

First Presbyterian Church
Bible Study Discussion Starter
Deuteronomy 10:12-22

12. So now, O Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you? Only to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul,
13. and to keep the commandments of the LORD your God and his decrees that I am commanding you today, for your own well-being.
14. Although heaven and the heaven of heavens belong to the LORD your God, the earth with all that is in it,
15. yet the LORD set his heart in love on your ancestors alone and chose you, their descendants after them, out of all the peoples, as it is today.
16. Circumcise, then, the foreskin of your heart, and do not be stubborn any longer.
17. For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who is not partial and takes no bribe,
18. who executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and who loves the strangers, providing them food and clothing.
19. You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.
20. You shall fear the LORD your God; him alone you shall worship; to him you shall hold fast, and by his name you shall swear.
21. He is your praise; he is your God, who has done for you these great and awesome things that your own eyes have seen.
22. Your ancestors went down to Egypt seventy persons; and now the LORD your God has made you as numerous as the stars in heaven.

Fear God? Have you ever wondered about the Bible's high praise for "the fear of the LORD" which is "the beginning of wisdom"? I have, and the best I've been able to do is relate it to the child's "fear" of earning the parent's disapproval. Or to the husband's "fear" of offending or hurting his wife, whom he loves. I don't see this "fear" as being the same as fear of an enemy, a disease, or a dangerous situation. This fear seems to me born of respect, concern, and even love, and so it is a different thing. To me, this fear doesn't make God a terror to us but, rather, the prime concern in our lives. Deuteronomy combines it with love for God. I don't think fear as we usually think of the feeling, combines well with love. Jesus takes it further by reminding us that God is the one who is greatest and, therefore, would be most the most terrible – a far greater potential threat than any power on earth – but this God who is most to be feared is the Father who loves us and who cares even for a single sparrow.

The heart represents the *will* rather than the sentiments. At least, in the Old Testament way of speaking, the will is primary. That's why the heart can be stubborn. When love is stubborn in its refusal to stop loving, that's a good thing; but, when the will is stubborn and refuses to respond

to God or the needs of people, that's a bad thing. So, loving God wholeheartedly is expressed in our responses, attitudes, decisions, and actions and not merely in sentiments.

The God who creates and rules over everything has chosen you, Israel, to love. That's amazing. I think the right response is wonder. How can such a thing be? But it is.

Years ago, I read an article contending that, in the way the Bible uses the term, to be "chosen" is to be singled out from among many *for the purpose of service to the many*. It's not to be set aside for special privilege or status. God calls a prophet for the sake of the people to whom the prophet must go and speak. God chooses Israel for the sake of all peoples.

Circumcise the foreskin of your heart and don't be stubborn any longer. Remove the callous. Let God's love get through to you and move you so it changes you. If we do, we become responsive to God and learn to care about other people as God does. Empathy and compassion are the great enemies of evil. Our distance from God shows up in our lack of regard or concern for other people.

Now we encounter a paradox. Know that the God who favors you plays no favorites. The God who loves you more than you know will not favor you over others if you mistreat them or scorn them. Here again, the parent-child relationship helps me understand. "Young man, you do not treat your friend or any other person that way! Do you think you're more important than s/he is? Well, you've not! Just who do you think you are?" Not that I ever heard such talk from either of my parents, of course. Right.

Yahweh God takes no bribe. That refusal to be bought should be reflected both in the church and in public officials, those responsible for justice. Imagine it: a society that seeks justice for all without regard to influence, wealth, or prestige! It's not about being impersonal but about being fair.

Yahweh God goes beyond fairness to look with special concern upon the vulnerable and disenfranchised as represented by three figures: the widow, the orphan, and the alien. The Hebrew word for the last of the three is *ger* (rhymes with their). A *ger* is a foreigner living in Israel and working there. The Israelites had been *gerim* (the plural) in Egypt where the Egyptians mistreated and enslaved them. They know how it feels, and so should always be able to empathize with *gerim*. Moses even named his son Gershom because he was a *ger* in a strange land. In our land, a *ger* is a person who has or needs a green card, a foreigner living among us to work or seek refuge. Such people have always been especially vulnerable to prejudice, abuse, and exploitation. Matthew says Jesus and his parents became refugees, foreigners living in Egypt. The command of God is to love the *gerim* among you.

To Yahweh your God you shall hold fast, cleave, cling tightly. Is there any greater wonder than that the Creator of the universe should want us to hold on tight, should care about your responses and mine, should be so concerned that we learn to care for each other and do justice as to withhold final judgment upon all the evils we do to each other and keep trying to get us to come around?