

"The Continuance of the Covenant"  
Deut. 6

--CEFC 7/2/17

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On our Fourth of July,  
we Americans celebrate our freedom—  
our freedom of religion,  
our freedom of speech,  
our freedom of association.

We are a free people, we say.

In the famous words of Supreme Court Justice Anthony Kennedy,

"At the heart of liberty is the right to define one's own concept of existence,  
of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life."

And we shudder when we hear stories about the practices of  
indoctrination perpetrated by totalitarian regimes  
in places like North Korea.

We have images of impressionable children wrenched from their homes,  
taught to hate the enemies of the state,  
and required to dedicate their lives to the party.

And now we see it also among religious extremists, like ISIS—  
who radicalize even their children  
such that they would strap bombs to their bodies to kill innocent people.

We are appalled at such indoctrination.

It is so contrary to our conception of freedom.

There is much that we object to,  
much that is wrong,  
but I'm sure that the fault does not lie  
in the fact of indoctrination itself.

"Indoctrination," to quote Richard Neuhaus,

"is a perfectly lovely word that gets a very bad press."<sup>1</sup>

That may surprise you,

but think about it-- What is indoctrination anyway?

It is simply impressing upon people the doctrines or principles  
by which a community desires to live.

So, for example, in this country we routinely indoctrinate our children  
in all sorts of ways--

we indoctrinate them the idea  
that they shouldn't throw their candy wrappers on the sidewalk,

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<sup>1</sup> *Religion and Society Report*, July, 1988, 5.7.

that racial prejudice is bad,  
and that they should respect the rights of other people.

We don't let children decide for themselves about such matters—  
we don't lay out the options with an open mind  
and then let them choose what they will believe  
when they get older.

No, we indoctrinate them.

These are social doctrines, values, that we, as a society,  
feel are important and good, and right.  
So we impress them upon our children.

This is simply the process of socialization--  
inculcating in each successive generation  
the values that are believed to be for the common good.

And this is an indispensible task.

As one social observer has put it:  
"When it comes to rearing children,  
every society is only 20 years away from barbarism.  
Twenty years is all we have to accomplish the task of civilizing the infants  
who are born into our midst each year.

These savages know nothing of our language, our culture, our religion,  
our values, our customs of interpersonal relations.

The infant is totally ignorant about [the values we hold dear].  
The barbarian must be tamed if civilization is to survive."<sup>2</sup>

Yet the word "indoctrination" is still tainted, and avoided,  
especially by educators.

It conjures up images of manipulation, of judgmentalism,  
of imposing our values on others.

So today, quite often, education is seen  
not as an effort to transmit important truths to our children,  
but of simply creating the capacity of children to clarify and choose  
the values they want to live by.

God forbid that we should tell them what is good or right or true.  
That, you see, would be indoctrination.

Yes, it would be--but that is exactly what we should do.  
At least that's what the Bible says.

Just look at what our passage today tells us--  
**"These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts.  
Impress them upon your children.**

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<sup>2</sup> Dr. Albert Siegel, Quoted in MacDonald, *Fathers*, p.94.

Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road,  
when you lie down and when you get up.  
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."

"This is God's truth I am giving you," Moses says.  
"Now indoctrinate your children with this truth."

This is essential not only for the well-being of society,  
but, more importantly, for the continuance of the covenant—  
that special relationship that exists between the Lord and his people.

Observe these commands, he says, "**so that you, your children  
and their children after them  
may fear the Lord your God as long as you live, . . .  
and that you may enjoy long life**" (6:2).

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Our text this morning speaks to us of the continuance of the covenant--  
As you can see from your outline in the bulletin--  
it addresses both the core of the covenant--  
that is, the doctrine we are to teach—  
which will take up the bulk of our time.  
and then it speaks of our responsibility to communicate the covenant--  
describing the process of indoctrination--  
as we are to impress God's truth on our children.

This is a message that we all need to hear--  
whether we have children or not--  
For we all are entrusted with this message of the new covenant--  
the message of the gospel--  
which we should communicate,  
and which we will communicate--  
in one form or another, whether well or poorly.

Discipleship itself is a kind of indoctrination—  
it is the process by which the doctrine of the gospel  
is taught such that it becomes embedded deeply in our lives.  
Jesus commissioned us to make disciples of all nations  
baptizing them  
and teaching them to obey all that he commanded—  
that's indoctrination.

May the Lord, by his Word to us,  
make us all more faithful and effective in this task.

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So what is the doctrine that we are to teach?  
Of all the commandments, what is the most important?

When a teacher of the law asked the Lord Jesus this question,  
he responded by quoting these very words from Deuteronomy 6--  
"The most important [commandment]," answered Jesus, "is this:  
'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.  
Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul  
and with all your mind and with all your strength'" (Mk. 12:29).

This is the core of the covenant--  
the heart of the doctrine that we are to impart.

The centrality of this truth was recognized very early by the Jews --  
as they called this passage the *Shema*'--  
from the Hebrew word for "hear" with which it begins.

"Hear O Israel:"

This confession, the *Shema*', was recited twice a day by every faithful Jew,  
and in some circles, it still is<sup>3</sup>--  
as it was believed to contain the fundamental truth of Israel's religion  
and the primary duty founded upon it.

Israel was a people summoned by God to hear his word,  
and to respond to that word with loving obedience.

Their religion was not just a feeling of spirituality,  
or a reflection on the wonders of nature.

No, the God they worshipped was a God who speaks propositionally,  
and they were to attend to his revealed word—  
they were to listen to him  
and to respond personally.

Deut. 6:4--"Hear O Israel: The LORD our God, the Lord is one."

Just six words in Hebrew--

שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל יְהוָה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְהוָה אֶחָד

These words can be translated in various ways—

but I think what we have here is the best—

"Hear O Israel: The LORD our God, the Lord is one."

The significance of the verse is clear--

the LORD, Yahweh, the God of Israel alone is to be worshipped.

"The LORD is One"—

This oneness of God can have two dimensions--

1. First, it can be the affirmation that the LORD, the God of Israel, is unique—  
He alone is God.

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<sup>3</sup> The *Shema* is echoed in the first part of the Islamic *Shahadah*—"There is no god (allah) but God (Allah)," which is recited by Muslims five times a day.

The emphasis is on his singularity.<sup>4</sup>

The pagans had a multitude of gods who vied with one another for control and power,  
and each god in the pantheon  
ruled over a particular sphere of human experience.

But Yahweh, the God of Israel, is not like those gods—

He is the one God over all other powers—he has no equal;  
he has no rival.

He is the one God who created all things,  
and he is the one God who demonstrated his supremacy  
over all the other so-called gods of Egypt  
in redeeming his people from the power of Pharaoh.  
He alone is God.

2. Second, this statement can be understood

as an affirmation that the God of Israel is not only unique,  
he is also unified--

He has one will, one purpose, one plan by which he rules the cosmos.  
To say "The Lord is one" is to affirm his unchangeableness and his consistency—  
it is a statement of his internal integrity.

Every aspect of God's being—all his eternal attributes—  
are perfectly joined in the oneness of his nature.

The theological term for this is God's simplicity—  
that is, God is not composed of competing parts.

He does not have the various attributes of goodness, mercy, justice and power;  
He is goodness, mercy, justice and power.

Every attribute of God is identical with his essence—  
so his justice is always perfectly loving,  
and his love is always perfectly just.

In a pagan world, we have to understand,  
the gods themselves could be opposed to one another.

And this could create a great deal of confusion and tension in a person's life.

A pagan worshipper may perform his duties toward one god,  
while offending the other.

From one, he may receive a promise,  
and from another, a threat.

How could he know where he stood?

But the LORD, the God of Israel, is One.

As one writer put it--

"When he spoke, there was no other to contradict;  
when he warned, there was no other to provide refuge  
from that warning;  
when he promised, there was no other to revoke that promise."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> So C. Wright.

<sup>5</sup> Craigie, *Deut.*, p. 169.

He alone is God--He is the one and only.

standing supreme above all that he has created.

The God of Israel—who has revealed himself through Moses—

who is the same God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ—

this God is the God of the whole world—

and he alone is over all the nations.

And the prophet Zechariah declares that one day, he will be seen to be so—  
in an echo of the Shema of Deut. 6:4,

we read in Zech. 14:9—

**"The LORD will be king over the whole earth.**

**On that day there will be one LORD,**

**and his name the only name"—**

literally, **"On that day the LORD will be one and his name one."**

And let me just add that,

though the New Testament believers

understood Jesus to be "**in very nature God**" (Phil. 2:6),

they still affirmed this doctrine—there is only one God.

They came to understand that this one God

has wonderfully and mysteriously revealed himself personally in a triune manner

as three Persons--Father, Son and Holy Spirit—

but they never wavered in affirming that there is only one God.

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שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְהוָה אֶחָד׃

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

This affirmation about God is at the core of the covenant—

it is a fundament doctrine.

On this basis of this truth, what is the appropriate response to this one God?—

it is Love--

**"You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart**

**and with all your soul**

**and with all your strength."**

Since Yahweh, the Lord, alone is God

he alone deserves our total allegiance.

Because he is an undivided God,

so he deserves our undivided devotion--

a total response of all our heart, soul, and strength--

every part of us is to respond to God in love.

This is what he deserves and nothing less.

We are to offer him our heart—

which in Hebrew thought was not just the emotional part of us,

but the seat of our intellect, will and motivation.

We are to offer him our soul—that is our fundament identity as a person—

the whole of our inner life that makes us a unique individual.

and we are to offer him our **strength**—  
the word here doesn't refer to our muscular capability  
so much as our outward possessions—our assets,  
the things we own and control.

All of it—all that we are as persons—  
is to be put at the Lord's disposal as an act of our love.  
It is an act of complete devotion that is reflected in our earthly experience  
in the vows of marriage.

This is the first and greatest commandment—  
for this is our first and greatest purpose as human beings—  
this is what we were made for—  
to love God./

It is clear in Deuteronomy and in the words of Jesus  
that the primary way that our love for God is to be expressed  
is through obedience to God's commands.

But the Lord desires more than just our obedience and submission.  
He desires our love—  
Just as a marriage relationship would be deficient  
if it was simply based on obedience and submission,  
so our God desires a relationship in which we come to know him  
and relate to him in love  
as the one great and glorious God that he is—  
full of goodness, truth and beauty--  
the supreme object of our ultimate desire.

This love command is central to the entire Book of Deuteronomy--  
and the entire Bible.

As Jesus tells us, it is the first and greatest commandment.  
For it points us once again to the covenant relationship  
the Lord desires to have with his people.

God's covenant people are to say—  
The Lord is our God--he has dealt with us personally, in love,  
and the law has to be seen in the light of that love.

Look at v. 20 of our passage—  
(and, by the way, we'll be looking at the important themes of vv. 10-19  
in a couple of weeks when we get to chap. 8.)

v. 20--"In the future, when your son asks you,  
"What is the meaning of the stipulations, decrees and laws  
the LORD our God has commanded you?"

The Hebrew is literally, "What are these stipulations, decrees and laws?"  
In other words,

when your son asks, "What are all these laws really all about?  
Why should we obey them?"

That's a good question—and you parents may have heard

a question like that from your kids regarding your own decrees.

You could answer—

we should obey these commands simply because it is God who gives them.

As God, he has the authority to command our obedience.

Period.

—and that answer would be true.

But that's not the answer we find in our passage.

**"In the future, when your son asks you,**

**"What is the meaning of the stipulations, decrees and laws**

**the LORD our God has commanded you?"**

**tell him: "We were slaves of Pharaoh in Egypt,**

**but the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand.**

**Before our eyes the LORD sent miraculous signs and wonders—great and terrible—**

**upon Egypt and Pharaoh and his whole household.**

**But he brought us out from there to bring us in**

**and give us the land that he promised on oath to our forefathers.**

**The LORD commanded us to obey all these decrees and to fear the LORD our God,**

**so that we might always prosper and be kept alive, as is the case today.**

**And if we are careful to obey all this law before the LORD our God,**

**as he has commanded us, that will be our righteousness."**

In these six verses we find the first person used 13 times--

"We," "us," "our"--the Lord has dealt with us.

That's what this law is about—

It comes from a God who loves us—

who has acted in history to redeem us,

and he has given us his law for our good—

that we might prosper and flourish as his people.

In other words,

we are to love the Lord and obey him,

because he has loved us first.

Isn't this what the gospel is all about—

as Christian believers, can't we tell the same story—

We were once slaves of sin and of death,

but the Lord brought us out with a mighty hand.

He did great things--sending his own Son to live and to die for us--

and he raised him from the grave to show us what he will do for us.

And he has given us his Holy Spirit,

to bring us into a living relationship with himself.

And he has commanded us to obey him so that we may enjoy his life in joy--

He is our righteousness.

This is what his commands are all about.

This is why we should obey him.

The law finds its meaning in the gospel.

We are to love God because he has loved us first.

This is the core of the covenant--this is the doctrine  
and the fundamental duty that we are to teach.

The Lord our God is One—  
and he has loved us with a great love,  
and we are to love him in response with all our heart, soul, and strength.  
This is the first and greatest command.

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And so I ask--  
Have you grasped this gospel?  
Do you understand this doctrine of who God is and what he has done.

But more importantly,  
Has this gospel gripped you?

v.6--

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

This truth must be a personal part of your life—on your hearts.  
But also, Moses is saying, it must be a pervasive part of your life.

Your relationship with God—  
as that relationship is conveyed through his Word—  
it is to impact all of life.

These commands I am giving you, Moses says--  
you are to **"Talk about them when you sit at home  
and when you walk along the road,  
when you lie down and when you get up."**

Whatever you are doing—  
they are to be on your mind—  
they are to be a topic of your conversation.

Think about them during the day—  
and then as you end the day,  
and then again as you begin the next day.

And God's word is to inform every area of your life--

**"Tie [these commands] as symbols on your hands  
and bind them on your foreheads"--**

that is, they are to impact you individually.

**"Write them on the doorframes of your houses"—**

that is, they are to be a part of your family life;  
and write them **"on your gates."**

that is, they are to inform your public life—  
for the gates of the city were the public square in the ancient world—  
the place where public business took place.

Biblical "religion" can never be confined to one's private life,

it can't be limited to what happens  
within the confines of our places of worship—  
it must impact the whole of your life—  
nothing can be left out.

That's why the framers of our American constitution  
guaranteed the free exercise of religion and not just the freedom of worship.

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Are we literally to tie the commands of God on our hands and foreheads,  
or write them on our doors?  
Some Jews have understood this passage that way and have done just that—  
with their phylacteries and muzuzahs.

But Proverbs 3:3 points us to the metaphorical meaning  
when it says, "**Let love and faithfulness never leave you;  
bind them around your neck,  
write them on the tablet of your heart.**"

What the words mean—love and faithfulness that they point to—  
these must go into our hearts./

How do we do this?  
How do we allow God's truth to be an all-pervasive part of our lives?

We need regular practices that reinforce that truth—  
daily devotions—Bible reading and prayer—  
Bible memory and meditation--  
giving thanks at meals,  
talking with other believers about our faith—  
being a part of community group during the week—  
all of these are ways that we can  
**"Let love and faithfulness never leave you;  
bind them around your neck,  
write them on the tablet of your heart."**

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This is the core of the covenant—  
The Lord our God—the one true God—  
in his uniqueness and his singularity—  
he is to be worshipped,  
and he is to be loved—  
for he has loved us first.  
He is to be loved with a love that encompasses all that we are  
and all that we do.

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This is the doctrine—  
it is the first thing that is said--  
and it must come first,  
before we get to the responsibility that comes with it--  
the responsibility, in Moses' words,

to "impress these things upon your children."  
We have a responsibility to **Communicate the Covenant**--  
This "impressing,"  
this "diligent teaching" (ESV) of this doctrine  
is the indoctrination.

How does the faith of the fathers and mothers get passed on to the children?  
God's truth first has to be important to you parents--

I can remember an old history teacher at my high school, very near retirement—  
who, on the parents' night at the school, had written on his blackboard—  
"Do not send your kids to Sunday School,"  
which was a very unusual thing for a teacher to display in a classroom.

He didn't say anything about this as he spoke to the parents about his class  
and what he expected from their children.  
But just as he was dismissing them, he flipped up a map  
which had been covering another blackboard to expose the words:  
"Bring them with you."

"Do not send your kids to Sunday School"  
"Bring them with you."

Kids aren't dumb--  
They can tell when something is important to their parents.  
That's why the idea of just letting the children decide for themselves is naïve.  
You will be teaching them,  
whether you want to or not—  
the question is, What will you be teaching them?

Parents indoctrinate their children more by what they do  
than by what they say.  
That's why you can best impress God's truth on your children  
by letting that truth impress itself on you.

Certainly, there should be formal times of teaching in the home—  
the planned activities--  
family devotions, Bible reading times,  
time set aside to communicate God's Word.

There can be things that are built into the fabric  
of the home and family life--  
certain family traditions—like having prayers before meals together,  
or certain holiday customs  
that reinforce gospel truth.

These regular rituals are important—  
and one way to teach your children is suggested by the question of v. 20.  
Using this example,  
through history Christians have developed a question and answer format  
to teach biblical truth in what is call a catechism—

these became especially popular during the time of the Reformation.  
That approach is used to great affect in our Gospel Project Sunday School material.

Just as children need to learn about the Bible,  
they also need to learn about the theology of the Bible—  
that's what these Reformation catechisms are especially good at.

There is a new one that has just come out under the direction of the Gospel Coalition  
and the Tim Keller's Redeemer Church  
called the *New City Catechism*—

It has 52 questions and answers—  
that can be a very helpful tool in teaching your children  
the basic doctrine of the gospel.  
We'll be talking more about that this fall.

You need formal ways of indoctrination,  
but equally important are the informal teachable moments--  
the spontaneous occasions--  
when you are tucking the kids into bed and they want to talk,  
when something comes on television that provoke discussion,  
or when the child comes home with something from school.  
These are those unpredictable times when the window of a child's mind is open,  
if only for a moment  
to receive some precious ray of God's light.

These can't be planned or programmed--  
You simply have to grab them when they come.  
Are you looking for these times?

Every moment is a potential teaching time--a learning experience--

"It is said of James Boswell, the famous 18th century biographer,  
that he often referred to a special day in his childhood  
when his father took him fishing.

The day was fixed in his adult mind,  
and he often reflected upon many of the things  
his father had taught him in the course of their fishing experience together.

After having heard of that particular excursion so often,  
it occurred to someone much later to check the journal that Boswell's father kept  
and determine what had been said about the fishing trip  
from the parental perspective.

Turning to that day, the reader found only one sentence entered:  
'Gone fishing today with my son; a day wasted.'"<sup>6</sup>

There is no such thing as a day wasted--  
Dads, Moms--you are building into the lives of your children every day--  
whether you know it or not.

And as Christians, we are teaching what it means to be a disciple of Jesus to others

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<sup>6</sup> Cited from MacDonald, *Fathers*, p. 79

every day.

Often it is the little things that speak the loudest.

Howard Hendricks of Dallas Seminary told of two graduates, brothers,  
who are making a significant impact for Christ in their lives.

Hendricks once asked one of them,

"Ed, what do you remember most about your father?"

Ed thought for a moment and then said--

"Two things--and interestingly enough, they appear to be contradictory.

I used to throw a paper route, and I had to get up at 4 a.m.

I'd go by my father's room and the door would be cracked,

and I'd see him on his knees in prayer.

That made a profound impression on me.

The second thing I remember is my father rolling on the floor with us kids in laughter."

What a combination--on his knees in prayer, and on the floor in laughter.

A demonstration of love for the Lord

and a demonstration love for his kids.

Little things in daily life--

maybe it's a moment of discipline--your son has refused to obey,

and action is called for--

that becomes an opportunity to speak of God's discipline of us.

--maybe it's a moment of disappointment and failure--

your daughter didn't make the band at school.

You can tell her about the abiding love of Christ,

who picks us up and puts us back on our feet.

--maybe it's a moment of joy--

a time to praise God for his goodness.

We need to capture all of life for Christ--

and to use it to capture our kids.

**"These commandments that I give you today are to be upon 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."**

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Christian education is more than just cramming a bunch of facts into our kids heads--

It is more than just sending your children to Sunday School.

it is a process of socialization in the gospel, of indoctrination--

but more than that--

it is communicating to them the **covenant**--

it is sharing a relationship--a relationship of love and obedience--  
with our One God--Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The God who has loved us with a great love,  
and who as our Father wants what is best for us.

Communicating the beauty of this covenant relationship--  
that is what evangelism is all about--  
and that is what discipleship is all about--  
and that is what parenting is all about.

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We are moving to the communion table in a moment,  
but can I leave you with one simple assignment—  
to practice what we've heard about today.  
At lunch today or maybe sometime later in the afternoon or evening—  
talk with someone about something you heard this morning—  
with you family members or a friend or neighbor—  
or, as a last resort, on Facebook—

**"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.  
Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul  
and with all your strength.  
These commandments that I give you today are to be upon 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."**

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I invite our servers to come forward as we pray--

**Prayer**—  
You are the Lord and there is no other—  
you are worthy of our worship,  
and you are worthy of our love--

Communion—

If your son or daughter came up to you asked you,  
"What is the meaning of this bread and this cup  
that the church shares together?"  
what would you say?

Tell them—

When we were slaves to our sin and without hope,  
God being rich in mercy and love,  
sent his Son to redeem us,  
rescuing us from his own wrath.  
Jesus died in our place to take away our sin  
and he rose again to give us new life—  
and when we eat this bread and drink from this cup  
we remember that gracious work,  
we commune with Christ by the work of the Spirit,  
and we look forward to that day  
when we will eat and drink in his glorious presence.

That's why we come to this table.

Is that why you come today?

If not, I urge you to let the elements pass—  
for this divine ordinance  
is for those who have embraced Christ  
as their Lord and their Savior,  
and have become a part of his public people  
through the confession of their faith through baptism.

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## **"The Continuance of the Covenant" Deut. 6**

The notion of "indoctrination" gets a bad name, but it happens all the time, whether we like it or not. The question is not whether we will teach others, but what we will teach. Our passage this morning urges us to pass on the covenant—bringing the covenant to the next generation.

### **I. The Core of the Covenant— the Doctrine (vv. 4,5)**

#### **A. God is to be worshipped**

- 1. He is unique--He alone is God.**
- 2. He is unified--He alone is God.**

#### **B. God is to be loved**

### **II. The Communication of the Covenant-- the Indoctrination (vv.6-9)**

**Impressing God's truth on our children**

Sermon Discussion:

**"The Continuance of the Covenant"**  
**Deut. 6**

- How have you been "indoctrinated," both for good and otherwise? What are the ways that we are "indoctrinated" by our culture? What kind of practices do we engage in that shape our view of the world and of God?
- How can we be commanded to love someone? What is the difference (if there is one) between obeying God and loving him? Why is loving God with all our heart, soul, and strength the first and greatest commandment?
- What are some of the "informal" ways that the truth of God's word has been impressed upon you? How does that dynamic operate in a family? in a church family?
- How often do you talk about your faith with others outside of a church gathering? How could you increase that frequency?
- How can we seek to apply vv.8,9—bringing the word of God to bear more fully on our individual life, in our family and in our public life?
- What do you make of the answer to the question of v. 20? Why is that answer so important?