

Why do we do what we do?

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Date: 25 March 2018

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[0 : 0 0] Well, I would like us for a short while to turn back to the chapter that we read in Deuteronomy chapter 6 and we're going to read again these verses that are on the screen before you.

Here, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your might.

And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. 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.

Now, as I said, Deuteronomy 6 is one of the most important chapters in the Bible. It's one of these big chapters that we have in the Old Testament.

If I was to ask you, what are the main big famous chapters in the Old Testament? You would maybe say something like what Genesis 1, where it speaks about creation. Genesis 3, where it talks about, where it describes to us how humanity sinned and rebelled against God.

[1 : 1 1] Genesis 12 is a really important chapter because it introduces us to Abraham, who's a big, big figure in the Bible. Exodus 20 is where we get the Ten Commandments, another big chapter.

And Samuel 7, a key chapter in the life of David. And Isaiah 53 is a wonderful chapter prophesying towards the cross of Jesus Christ.

There's many, many, many big, big chapters in the Old Testament. And one of them is Deuteronomy chapter 6. And the reason it's so important is that here, Moses highlights the foundational principle of life as God's people.

He says, here, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might.

And as we read at the very beginning, Jesus himself said in Mark 12 that this is the most important commandment.

[2 : 1 9] So if you were able to go up to Jesus and say, please show me the most important commandment in the whole of the Old Testament, he would take you to Deuteronomy 6 and he would show you these verses.

And so it's a hugely important passage. Very, very, very significant commandment has been given here. And one of the reasons it's so significant is that really, Moses is summing up all of the other commandments.

He is summarizing them by saying, you are to love the Lord your God. And that's not to be half-hearted, it's to be wholehearted. And everything else follows on from that.

And we notice that in verse 7, Moses tells us something interesting. He says that the Israelites are not simply to recognize this commandment for themselves, they are also to teach it and all the other commandments to their children.

In other words, God is saying, you need to know this and you need to teach it to your children. And this is a principle that's emphasized again and again and again in the Old Testament, even later on in the chapter from verse 20.

[3 : 39] It says, if your son comes and says, what's the meaning of this, these testimonies and statutes and these rules, what are they all about? You are to explain them to him. We see the same thing in Exodus 12 when they established the Passover.

It says, if your children say to you, what is this service? What do you mean by this service? You need to explain why you're doing it. And another example is in Joshua chapter 4 where they were told to take a pile of stones from the riverbed of the Jordan and set them up as a memorial.

It says, when your children ask in time to come, what do these stones mean to you? You must explain and tell them. And all of these chapters are highlighting the fact that God is aware that certain truths will need to be explained to generations to come.

And in many ways that's just a matter of common sense. In every sphere of knowledge, children need to be taught by the generation that has come before them.

And all of this is a reminder of the fact that children, especially young children, are very, very good at asking a very important question.

[4 : 55] And that question consists of only one word. Why? Children look at things, they observe what we're doing and they'll say, why?

And sometimes the questions can be really hard. So I've been asked various things. I've got three examples here of questions. Why do wars happen?

Why are people disabled? Why do we need money? And that's a really interesting question. All of these are really interesting questions.

But children have asked me, not just my children but other children, have asked these questions. Why? Why? Why? Children are very, very, very, very good at asking why.

And it's a great question to ask. And often that inquisitiveness fades as we enter into adulthood. And sometimes as grown-ups there's lots and lots of things that we do and we never stop and ask ourselves why.

[6 : 11] And God is aware of this principle that children will ask why. And he wants to ensure that grown-ups are ready to answer. And that's the question I want us to think about today.

I want us just to ask why do we do what we do? To begin with I want us to start by just looking at our service this morning today.

We're here today in many ways as we usually are. Why do we do what we do? So let's think of it in various details. This morning we've got four singing in our service.

Why? Why not ten? We're singing without music. Why? Our service started at 12 noon.

Why? We've got several prayers in our service each week. Often I'm the only one who ever does it. Why?

[7 : 12] We sit to pray, we stand to sing. Why? We've got two services on a Sunday. Why? Why not three or four? At the end of our service we have a benediction.

Why? We have communion four times a year. Why? Now I'm not saying that any of these things are wrong. I love all of these things.

What I'm saying though is that we should be able to answer the question why. If someone came and says why do you do this? Why do you only have four singing? Why do you do that?

Why do you do this? We should be able to answer. And if all we can say is because then we really need to get our act together.

And I remember being hugely challenged by this when I was a student in Edinburgh at a lecture, Ross Donald McLeod who was giving us and he asked all of these questions. Why do you have four singing?

[8 : 10] Why do you have two services on a Sunday? Why does it start at such and such a time? And I could not answer any of the questions. I couldn't answer them because it was just what I'd always done and I'd never thought it through.

And it's reminding us that we should ensure that we can explain why we do what we do. Just imagine an Israelite child at the time of Passover coming up to their parents and saying, ma'am, why do we do this feast?

If their parents just said, well, it's just what we always do, then the whole point of the feast has been forgotten because the purpose of it was to remind them of specific events that took place at a certain time.

It's really important that we don't simply know what we do, we need to know why we do it as well. And that raises a very important question in regard to our service today, which I want to spend five minutes answering.

That's the question, why do we baptise infants? That's a big question. And some Christians say we should do it, some say we shouldn't do it, and it's been debated for centuries and it will be for centuries to come.

[9 : 30] Why do we do it? It's a question that we need to be able to answer. Well, we're going to spend five minutes answering that just now. The foundational principle underlying the reason why we baptise infants is because family is at the centre of God's purposes.

We studied that a year or two ago and as part of a big study that we were doing. Family is one of the key themes that runs right through the whole Bible. The Bible is an amazing book because although it was written over centuries by many, many different authors, the whole thing fits together perfectly.

And there's various themes that stretch from Genesis chapter one at the beginning to Revelation 22 at the very end and it ties it together with amazing coherence. And one of these themes is family.

So right at the beginning of the Bible, God establishes a family when he creates Adam and Eve and he tells them to have children. And as we often say very quickly, we read that Adam and Eve sinned against God and broke their relationship and fellowship with him.

But immediately God promised to restore a promise of salvation, a promise of restoration, a promise of victory and that promise was going to come through the offspring of Eve.

[10 : 54] So it's a family promise. Later on, God makes a covenant with Abraham in Genesis 12 and that included his family, even though at that moment he didn't have any children at all.

Abraham's family grew into a huge nation called Israel, but it was still one big family and it was organised around that structure. And all of these Old Testament themes come out in the fact that in the New Testament we are united to Jesus Christ by faith and we are adopted into one big family.

And when the disciples went out with the gospel message on the day of Pentecost, they made it very clear this promise of salvation is for you and it's for your children.

God's people, God's covenant people from the days of Abraham way back in the Old Testament, right the way through until today are a family. Now if somebody joins this family, God has commanded that an outward visible sign is placed on them.

In the Old Testament that sign was circumcision. In the New Testament that sign is baptism. So if you are back in the Old Testament, imagine you are living in the ancient Near East, 2,800 years ago or something like that.

[12 : 21] If you wanted to join and become a member of God's people, you would have to take the outward visible sign, the sign of circumcision.

And a clear example of that is Abraham. Abraham was actually 99 years old when he was circumcised. So it was an adult circumcision if you like. And God makes it clear that other adults who join are to be circumcised as well.

Exodus 12 tells us that if a stranger shall sojourn with you and would keep the Passover to the Lord, let all his males be circumcised, then he may come near and keep it.

He shall be as a native of the land, but no uncircumcised person shall eat of it. So God's people have this sign, those from the outside who want to join, they have to have this sign as well.

And so they are all like natives, all part of the one family. So in the Old Testament, adults who became members of God's people were given the sign of circumcision.

[13 : 21] And exactly the same thing happens in the New Testament. Adults who come to faith are baptised. And so we see the same thing, old and New Testament, a person who comes to faith from outside God's covenant community has this outward sign and seal placed on them.

It's a great reminder of the fact that we are not in any way against adult baptisms. In fact, we long to see adults being baptised because our village is full of adults who have not been baptised.

And we long to see them come to faith. We long to see them join our church. We long to see them being baptised and proclaiming that Jesus is their Lord and Savior.

So everybody agrees on that. It's not really anything to argue about. But the question arises, is it okay to baptise children? And some people are out of the view that because the sign should be placed on adults who come in to the community, it shouldn't be placed on children.

Many, many people are of that view. Are they right? That's the question. Well, I think you'll know I'm going to say no because we're here today to baptise a child. And the reason we don't agree with that position is because we believe that the Bible teaches us that we should indeed baptise children.

[14 : 41] And the key person to answer this question is Abraham. He is a model for us as believers. And those of you who were here a couple of months ago will know that we were looking at Abraham as part of our studies in Romans.

Paul spends a whole chapter in Romans chapter 4 talking about Abraham. And the great point he makes is that Abraham came to faith first and then he was circumcised.

And the point Paul is making is that Abraham is not saved because he was circumcised. He's saved because of his faith. He's justified by faith and not by works.

And we totally agree with that. So Paul's point, he says, Abraham came to faith first, then after the sign was placed on him. Now after the service, somebody spoke to me, somebody's not here today, so don't worry, I'm not picking up, picking on anybody here.

Somebody said to me, you've just presented a clear argument for adult baptism. Because that said, Abraham came to faith first and then the sign was placed on him.

[15 : 51] And so the person said, that's adult baptism that you've just presented an argument for. And you might say, yeah, that person is right.

Well they are right in terms of an adult who is outside of the covenant community. But if you are going to take Abraham as your model, which you should, I believe, you need to ask yourself the question, what did God tell Abraham to do with his child?

And the answer is that God said to Abraham, put the sign on your son when he is eight days old.

And so not only is Abraham a model of an adult who comes to faith and who has the sign placed on him, he's also a model of the fact that that sign is to be placed on his offspring as a baby.

And so we can summarise it all like this. I said five minutes, I've taken six minutes, but we're nearly finished. Old Testament, New Testament, the whole thing fits together as one. In the Old Testament, the sign was circumcision.

[16 : 56] In the New Testament, the sign was baptism. In both of these contexts, the sign is to be placed on adults who come into the community who are not part of it. But in the Old Testament, it's also made very clear that the same sign is to be put on your children.

So it gets put on Abraham as an adult, it gets put on his son Isaac as a child. In the New Testament, the sign is baptism, it's placed on adults, it clearly happens.

Question is, what do we do with our children? And our argument is that we follow the same pattern as the Old Testament. Just as they put the sign on their children, we also put the sign on the children.

God has not told us to stop. We are going to baptize little Lewis for the same reason that Abraham circumcised Isaac. And a key reason why we do that is because we want our children to grow up as members of God's covenant community.

Gus and Yvonne are going to be standing here today saying that they want to raise little Lewis in God's way and as part of God's family. It's all a reminder that family is at the heart of God's purposes.

[18 : 10] And we are baptizing we Lewis because Gus and Yvonne and every single one of us here knows that to grow up loving and knowing and serving the Lord is by a mile the most important thing in our lives.

So that's the five minute explanation that actually took seven minutes as to why we baptize children. But the question why do we do what we do goes beyond the details of our service this morning.

It even goes way beyond the question of infant baptism. We need to ask ourselves why do we do what we do as Christians.

So imagine a child comes to you and says why are you a Christian? Why do you go to church?

Why do you do what you do? What would you say? How would you respond? Well that's a big question isn't it?

[19 : 16] And I think a key passage for answering it is Deuteronomy 6 verses 4 to 5. Here we are being reminded of some of the most important things that we can ever think or talk about and there's two things in particular that these verses emphasize for us.

First of all in verse 4 it says, Hear O Israel the Lord our God the Lord is one. And that is highlighting a very simple but a very important point.

The fact that only God is God.

Now verse 5 there is no, we would describe that as a statement of monotheism. In other words that there is only one God. That was one of the key things that distinguished Israel from all the other nations in the Old Testament because all the other nations believed in lots of different gods.

Lots of rain and gods of storms and gods of the land and all these different things. Israel was different. They said there's only one God. They were monotheists in the midst of polytheism.

[20 : 32] Israel were different. And this is a core doctrine of Christianity. Only God is God. And we believe in one God.

The triune God of the Bible, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, one God. And there is no other. No other. Anything else that claims to be God is an idol. And that should make perfect sense to us.

If God is God, if God is the supreme being there can only be one. He alone is God.

We are created by Him. We are accountable to Him. And we worship Him because He and He alone is to be worshiped. That's why we are Christians because God alone is God.

[21 : 29] So we don't worship here today because we have a Christian heritage in our nation. We don't worship God because we've chosen Him out of all the other different religions of the world. We don't worship God because He has provided us with a belief system that we enjoy.

We worship God because He is God. And when we really grasp what that means then we would never, ever be casual about our worship again.

Only God is God. But the second thing that's highlighted in these verses is in verse 5 where it reveals to us that the one and only God wants to have a relationship with us.

Now that is an extraordinary thing because we must recognise the non-essentialness of that. In other words, God alone is God and that means that He most definitely does not need us.

God owes us nothing. We are simply tiny specks in a vast universe that God has made. He has existed and will exist for all eternity.

[22 : 42] He does not depend on you. He does not depend on me. And there's a sense in which God could abandon us and forget about us because He doesn't need us.

But the amazing thing about God is that He doesn't do that. He doesn't want to do that. Because God does not simply want to be THE God.

God wants to be your God. THE God is our God.

And do you know that that is the most extraordinary privilege that we could ever have? God wants to be in a relationship with us whereby He is our God and we are His people.

So it's not a case of God just being the supreme being that dwells somewhere who knows where and has absolutely nothing to do with the world and no interest in us whatsoever. God wants a meaningful, real relationship with us whereby He is our God and we are His people.

[23 : 53] And there is one thing that lies at the very heart of that relationship. One thing that is more important than anything else, one governing principle that determines the whole structure of a relationship with God.

What is that one thing? Love. THE God who made us is the God who loves us and that's why He wants to be in a relationship with us.

And that's why the most important commandment for us is to love Him in return.

And the vital truth that we must remember is that this relationship with God should be everything to us. It should be the most important thing in our lives.

That's why it can never be half-hearted but we are to love God with all our heart, all our soul, all our strength. It's not something that we should just be casual about, it's something that should be everything to us because it transforms everything.

[25 : 12] Knowing Jesus is the most wonderful and most amazing thing that any of us can ever experience.

And we must never forget that the whole reason that we can have a relationship with God is because He has given everything in order to save us.

And so God wants us to be wholeheartedly committed to Him simply because He has been wholeheartedly committed to us.

There are many, many things I like about God. There are a lot of things I like about God. But one of the things I like most about Gus is that when I look at Gus, I see a husband and a father who would do anything, anything for his wife and for his son.

He's the kind of person who would walk through fire for them without even blinking. And that's a wonderful thing.

[26 : 28] But never forget that that is just a glimpse of what God is willing to do for you.

Because the message of the Bible is telling us about the God who will go all the way to death so that you can have a relationship with Him so that you can be saved.

But if you can imagine Jesus on the cross, ask yourself the question, what did Jesus have left for himself as he died on the cross?

What did he have left? The answer is nothing because he gave everything for you.

And for that reason, we love him with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our strength.

[27 : 35] So why do we do what we do as Christians? Well first of all because only God is God, but also because he has poured his love out upon us through Jesus Christ so that we can have a relationship with Him so that God is our Father, Jesus is our brother, and God himself dwells in our hearts by his spirit and we can be part of his amazing family.

And that is something that we want our children to see in us every day. So that when we speak, when we act, when we work, when we care for our children, when we spend time with them, when we have fun with them, we do it in a way that is to the glory of God and shows them that we love them and that we love the Lord.

God is our God. That's the greatest privilege that any of us can ever, ever have. So the child's question, why do you do what you do, is a really, really, really important question.

As Christians, we want to be able to give clear answers to that, whether it's in regard to our faith in general or regard to the details of our life together as a church. And if there's anything that people don't know or don't understand, then please just ask.

It's always okay to ask. It's a really important thing to ask, why do we do what we do. But just to finish with just now, if you're not yet a Christian, then I want to ask you a question.

[29 : 17] Why do you do what you do? Whatever you're going to be doing tomorrow morning, why do you do what you do?

Whatever you're aiming for in life, whether it's a house or a job or a routine or an achievement, why are you doing it?

The great story of your life up until today, 25th of March 2018, why are you doing it?

Why do you do what you do? Can you answer that question? It's quite an unsettling question, but it's probably the most important question that you will ever ask yourself, because never forget that the devil wants to distract people all the way into hell.

We need to stop and ask ourselves, why am I doing what I'm doing? And the wonderful truth is that God is calling you today to put your faith in him.

[30 : 33] And the moment we do that, our whole life falls into part of his glorious plan, and we have a meaning and a purpose and a reason to do what we're going to do tomorrow and the next day and the next day and every part of our lives.

Instead of living for who knows what, because who knows what you're living for, to be honest? Instead of living for who knows what, you are living for the God who made you, for the God who loves you, for the God who wants you in his family, and for the God who one day will take you to be with himself and with all the rest of God's people forever and ever and ever.

God is offering us so much, God's love is amazing and he's calling every single one of us to become part of his family.

And if you're going to reject that, then you need to be able to answer the question. Why? Let's pray.

Our Father, we thank you for the words that we've been studying here in Deuteronomy 6. That remind us that you alone are God, but also remind us that we have this amazing privilege of coming into a beautiful family relationship with you.

[32 : 11] And we pray, Lord, that every single one of us would just come to you with a childlike faith looking to you and leaning on you. Please forgive us for all the times that we've just drifted through life and aimlessly just done whatever.

We pray, Lord, that every one of us would just stop and focus on you and commit ourselves to you because you alone are God and we need you so, so much.

So bless us, Lord. Thank you for your word, for all that it teaches us. And as we continue in our service now, we pray that you would draw near to us and bless us in all that we do.

In Jesus' name, amen.