

## **Let the Circle Be Unbroken**

### **Deuteronomy 6**

**By [Dr. Robert C. Cannada, Jr.](#)**

Good morning. It's always good to be here and worship with you. Let me encourage you if you did not get one on your way in, to make a note that on your way out, get a copy of the latest magazine from Reformed Theological Seminary — they are at each of the doors and you will notice a picture, not too modern, of John Calvin on the front cover. In fact, several of the articles in this particular issue will be of particular interest to you at First Presbyterian. Among them, Derek Thomas has an article on Calvin's view of prayer in this issue. We also, in this issue talk about particularly Twin Lakes Camp and a number of our graduates from RTS through the years who are involved in summer camping ministry. We also talk in this issue, the history of Reformed Youth Ministry and the leadership of RTS in that and youth—the youth from this church go to the RYM conferences during the summer. I hope that you will pick up one of those magazines as you leave today and if you don't get that regularly, there is a card in there and we would love to put you on our mailing list to get that regularly in your home. This church means so much to us at RTS. As most of you know, RTS in many ways grew out of this church. Out of the five regional lay people who signed our articles of incorporation, when RTS was begun, three of those five at that time were elders of this congregation. And still, more of our board members, by far, are from this church, than from any other church, including Jim Moore, one of your elders who serves as the chairman of our board. We are grateful for you. We are grateful for your support, as you support us as a church, by far more than any other church, and so many of you individually and you pray for us, encourage us—and we are grateful.

Let me give you a brief report. You kind of hear a bit about the three regional campuses here in Jackson, in Orlando, and in Charlotte. Our newest campuses are in Atlanta and Washington D.C. We are encouraged that we had this year, in Washington, at that campus, 11 graduates, and in Atlanta, 14 graduates. And by next year, we think we may have as many as 20 graduates in each of those locations and that's exciting. Our virtual campus, our distance education program, sends its degree program around the world. We have three to four graduates a month from that program. Those courses, courses—Ligon's courses, Derek's courses, Doug Kelly's courses—over 20 courses are available for free now, over iTunes U. We've had available chapel messages and other events available on iTunes U for almost—a little over, two years now. In that period of

time, now, we have had over two million downloads of those lectures on ipods, on computers, and we encourage you to go and get those courses and listen to them for free as well. And we have programs overseas. As you know, as you have seen so many of them come through here, we have a very large ministry in the Korean community around the world and several hundred Korean pastors in our Doctorate of Ministry degree program with them. We also do a Doctorate of Ministry degree program in Portuguese and Brazil and do a Doctorate of Ministry program in Scotland in that other English language over there—a little different than ours. Actually, I was in Indonesia in March, we have a number of graduates there who have done a great job in starting churches and seminaries—several seminaries started there by seminary grads, and I have spoken in two of them when I was there and in one of them, I was — it was located in a church there in Jakarta, Indonesia — this is the fourth largest population country in the world with over two million people, the largest Muslim population country (85% Muslim), and yet the Christian church, particularly the Reformed Church is very strong there and this second seminary where I was teaching, located in a church in Jakarta, Indonesia, the pastor is not a grad, but the main assistant pastor is and the one who heads up the seminary in that church — this church, where one of our seminaries is located, headed up by someone who graduated right here at RTS Jackson — this church in Jakarta, Indonesia will seat 5,000 people. It's amazing to think about. And those churches have now asked us to think about starting a Doctorate of Ministry program in Indonesia. We're looking at what an opportunity — the largest Muslim population country in the world — to try it out to influence and impact even greater than we already have. So, keep praying for us. We are encouraged.

But now, I want us to turn to the Word of God. And I would encourage you, if you have your Bibles to turn to Deuteronomy chapter six, or to take your pew Bible and do so. And I don't have three points this morning or even two—I only have one. I want to talk about passing on our heritage — our Godly heritage to the next generation, our covenant heritage with a covenant-making and covenant-keeping God. And we want to pass that on, we want to pass it on in this country of ours — this nation, we're concerned about it. And, I know you are because of your support of us at RTS. We realize that as go the churches, so goes the nation. And as go the pastors, so go the churches. And as go the seminaries, so go the pastors and we are grateful to you that you recognize that and support us as we seek to influence our nation but through some rather ingredient and so important in passing on that heritage—it's vital, it's crucial and that is the family. As we pass on that heritage to our children and grandchildren, God, our covenant-keeping God, is always been interested in the covenant family. We saw that in Adam and Eve, with Noah, with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and David. We see it in the New Testament. We see it there at Pentecost, when the people after hearing Peter preach say, "Well, what do we do?" And he said, 'repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of your sins and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit for the Promise — the promise made to Abraham and carried on down through the years — it's for you and your children and for as many as are far off

that the Lord our God may call to Himself. Yes, God does reach out to individuals, from families who don't know the Lord and brings them to the Lord.

But then, He works through their families in the generations to come, to pass on the faith to others. We see that again in Acts with Lydia and her family who say she believed and she was baptized along with her household. We see it with that Philippian Jailer who said finally to Paul and Silas, "What must I do to be saved?" And they said, "believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved" — and your household, how important it is that as families, we seek to serve and love the Lord and pass on the faith to our children and grandchildren. But how do we do that? How do we do that effectively? It's not an absolute thing. It's not a guarantee because our children born in a Christian home will come to know the Lord. Think of the Old Testament again. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob — one grew up to love the Lord, one grew up to reject Him. Or Isaac who had Jacob and Esau — one grew up to love the Lord, and one grew up to reject Him and yet, although it's not a guarantee that all of our children will come to know the Lord, that is God's way normally to brass and to work through our children and our grandchildren. As we are faithful, He is faithful — He has promised, "I will be a God to you and to your descendants after you" and think of the heritage that so many of us have — we are in the family of God because of the heritage that has been passed on to us and God's faithfulness to our parents and grandparents. What about us, as we seek to pass that on to others?

Well as we do, I encourage you to think about one thing this morning and that is to focus on what I would call, "saturation evangelism," aiming at the heart. And if you are going to look in one passage in the OT for what we should do for passing on the faith to the next generation, I would ask you what passage should we turn to, many of you would say this passage before us. Deuteronomy 6. And let's look to the Lord in prayer before we read it.

*Father, thank you for this Word and how we do pray that you would open our hearts, not only to hear but to receive this Word, for the salvation of our souls and those who come behind us. We pray in Jesus' name, Amen.*

Deuteronomy 6, verse 1, hear the Word of the Living God:

Now, this is the commandment, the statutes, and the rules that the Lord your God commanded me to teach you, that you may do them in the land to which you are going over to possess it. That you may fear the Lord your God, you and your son and your son's son, by keeping all His commandments and His statutes which I command you, all the days of your life, that your days may be long.

Notice that he is concerned about their salvation and the sons and the grandsons and again, not just obedience to the statutes but that they might fear the Lord. That's an Old Testament way of talking about trusting the Lord, depending on the

Lord, from their hearts — it's not just obedience but obedience from the heart, out of love and gratitude and trust in the Lord.

Hear therefore, Israel and be careful to do them, that it may go well with you and that you may multiply greatly, as the Lord, the God of your Fathers has promised you in a land flowing with milk and honey. Hear, 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, with all your might.”

Notice, again, it's not just obedience — it's from the heart. Loving and trusting in Him and following Him.

And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart...On your what? On your heart...aiming for the heart.

They shall be on your heart and you shall teach them diligently to your children, you shall talk with them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise — you shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes, you shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

Saturation evangelism. Aiming at the heart. Rather than, what so often people emphasize, what I would call climactic, event evangelism concentrating primarily on externals. Now climactic events can be helpful and good and important- they are not bad. And certain externals are good and important, showing the fruit of our faith—but those are not the things on which we should focus our attention. We should focus on saturation evangelism, not just certain climactic events. On the heart! Not just externals. We see that here. Do you see the emphasis? He doesn't say be sure that your children and grandchildren pray occasionally — or at least once and ask God to forgive them of their sin. He doesn't say make sure that they make a public profession of their faith, that they belong to the family of God. He doesn't even say to be sure that they are circumcised which is the Old Testament sign similar to our sign of God's people today of baptism. All those things are important, but that's not what He says here.

Notice that the emphasis is on saturation evangelism. If you are going to win your children and your grandchildren, what should you do? You should talk about the Lord and the things of the Lord, His commandments, His Words — and again, not the commandments only, but the fact that we love the Lord, that we are to fear Him, that we are to trust in Him with all our heart. We are to talk about those things...when? When? All the time! When you go out, when you come in, when you get up, when you go to bed...they are to be like frontlets between your eyes and they would do that literally, putting a little piece of Scripture and hanging it between their eyes. On the doorposts of your house—we do that too, don't we? We put Scriptures, maybe needlework on the walls, or we will put a Scripture magnet on our refrigerator. We are to have Scripture around all the time. The

things of the Lord and the things He has done for us, so that, when this happens, we have the opportunity to explain. Look at what He goes on to say in verse 20. “When your son asks you in time to come...” and he doesn't say, “if.” But naturally in that context, when your son in times to come asks you, “what is the meaning of the testimonies and statutes and rules that the Lord our God has commanded you, then you shall say to your son, we were Pharaoh's slaves in Egypt and the Lord brought us out of Egypt.” With a mighty hand, the Lord showed signs and wonders and miracles and so forth—the Lord saved us, the Lord redeemed us! When your child asks you, then you explain! It's the Lord—His grace, His goodness, His mercy, the mighty God is saved us and redeemed us through what He did for us ultimately through what He did for us on the cross of Christ and in His death and burial and resurrection and ascension to Heaven—we are to explain what the Lord has done for us! Saturating them in the things of the Lord.

Again, some of the externals are important. Circumcision was important, but it was not enough. Look over in chapter 10, verse 16 where he says, “Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart and be no longer stubborn.” They had been circumcised but it wasn't enough — it wasn't real. It says that circumcision, an outward sign was supposed to be an outward sign of something that was in your heart and life. Circumcise your heart, aim for the heart. Remember in the Old Testament, 1 Samuel 16, Samuel there was ready to anoint someone to be king and the Lord said something to him about David, “Men look on the outward appearance but I, the Lord, God, looks at the heart.” Isaiah talked about it, prophesied judgment on the people of God — “On behalf of the Lord, you worship Me with your lips but your hearts are far from Me.” Saturation evangelism — always aiming at the heart.

Now if you are going to turn to a passage in the New Testament, about passing on to the next generation, our faith, where would you turn? Well, the primary place where I think most of you would turn is to Ephesians 5-6. So turn there with me and Ephesians 5, at the end of that chapter talks about, again, all of the family relationships—husbands love your wives sacrificially and wives, be submissive to your husbands. And then in chapter six, it begins to talk about children being obedient to your parents and to honor them. And then in verse four of chapter six, it talks about parents' responsibilities to their children and it says, “Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.” Or another translation, “the nurture and admonition of the Lord.”

Notice the emphasis here. It's not on getting them to say a prayer. It's not on getting them to make a public profession of faith. It's not in getting them baptized, all of which are important. It's again a saturation evangelism kind of verse. Bring them up. It's a process, in the nurture and admonition of the Lord—in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. Discipline, both positively in terms of teaching them, as well as negatively correcting them, encouraging them, helping

them, teaching them, comforting them, bring them up! It's a saturation evangelism verse! In the nurture and admonition of the Lord and it is aimed at the heart. I don't understand and I'm not sure any of us do exactly what he means here, "and don't exasperate your children" — don't cause them to have anger. What exactly he has in mind there—whether it is the rules and regulations, how you handle it, but whatever he is meaning there, He is concerned with their inner attitude—their response, their heart. It's not just saturating them with the things of the Lord. But He is aiming at the heart and that is true throughout the New Testament, too. Jesus quoted Isaiah, talking to the Pharisees— "you worship me with your lips but your heart is far from me." And He said to those Pharisees again, that you are those who try to justify yourself before men but God sees your heart! Saturation evangelism, aiming at the heart.

The point is this: too often we emphasize the wrong thing and it's natural. We want to be done. We want to be finished, we want to be complete. We want to be confident, externally somehow. We want to be able to notch up our evangelism successes—whatever it is, instead of focusing on the main thing. Saturation evangelism, aiming at the heart.

And so we know that other denominations, some maybe within our denomination, some maybe within our church who focus too much on baptism. As if baptism is going to save and believe in infant baptism is we do, you have to be quick to have this baby baptized and then have this big sigh of relief, well, now it is "done," this baby is okay. Those who don't believe in infant baptism, maybe Baptists, others who do the same thing with their children are teenagers — when they get them to make a public profession of faith and be baptized and then it's just a, "we are done." But baptism doesn't save us any more than circumcision. Others make the same mistake emphasizing the external of a public profession of faith. Sometimes, if you are in a church like ours where children are baptized, they grow up, they go through what some would call confirmation classes—some would call communicant classes, then make their public profession of faith and you kind of hold your breath until they finally do that and then you think, "Whew, they are done, they are 'in,' they have made their public profession." Or in a Baptist circle, maybe they were baptized when they were younger, then strayed, and then you get them back at a revival, and then they make their public profession. The problem is, sometimes they make it two or three times and which time was the real one? We put the emphasis too much on that and sometimes it's the preacher's fault. At a crusade or revival and someone comes to the front to make a public profession and the preacher says, "don't ever doubt it again—you know you are a Christian; don't ever worry about it again, once saved, always saved."

Now, I believe that we believe in this church, "once saved, always saved." But I want to put it this way, once SAVED, always saved. If we're really saved, it will really make a difference in our lives. But how many of us know of people who have walked an aisle somewhere, made a profession, never been in church

since...or hardly ever and don't walk with the Lord at all but feel like they are saved because the preacher told them they are saved. The preacher can't see that person's heart—you should never give that kind of assurance. We put the emphasis on the wrong thing and sometimes we do it not on baptism or on a public profession of faith, but on saying the sinner's prayer, “Jesus, forgive me from my sin; save me, come into my heart, take my heart, receive me, as your child.” That's a good thing to do—all of those things are good things to do, but none of them will save us, because you see there is no magic formula or magic prayer.

The truth of the matter is, everyone of us here could take a bunch of preschool children and get everyone of them to say the words, “Jesus, come into my heart.” All you have to do is for five minutes, tell them how bad hell is, and for five minutes how great heaven is and ask them which place they want to go. And you can get everyone of them to say the words, “Jesus, come into my heart; forgive me for my sins.” In fact, a good preacher can do that with most adults. Work them up and get them to say the words; does that make it real in their hearts? No way. In fact, even those words, ‘accept Jesus into my heart’ — where do you find those words in the Bible? They are not there. The closest we will ever come to that is Matthew 7 in the Sermon on the Mount where we find, “Seek and you will find, knock and the door will be opened to you, ask and it will be given to you” but that's in the present tense imperative — what it really means is this, “seek and keep on seeking and you will find; knock and keep on knocking, the door will be opened to you, ask, keep on asking and the door will be opened to you — it's not a one-time formula. The emphasis is on the heart! A heart that makes a difference in your life.

That's what it says in John 1:12 where it says, “as many as received Him, to them He gave the power” — not to those who said a prayer, but to “as many as received Him, He gave the power to become the children of God, even to those who believe on His name.” To believe in His name is to receive Him. If you believe in His name, you have received Him! It's not saying a prayer, the emphasis is on the heart — REPENT and be baptized, Peter says in his sermon at Pentecost. Paul said it to the Philippian Jailer, “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved” — not just say a prayer. Saturation evangelism — aiming at the heart rather than climactic events which are good.

Is it good to say, “Jesus, forgive me for my sins and take my heart?” Of course it is! Is it good to make a public profession of faith? Of course it is! He says if you confess me before men, I will confess you before my Father in Heaven — not a one-time confession, a life confession. Is it important to be baptized? Of course! He commands us to be baptized but none of those things will save us. And as we are concerned about our children and grandchildren, we need to focus—yes, those things are good—but focus on other things. Saturation evangelism — aiming at the heart with our own children, we sought to saturate them with the things of the Lord, teaching them every way we could teach them, the Word of

God and catechism memory, and we'd have them in Sunday school, and in church and in Christian camps and even in Christian schools. Not just saturation teaching but saturation discipline — and we needed help from others, how to teach them and discipline them, positively and negatively. And then saturation prayer—we not only prayed for our children, we wanted everybody else to pray for them, that the Lord would work in their hearts. And saturation Bible-ing...we wanted them around Christians, to see and understand and be influenced by Christians. Grandparents and aunts and uncles and cousins and friends and others, to saturate them in the things of the Lord. How important that is, but still aiming for what...the HEART.

I remember one time we were sitting at the kitchen table, I think, and I was talking about this subject with someone else and my two daughters Christy and Ceci were there listening and listening intently and they were maybe 8 and 11 at the time, and finally I turned to them and said, "Now, I hope and trust this is real in your hearts." And like typically children they responded, "Oh daddy, you know it's real, we believe that...and so forth." And I said, "No, no...I'm serious, I can't read your heart, I hope this is true in your hearts." And they said, "Oh, yes, it is." You see, that's important too from time to time, to do a heart check. That's a good thing to do. Paul tells us to do that in 2 Corinthians 13, he says, "test yourselves to see if you are in the faith." Examine yourselves—is it real and genuine or are you just playing games? Saturation evangelism, aiming at the heart.

In my own case, I grew up in this church. Mom and Dad were strong Christians. In fact, I didn't realize it until just a few days ago, when I agreed months ago to come preach today, that today is the second anniversary of my father's death, going home to glory. And mom and dad did everything they could to saturate us—my brothers Barry, David — in the things of the Lord. Teaching us, having devotions, family devotions, we learned the catechisms, and Scripture memory, we here in Sunday school and church and youth group, and I feel like I came to know the Lord early. But I had a time in junior high where I was doing a lot of things I shouldn't have done — I always did, but I did a lot more of them in those days. I went to Alpine Camp that summer, and two counselors from Belhaven College — Tom Weaver and Laurie Jones — they had a tremendous impact on my life in helping me to be more committed to Christ. When I came back that next fall, we had Jimmy Turner starting our youth group here. That was so good in those years. And then when I went off to Vanderbilt, I met Christians from all kinds of backgrounds and it seemed like all of them had these dramatic Paul on the Damascus Road testimonies and knew exactly when they had been converted and I didn't. I didn't have a very exciting testimony because of that. And since everybody seemed to have an exact time and place, I made up one. I decided that it was that summer at Alpine that I became a Christian and that's the way I shared my testimony for several years until I finally came to realize that I think I was a Christian before that, but that's why I was wrestling so much with the things of the Lord — because I didn't know a time or place or a date.



I just came up knowing that I was a sinner and looking to Christ as my Savior and I remember when I came to seminary here, talking to Sam Patterson, the first president about it, and concerned and he finally said, "Look, Ric, that's the best kind of testimony!" I don't know that any testimony is better than another — all need God's grace, but it is the kind of testimony that we want for our children and grandchildren, isn't it? To come to know the Lord so early that they don't even remember a time and to protect them from some of the pains and heartaches that they might otherwise have in this life — you have enough anyway! To know the Lord from an early age, what a great thing! I still was bothered and remember talking to Sam about it and he finally convinced me this way, saying, "Look, Ric, what if the courthouse where your birth certificate was registered, burned down, along with the records. How would you prove that you were born? You don't know the date or the time or the place, you can't prove that, how can you prove you were born?" Well, because I am alive!! He said the same thing about being born again. If you don't know the exact time or place or date, even those who have an exact time or place or date are not sure which one was the real one — they made several at different revivals. If you are not sure of the date, time, or place, how can you prove that you are born again? Well, I'm alive!! I love the Lord, I trust Him. I may not know the exact details in terms of when it began, but I trust Him. That's the key.

And I turn back to you now...what about you? Is it real in your heart? You'll never pass on to your children and grandchildren when it isn't real to you. And I ask not have you sometime in the past said the sinner's prayer, "Father forgive me for my sins," but do you do that every day? I ask you not, have you sometime in the past made a public profession of faith in Christ, but I ask you, do you profess your faith in Christ NOW and every day? I ask you not have you been baptized — I hope you have, I hope you've done all of those things- but I ask you what the old Puritans used to ask, "Have you improved baptism?" Or, maybe put it this way, "have you proved your baptism?" Is it real, is it genuine in your life? If it is, then you want the circle to be unbroken. I love that old Johnny Cash song. Let the circle be unbroken, by and by Lord, by and by. If you want the circle to be unbroken in Heaven, your family circle — if you want all of them there, then I urge you, focus on saturation evangelism. Aiming at the heart.

Let's pray together...

*Father, thank you for your Word and help us to examine our hearts, to be sure that we know and love the Savior. And then Father, help us with the help of others, and the church and the family of God to saturate our children and grandchildren in the things of God. Always aiming for their hearts. We pray in Jesus' name, Amen.*

I want to close our service today singing about passing on the faith to the next

generation, using hymn number 364. Please stand...

*And now unto him who is able to keep us from falling and present us faultless, before the presence of His glory with exceeding great joy to the only wise God, our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion, and power both now and forevermore, Amen.*

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