

# Deuteronomy 6:6-9

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*The Israelites are commanded to constantly reflect on God's covenantal laws, to diligently teach them to their children, and to share them to the entire community.*

In this section, Moses described the covenant law as "*these words*." Although in its immediate context this term refers to the commandments in verses 4-5 (the commandment to love God wholeheartedly), it can also include the whole covenant text which God gave to Moses at Mount Sinai. This reading is based upon the statement "*which I am commanding you today*" which seems to suggest that Moses at least included all the words spoken up to this point. Moses then told the Israelites that *these words* "*shall be on their heart*." That is, the individual Israelite needed to constantly reflect on *these words* in order to remain faithful to their Suzerain/Ruler ([Joshua 1:8](#); [Psalms 1:2](#)).

Not only did the individual Israelite need to constantly reflect on God's laws, he needed to pass the knowledge to his descendants as well. In other words, the knowledge of God should flow from the individual's private heart to his own family in the home. As Moses said, "*You shall teach them diligently to your sons 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 up.*"

The piling up of these pairs of contrasting verbs together is a literary device known as "merism," the combination of two contrasting words to refer to an entirety. This tells us that this teaching to children was not meant to be a one-time or once-per-week activity. Rather, it was to be done continuously. As such, Moses asked the Israelites to talk about *these words* all the time, regardless of the location or time of day.

Speaking of when they *lie down* as well as *rise up* means to speak of God's laws and beneficial ways of living to the children all day long. Similarly, they were commanded to integrate the teaching of God's laws into every aspect of everyday life. When they were *in the house* enjoying time at home. Also when they were out of the house, traveling somewhere else, as they might *walk by the way*. In other words, as an integral part of every activity. This was possible because God's law covered every aspect of human behavior. Treating others

with respect, serving and loving rather than coercing and extracting is something to be done all day, every day.

Just as Moses figuratively spoke of placing God's commandments on the heart (v. 6), he also speaks of wearing copies of the commandments on the bodies. This is a figurative way to stress the importance of these laws, as Moses said to Israel, "*You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead.*" The idea here is that the Israelites were to constantly have God's commandments in view and in mind, in order to carefully and continuously observe them. Such a careful observance would translate Israel's genuine love and faithfulness toward God into action. It would be a public demonstration of their commitment to God's precepts, and a witness to surrounding nations of a self-governing society seeking mutual benefit.

Finally, Moses commanded the Israelites to remember God's covenant principles every time they left their homes and came back. He declared, "*You shall write them on the doorposts of your house.*" Not only did the Israelites need to write these laws on their doorposts, they also needed to *write them on their gates*. The *gates* likely refer to the *gates* of the cities because in ancient Israel, most houses did not have *gates*. The city gate was the seat of community governance. The self-governing principles of rule of law, honesty, and love of others was to be the foundation for community governance as well as family and individual life. ([Ruth 3:11](#); [Proverbs 31:31](#)).

Thus, writing God's laws on the doorposts of the houses and on gates figuratively demonstrates that God's laws were to be the foundation for all aspects of their community. Not only for individuals, but also family households and the entire city or village. This fits with God's admonition that if Israel would obey His laws, and treat one another in an honest and loving way, it would be set apart to serve a priestly function to the surrounding nations ([Exodus 19:5-6](#)).

In summary, this section confronts us with a pattern in the way God's teaching should properly be done. The knowledge of God went from the individual's private heart to his family in the home, before it finally reached the public (the community) and its governance, including its system of justice. Such a pattern, when applied diligently, would be beneficial for any society because obeying the LORD's commands leads to social harmony, justice, opportunity, and mutual benefit. It creates a people dealing with one another in a loving and mutually beneficial manner.

## **Biblical Text:**

**<sup>6</sup>These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. <sup>7</sup>You shall teach them diligently to your sons 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 up. <sup>8</sup>You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. <sup>9</sup>You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.**