Notably, the text does not command to *bind* these things on the hands and between the eyes of one’s children, but on one’s own *hands* and fore-

head. Leading by example is the ultimate form of education.

The list in these two verses is also not exhaustive. These are examples of how one might establish visual reminders of this prescribed attitude. The failure to erect such reminders is not a sin, but to heed it is wisdom. The purpose of this verse is to encourage endurance in the attitude outlined in the previous verses. When times get difficult, it is easy to forget this way of looking at the world. One way to mitigate human forgetfulness is with external reminders.

The command to bind these commandments to one’s hand and forehead may be metaphorical (compare Proverbs 6:20–21). Still, many ancient people would wear clothing and accessories inscribed with invocations of deities as protectors. Hebrew examples invoking the Lord have also been found in the archeological record, suggesting that they may have worn clothing or jewelry with writing on them. This definitely seems to be the case in Matthew 23:5, where Jesus criticized the Pharisees for wrong motives in their use of phylacteries—small boxes containing Scripture verses worn on arms and foreheads (compare Exodus 13:9).

### What Do You Think?

What steps can you take today to implement the principle of verses 8–9?

### Digging Deeper

How will you ensure that your witness does not become holier-than-thou showmanship?

## II. Applying the Law

(Matthew 19:3–9)

The New Testament passage for today’s lesson takes us into the third year of Jesus’ earthly ministry. Matthew structures his Gospel account in terms of five discourses, and the fourth of those has just ended as Jesus shifts his ministry efforts from Galilee to Judea on the eastern side of the Jordan River (Matthew 19:1).

### A. The Question (v. 3)

**3. Some Pharisees came to him to test him.**

**They asked, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?”**

Opposition has been growing, and these *Pharisees*, like those of Matthew 16:1, do not have Jesus’ best interests at heart. So they test his interpretation of the Law of Moses. We should note that Jesus has already addressed this issue in Matthew 5:31–32.

Their issue specifically seems to concern Deuteronomy 24:1 and its divorce clause regarding “something indecent about her.” The Pharisees were themselves divided over the interpretation here between the conservative school of Shammai and the more liberal school of Hillel, two famous rabbis from the late first century BC. Those of Shammai were narrowly focused regarding their interpretation of the law: it must be followed to the very letter. To them, “uncleanness” meant “unchastity”—period. Those of Hillel were looser in their interpretation; in a rather uncontrolled way, they pretty much allowed the husband in a marriage to determine what “uncleanness” meant in his situation. Unlike the squabbling factions of his contemporaries, however, Jesus is no simple rabbi or interpreter.

### **B. The Response (vv. 4–6)**

**4. “Haven’t you read,” he replied, “that at the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female,’**

Jesus’ strategy is to go back to Genesis, where God’s original intent for marriage is recorded. It starts with acknowledging the *male and female* distinctive of Genesis 1:27; 5:2.

**5. “and said, ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh’?**

Jesus quotes Genesis 2:24, marking the establishment of a new family unit by means of marriage. A *man* living in his parents’ household leaves his original situation to make a new household with *his wife*. The relationship between man and wife overrides what was previously the most important relationship, that of parents to their son or daughter. Jesus’ invocation of this verse in this context reinforces the sacredness of the marriage relationship: with marriage, a new family unit is

born. This is not a relationship to be established or treated lightly (Malachi 2:16).

**6. “So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.”**

This verse contains the thrust of Jesus’ response: God has made *one flesh* by joining together a man and a woman. To rend them apart amounts to the destruction of God’s established order. Thus Jesus’ declaration aligns more with that of the school of Shammai rather than Hillel (see above). But this does not make Jesus a follower of Shammai. Rather, as the Son of God—and very God himself—Jesus possesses special authority to interpret the Law of Moses as only God can.

### **C. The Rebuttal (v. 7)**

**7. “Why then,” they asked, “did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?”**

The Pharisees’ rejoinder is valid enough: the fact of the matter is that ordinances for divorce *do* exist in the Law of *Moses* (Deuteronomy 24:1–4; compare 22:13–30; Jeremiah 3:1). If these ordinances are not applicable in the universal scope of space or time, then how did they find their way into Scripture? Perhaps the Pharisees think they have caught Jesus in a trap: Jesus has been stating the ideal situation; but the Pharisees counter by noting the reality of divorce and its justification.

### **D. The Clarification (vv. 8–9)**

**8. Jesus replied, “Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning.**

Jesus does not deny what *Moses permitted*. Instead, Jesus contrasts the doctrine of marriage with God’s permission of divorce as a concession. In the beginning, God joined man and woman together in marriage, a union never intended to be broken (except by death; see 1 Corinthians 7:39). Divorce is not the result that God intends for marriage relationships. However, because of the fall and resulting human sin, it is a “permission” that God gives.

Jesus reorients the conversation toward the original aim of God’s plan: although an exception exists, it should not be normalized (compare 1 Corinthians 7:10–11). This is not to say that situations involving adultery (see next verse) or abusive relationships should be preserved in every circumstance. Rather, Christians ought to strive first and foremost toward the ideal that God has established while acknowledging the contingency if this aim should fail.

**9. “I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery.”**

In the Gospels, Jesus frequently says, “You have heard it said . . . but I tell you . . .” (Matthew 5:21–22, 27–28, etc.). These pairs are often called “antitheses.” But notice here that instead of overturning a former saying, Jesus strengthens the grounds of what was said. Here, Jesus affirms what God had ordained through Moses: divorce is permissible in very particular conditions. However, he prioritizes God’s plan over the contingent allowances that God granted to hardhearted humanity.

The final clause speaks of the spiritual reality of marriage: a man who marries a woman who is, in the eyes of God, still married to her first husband commits *adultery* since she is still married in God’s sight. A marriage relationship is brought into being with God, and he will not easily admit its dissolution.

### What Do You Think?

What are some unhelpful or possibly dangerous interpretations of Matthew 19:3–9 concerning considerations of divorce?

### Digging Deeper

What questions should a believer ask when considering divorce?

## Conclusion

### A. Walking the Walk

Christians are called to receive and apply God’s will. If we are to be distinct in the world—as families and as individuals—we must be marked by

faithful obedience. Central to this is acknowledging that a whole-person love of God is the most fundamental part of the Christian life, even as it was to believers under the old covenant. It should undergird all thoughts and animate every action that a believer takes. One example of exhibiting such love for God is to submit to his desires as they relate to marriage.

It is not just in matters of marriage that one’s love for God can be displayed, however. The commandment “Love the Lord your God” can and should manifest in every decision and action in the life of a Christian. Love for God can look like obeying God’s wishes for human life as expressed in the Bible and especially in the person of Jesus Christ, the incarnation of God himself.

As we faithfully receive and live out God’s law, we must remember that it is not for us alone. We are to spur one another on and instruct younger believers growing up in the faith (Hebrews 10:24). Human nature inclines away from God and toward its own desires. We must receive God’s law—and establish external reminders of this commitment so as to combat human forgetfulness—so that it dwells in our hearts and forms our actions to live in alignment with it.

### What Do You Think?

How can believers live as a people who are distinct from the world?

### Digging Deeper

In what ways can this be true regarding our family relationships? our habits? our finances? our treatment of neighbors?

### B. Prayer

Heavenly Father, God of Moses and Jesus, help us to love you with all our hearts, all our souls, and all our might. Help us to love you in our homes and outside of our homes. Help us to love you with all our words and in all our deeds. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

### C. Thought to Remember

Love God in and through everything you do.