Something that has been big fun at our house is temporary tattoos. You can paste your favorite dinosaur, super hero, or gnarly looking serpent on your body knowing that after a few baths, it will come off. That is all together different than a guy I once knew who went out and got a tattoo despite his mother’s adamant objections. As the needles pricked his skin, he became keenly aware that it would never come off. One morning as she passed by his room and saw the abomination on his arm, she walked quietly over and scratched it to see if it was the real deal. Her efforts were in vain. She let out a muted “humpf” and walked out of the room.

After Moses’ exhortations to love the one and only God with every fiber of their being, he began the re-giving of the law to a people who were about to enter into the promised land. But it was more than a simple repetitive action.

Deuteronomy 6:6 And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart.

In Hebrew, al-lebabeka is literally “on your heart,” but it doesn’t suggest a placement like a temporary tattoo. It implies permanence, like a real tattoo.

It is like a person who constantly has a song on their heart. Despite how many times they hear, “Shhh!” they will inevitably burst forth singing or humming. It’s there, and it can’t be removed. It reminds me of the wife of a Caribbean preacher. Walking by her concrete and tile villa, you could hear her belting out her praise for God. As its beautiful sound echoed off the walls into the courtyard, you knew it was etched on her heart.

Moreover, it has been suggested that the Hebrew letters in the word for heart mean “home” which is the essence of God, through the law, finding a home in man who was created in his own image.

Moses wasn’t talking about wrote memorization or merely being able to regurgitate the words back from the mind (although that is part of it). It’s not simple obedience to the words with the absence of love. In both the Old and New Testaments, love is paired with obedience to God’s commands (Exodus 20:6, Deuteronomy 7:9, Joshua 22:5, Daniel 9:4, John 14:15, 21). How is one to love God? He must first know God’s commands. Second, because God’s laws are permanently etched and at home in the heart of man, they cause man to act in loving obedience.

Psalm 40:8 (ESV) 8 I delight to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart.” Have God’s words been tattooed on your heart?