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Deuteronomy 6:4-9
Pentecost 11

The Heart of Christian Education

Lord... You have the words of eternal life. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Forty years after leaving Egypt, the people of Israel were about to enter the land God promised to their forefather Abraham, the land where the promised Savior would be born. But now they faced a great danger, the same danger that we and our children face this very day. It is the great threat that has shipwrecked the faith of countless souls through history.

The danger I'm talking about is... everyday life in a sinful world. Not only do evil, unbelief and temptation surround us on every hand, but daily life brings the constant danger that we might take the good gifts God gives us in life and let them become harmful distractions that would get in the way of feeding our faith and lead us away from God's ways. There's a reason the Bible repeatedly gives us cautions like this one in Deuteronomy: **Be very careful so that you do not forget the LORD your God** (Dt. 8:11).

The word of God in our lesson from Deuteronomy 6, gives us the antidote to forgetting the Lord by pointing us to **the heart of Christian Education**. God through Moses the prophet says: **Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God. The LORD is one!**

If you attend Drivers Education you expect to learn about driving a car and the rules of the road. If you go to a class on quilting, you expect to learn about quilts. So, it's no surprise that **the LORD God** would be at **the Heart of Christian Education**.

After all, **the LORD is one!** There is only one true God who made all things and is entirely above and beyond His creation. Indeed, just who He is, rises far above our understanding: that He is three distinct persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit, each one fully, truly God in every way and yet He is only *one* God!

Now the only way we can truly know this God is through His merciful promise of the Savior that He gave to sinful mankind. The promise He kept when God the Son came into the world as the promised Savior, the promised **Christ**.

Only through God the Holy Spirit's gift of faith in Jesus Christ can we know and believe this **one true LORD God**. No surprise there right? We expect Christ the LORD to be at **the heart of Christian Education**.

But how will people know and trust in this one true God? There's only one way God has promised to make this happen: **Hear, O Israel! These words that I am commanding you are today are to be on your heart... teach them... speak about them... write them...**

You cannot rightly know God apart from His Word. Nowhere does the Lord promise to work faith in hearts apart from His Word. Rather, He tells us: **faith comes from hearing the message, and the message comes through the word of Christ** (Romans 10:17). Through the spoken and written message about Christ in the Bible and the Word of Christ along with the earthly elements in Baptism and the Lord's Supper, the Holy Spirit creates and sustains living faith. Clearly then, God's Word is at **the Heart of Christian Education**.

As is, of course, *the heart!* **Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. These words... are to be on your heart.** The aim of Christian education is to change and train the human heart to **love the Lord** and **live for the LORD** with our whole life and being and everything we have.

Three times we hear the word **all –all... all... all!** God is not interested in us giving him just an hour on Sunday morning, or a tiny little compartment of our lives, but He wants us to love Him and live for him with **all** we do, **all** the time!

Notice how the call to **love the LORD** is immediately followed by **These words... are to be on your heart.** You see, you cannot **love the LORD** apart from His Word! For without His Spirit working through the Word there will be no living faith able to love the Lord.

Furthermore, you can't show love for God by doing what goes *against* his word. You can't love the Lord by robbing a bank or by being greedy, because He tells us **do not steal.** You cannot love the Lord by disregarding what He teaches in His Word about marriage as a lifelong commitment of one man and one woman. Every way we disregard something God's Word teaches and commands is a failure to love God with **all our heart.**

That's why it's so important that His Word be taught to children. That's why it's also important for all of us to continue to hear and learn the Word so that it is on our **hearts!**

But where should this happen? **Teach (these Words) diligently to your children, and speak about them when you sit in your house and when you walk on the road, when you lie down and when you get up.**

These verses have long been used by believers over the years at the start of the year for Christian schools like we do today. And that's fine, since our elementary school, like our early learning center is a place where God's Word is taught to our children day in and day out, and not just in religion class or Bible lessons, but God's Word and living as God's people is the focus and foundation of everything that happens.

But note well, that while these verses certainly have an application in Christian schools along with hearing the Word in worship, Sunday School and Bible class, yet these words also *will not* allow us to limit teaching God's Word to just church and Christian school.

Instead, the Lord tells us here that the Christian Education classroom is to be our homes, in our cars, the breakfast table, when we say goodnight, at home, away, at the game, in the store, and so on as we speak with our children about God's Word and teach them by example, by living lives that are guided by His Word and commands. The Lord says His word is to be a fixture in our homes just as it is in Christian schools.

Let me share with you a personal example. Yes, I learned from every Christian teacher from Sunday School on that it is important to daily read our Bibles, but what really drove that lesson home for me and made it stick was learning how my dairy farmer grandparents read through the entire Bible together every year and the amazing difference that made in their faith filled lives.

Understand God teaches us this not to make our lives more complicated, but to bless us and do what is best for us, to focus on what He knows is the One thing truly needed (Luke 10:42). He wants us to enjoy the peace that comes from His Word.

Like the peace I've seen with an elderly woman who had made the Bible her delight, who when the pastor asked if she was ready to go see Jesus, she didn't hesitate for a moment but declared 'oh, yes, I can't wait!'

Or the man who was too weak to speak as death drew near, and yet with confidence his lips silently mouthed the words of the 23rd Psalm right along with me: **the Lord is my Shepherd.**

But how could we ever have such peace when the fact is no matter how dedicated to God's Word we are, not one of us has ever truly lived up to the command: **Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.**

How easily we love and trust things and stuff and people more than God and His Word. How often we get distracted and let ourselves get so busy that we fail to be lifelong hearers, teachers, and doers of the Word, not to mention being constant godly models for children.

How often we fail to let His Word be our only guide, but instead listen to the corrupt desires of our old sinful hearts or the world's deceitful lies flashed before our eyes on our phones.

And like every other sin, it all amounts to our saying to God *with our actions*: "I don't actually love you Lord, I love myself, and my convenience, and my self-chosen priorities way more than you Lord."

So what could ever save you and me from such horrible, hell deserving sins?!

The heart of Christian education of course! As in the **LORD** who is **our God**. Right where we started... we are saved by the Lord and what he has done for us. Yes, He is *our* God not because we deserved it, or because we chose Him, or did anything to earn a place among His people, but all and only because He chose us, chose to love and save us, just as Jesus said: **You did not choose me, but I chose you** (Jn 15:16).

Yes, He is our God who rescues us from all our horrible sins, all our failures to love Him with our all. And not because we gave Him anything, but because He gave everything to save us!

Because the Father so loved us with an undeserved love that He gave His only Son up to hell and death to save us.

Because the Son of God, Jesus Christ, so loved us with all His heart that He became our brother and substitute who did perfectly love God in every way, every day, with His all, all the way to the cross to forgive our every sin.

Because God the Spirit guided the prophets and apostles to write the Word of God and brought that Word to us in our baptisms where He made you one of God's own people. The Spirit brought us to believe and still gives us His Word that He will use to keep us in faith until the full joys of everlasting life!

We are saved, we are God's people, only because the Triune God **first loved us**, because at the **heart of Christian Education** we see Jesus and His saving work.

The LORD God who stands at **the Heart of Christian Education** is the one who has saved us. He is the One who gives Himself to us with all His greatest gifts in His eternal life giving Word.

And He is the God who through His Word and by His Spirit creates a new heart within us, a heart that is eager to make the time to hear His Word with its message of His saving love that cannot but lead us to want to love Him in response.

I invite you to pray with me that the Lord bless His Word among us just as he says he will: Lord, do what you have promised. Use your Word we have heard to build us up in Christ, to lead to treasure what you tell us, and to live as the holy and forgiven people you make us. *Lord, keep us steadfast in your Word. Amen.*

Praise the LORD, O my soul, and never forget all the good He has done: He is the One who forgives all your sins... who crowns you with mercy and compassion. Amen