

“More than just rules...”

We are offering a series of reflections for individuals and churches who may be finding it difficult to provide midweek prayer and shared learning from Scripture. You can use these by watching the YouTube video, reading the relevant Bible passage and then reflecting on the questions below. To help make this a shared activity, you are encouraged to reflect on this together with friends using an online conference package, or simply arrange with a friend for them to watch it too. Then ring each other up, share your thoughts and responses and then pray for one another, and pray together for our world.

Read Deuteronomy 6:4-9 and 4:9-8

If you can, watch the YouTube video: <https://youtu.be/uVZr1Z6iKMQ>

It's easy to see the Old Testament law books as simply a catalogue of ancient rituals and regulations that don't really have much of a place in today's world. But if we look beyond their style and recognise that they, like the rest of the Bible, are intended to show us what God is like, then they become something very different. An example like the cleansing ritual in Leviticus ch 14 is more than just a religious ceremony, it tells us that God cares if people live in mould-ridden houses, and calls us to act as a community to support and help each other, it calls upon religious leaders to be active in organising the community's response, and it describes worship as something that is an integral part of this. The kind of society that God outlines is one where community life, religious organisation and worship are all intertwined.

Deuteronomy outlines two key realities:

These laws are an act of love [Deut 4:9-8] For all their detail, the Old Testament laws are simply the outworking of one basic principle “Love the Lord your God . . .” a commandment that Jesus underlined as the greatest, reminding us to also “*love your neighbour as yourself.*”

These laws are an act of witness [Deut 6:4-9] As the other nations saw them being put into practice, they would recognise the reality of God's presence among God's people. This same principle is echoed centuries later in the words of Jesus “*This is how everyone will know you are my disciples if you have love one for another.*”

As we recognise this, there are three questions we might consider:

How am I expressing Gods' love in my life? As far as the Old Testament law books were concerned, love wasn't something to be simply spoken about, or merely recognised as an attribute of God, it was something to be lived out. Others would work out God was love because they saw God's people acting in love. We believe that God is love, sing about God's love and recall Bible verses about God's love, but the questions that these law books ask is “How are we expressing that love in our lives, our actions, our values, the way we treat others?”

Are my actions a true expression of love? It is also important that our actions do not become an end in themselves, but remain an expression of love. 1 Corinthians 13 warns of the danger of doing remarkable things but not acting out of love. Profound words are just a clanging gong, deep insights become meaningless, acts of sacrifice are pointless unless they are expressions of love. The heart of the Christian message is that these two are inescapably linked. God calls us to do more than talk about love, but to live and act in love in every aspect of our community life. And God does not call us to simply get involved in good activities – these things are to be an expression of a genuine love for God and each other.

Where and how do these two come together in my life? As you think about your love for God – how are you expressing that? How is that reflected in the way you treat others and go about things? As you think about the things you are doing at the moment – what is your motivation for doing them? How are these an expression of your love for God and your love for your neighbour? Would those who are watching recognise that God is at their centre?

PRAYER

Loving, Living God, as I reflect on the infinite love that is found in you, help me to be one who does not simply speak of your love, but puts it into practice in my words, my deeds and my attitudes. May every aspect of my life be an expression of the love that is found in you, that those around me might recognise the reality of your presence in our life today as your people. AMEN