

Immanuel Lutheran Mail Ministry



Deuteronomy 6:4-9 *"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. ⁵ You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. ⁶ And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. ⁷ You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. ⁸ You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. ⁹ You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.*

What do you think is the worst problem facing society today? Certainly, there are many frontrunners. The last year-and-a-half or so have revealed great divides in our country and in our society. Then there are the ever present, terrible diseases like the various forms of cancer that aren't going anywhere. There's also the growing drug problem in our society, including the opioid crisis which affects millions of everyday Americans. It would be pretty hard to pick any on-going problem and label it as the worst, but there's a now-deceased former professor at Columbia University named Allan Bloom who said it's none of the above. According to him, the worst problem facing our society today is a philosophy called "value relativism." In short, he's referring to the inability to tell right from wrong. In his book, *The Closing of the American Mind*, he wrote that Americans, especially young Americans, are having a harder and harder time distinguishing between right and wrong.

He wrote that one major reason for this gradual shift is that past generations of Americans were, for the most part, Christians who would go back to the Bible for their absolute source of truth. And that's sadly no longer the case in our country. Nowadays, everything is relative. What's right for you, many claim, may not be right for someone else. If you speak in favor of anything with too much certainty, well then you're alienating an entire other crowd, so now most things are labeled "right," and very few will speak out against anything. As Bloom wrote, the American mind is closing. The popular question of the day is the same one that Pontius Pilate asked 2000 years ago, "*What is truth?*" But it seems like no one is willing to answer.

Now, perhaps you find yourself thinking, "Glad I don't have that problem! I know what the truth is!" And it would seem that we do. After all, just before our last hymn, we all stood up together and confessed our faith in the one true God. Everything we confessed is derived straight from scripture, which we all believe to be the only source of absolute truth for our Christian lives. Or do we? Does God's revealed truth *really* govern our everyday lives? Today's text poses some important questions about this and reveals even more important answers for you. The theme we'll consider today is:

"We All Believe In One True God—Don't We?"

- I. Do we confess the one, true, Triune God?
- II. Do we offer the love that is due Him?
- III. Do we keep His Word in our hearts?

Our text this morning comes from a speech that Moses made to the Children of Israel before they finally entered the promised land of Canaan. There they were, standing on the Eastern shore of the

Jordan River, eagerly looking across to the land which would become their home. And they'd waited a long time for this day to come, and I assume they were feeling pretty impatient to get on with it. For many years their people had served as slaves in the land of Egypt. When they finally escaped through God's intervention, they were sentenced to wandering in the wilderness for forty more years. And now they were this close to entering into that land described as **"flowing with milk and honey."** (Exodus 3:8) And at this moment, of all times, Moses chose to halt the assembly and make a speech. But it was for good reason. There were some important reminders they needed to hear, the first was this, **"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one."**

Have you ever heard of the terms, "polytheism" or "monotheism"? Polytheism means, "believing in many gods." Monotheism means, "believing in one God." And Israelites were monotheists, just like us; they believed in Jehovah, the one, true, Triune God. They're probably standing there, itching to get their new lives started thinking, "Yeah, Moses—we all know that already! Of course we believe in one true God!" BUT, the people in Canaan, the land into which they were crossing over, those people were polytheists believing in many gods. Baal, Ashteroth, Molech, and countless others. And Moses knew that the many false gods of Canaan would become very attractive to the people of Israel. And it happened; this same people would soon turn away from the Lord and bow down to these many idols.

What about us, the members of Immanuel Lutheran Church? **We All Believe in One True God—Don't We? Don't we all confess our faith in the one, true, Triune God?** Well, we do on Sundays, as we did a few minutes ago! But what about on Monday, or Tuesday, or any of the other days of the week? In our everyday lives, are we truly monotheists, or do we have many different gods? One thing's for sure—our society is a modern day Canaan. We live in a polytheistic society. The people around us worship many different "gods"—chief among them being the Almighty Dollar. And how easy is it for us to confess faith in *only* one God, but at the same spend most of our energy in the pursuit of and place most of our trust in money? Jesus warned us about this, when He said, **"You cannot serve God and mammon."** (Luke 16:13) But how tempting that form of idolatry is. And there are many other gods of this society which appeal to us as well. Power, success, our families, our careers, our own desires—do you think any of these have taken that primary place in your hearts and lives?

Moses continues in our text with the First Commandment, which most of us probably know by heart. **"You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might."** I'd like you to take a moment and think about what that involves. Jesus called this the **"First and great commandment."** (Matthew 22:38) In fact, it's been said that if we *truly* kept this First Commandment, the other nine commandments wouldn't be any problem at all. But **do we really offer God the love that is due to Him?**

The First Commandment is a wonderful tool which can effectively bring a little needed humility to a Christian. The fact is, we tend to, in our own minds anyways, exaggerate our standing before the Lord. We might understand that we're certainly not perfect, but when compared to many other people in this world, clearly "I'm doing pretty good." But if you go back to the First Commandment—do you love the Lord, **"with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might"**? On this commandment, even the most pious among us must hang their head in shame. No matter how hard we try, this is one area we all fall way short of fulfilling God's law.

But how can we even know what kind of love that is—whole hearted, whole souled love? How can we possibly carry out that love? The answer to both those questions lies in one simple word: Jesus! We can see what true love is when we look at what love drove God to do for sinful mankind. The Apostle John asks: Do you want to know what love really is? He said, ***“In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the payment for our sins.”*** (1 John 4:10) In love, God handed over His own Son to be tortured and executed as a criminal on the cross. For sinful people who were actually His enemies by nature He did this! And when it comes to *fulfilling* God’s commandment of love—showing our love for Him in return—we simply cannot do it. So, Jesus did it for us. Where our love of God is imperfect and flawed, His love was perfect. Where our devotion to God has gaps—periods of time where we hardly pay even a thought to God for maybe even days or weeks—Jesus’ devotion was perfect. And His perfect devotion and love for God becomes ours, by faith. It’s a free gift, and it’s ours for the taking. That’s the Good News that we hear in Romans: ***“The love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.”*** (Romans 5:5)

I once had a co-worker who was a very outspoken atheist, totally despised Christians. We were having a rather lively conversation one day as we worked, and he was getting very annoyed with me since he kept asking me rather antagonistic questions, and I just kept answering with quotes from Scripture. He said something to the effect of, “You don’t think anything for yourself, you just repeat whatever you read in an old Book.” And obviously, he meant that as an insult. But, on second thought, I realize what a comforting truth that is. Just think about it. As a Christian, you already have all the answers, they’ve all been written down for you to reference at any time in that old-yet-still-current Book.

For instance, you don’t have to wonder where you came from, for God declares in that Book, ***“Everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, I have formed him, yes, I have made him.”*** (Isaiah 43:7) You don’t have to wonder about where you’re going—that Book says, ***“I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.”*** (John 14:3) You don’t have to search to find meaning for your life, for that Book says, ***“You are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.”*** (1 Peter 2:9) And you don’t have to struggle to try to solve the problem of your own guilt due to sin. That Book says, ***“He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor punished us according to our iniquities. For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward those who fear Him; As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us.”*** (Psalm 103:10-12)

So, cheer up! When we ask the question: **Do we really offer God the love that is due Him?** The answer on our end is clearly “no.” But the message of God’s Word is this: that through Christ, God’s commandment of love has been completely fulfilled. On the cross, your Savior gained for you a complete pardon for each one of those sins that burden your conscience. What a wonderful Word that is!

And now the final question is, **will we keep this Word in our hearts?** That’s what Moses was directing, when he said, ***“And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. ⁷ You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. ⁸ You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes.***

I'm going to teach you a Hebrew word. The word is "tefillin." Tefillin were little square boxes of leather which physically contained Scripture verses. Jews who wanted to appear extra-religious (think the Pharisees) would hang these little boxes by leather straps so that they dangled from their wrists and between their eyes. That's how they carried God's command to *"keep His words in their heart."* But Jesus told them that with this arrangement, they had God's Word on the outside but not on the inside. That's why He said, ***"They do all their deeds to be seen by others. For they make their phylacteries (that's the Tefillin) broad and their fringes long."*** (Matthew 23:5)

They had to do that because, in their rejection of their Savior, they had no other way to try to keep God near to them than just by physically tying His Word to themselves. But God's given you a much better solution. The Holy Spirit has given us true faith in the redeeming Son of God. That means His Word is in our hearts, not just tied to our wrists! Because of what Christ has done for us, that Word has assured us that we are free from sin and death. Our future is certain, and our salvation is assured. For though our stubborn hearts of stone would resist Him, God the Holy Spirit has planted in a us a clean heart and has renewed a right spirit within us. So how, then, can we possibly keep our joy over God's Word to a once-a-week celebration? We can't. It has got to flow over into our everyday lives. We have to take care to teach that Word faithfully to our children. We have to speak about it when we walk by the way, when we lie down, and when we rise—in other words, every single moment of the day is a good time to review all that the Triune God has done for you.

And Moses gives us one more piece of added direction regarding God's words in our last verse, ***"You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates."*** Perhaps you have some of God's Words written near the door of your houses, or on the walls in the form of pictures or plaques. One of my mom's favorite passages is Joshua 24:15. ***"Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve—but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."*** As far back as I can remember, she has always had that passage displayed on a few walls of the house. But the best thing about those is that they are not only on my parents' walls, but thanks to God's work in them, those words written in their heart as well. And I pray the Lord continues to do the same for each of us too.

Because, thinking back to that big problem facing our society, the idea of truth being relative—is that a problem for us too? Is the right way impossible to find? Not for us. For we have been given the irrefutable Word of our Savior, who said, ***"I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life."*** If there's ever a moment when the questions become difficult to answer, when the truth seems hard to find, remember that Jesus is the way we're walking, that Jesus is the truth that God has revealed to us, and that Jesus has the eternal life we're waiting to inherit. Afterall—we all believe in one true God, don't we? **By His grace—yes, we do! Thanks be to God, in Jesus name, Amen.**

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:7) Amen.