

Matters of the Heart

Deuteronomy 6:1-9

Introduction

Story – Hannah’s excitement about TX speed limits...

Except on rare occasions, we do not tend to associate “love” with “law.” I believe this is part of the reason that some struggle with presence of laws in the Bible. This morning, though, we are going to explore the relationship between love and law in light of God’s intention...

Deuteronomy 6:1-9

¹These are the commands, decrees and laws the LORD your God directed me to teach you to observe in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess, ² so that you, your children and their children after them may fear the LORD your God as long as you live by keeping all his decrees and commands that I give you, and so that you may enjoy long life. ³ Hear, Israel, and be careful to obey so that it may go well with you and that you may increase greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, just as the LORD, the God of your ancestors, promised you.

⁴ Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. ⁵ Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. ⁶ These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. ⁷ Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. ⁸ Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. ⁹ Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

Exposition

As we look at Deuteronomy 6, we are going to see Moses use repetition and summary to drive home the importance of the laws that he just taught the people in Deuteronomy 5. In terms of repetition, Moses tells the people again that “these commands, decrees, and laws” from the LORD were given to the Israelites to teach them how to live in the promised land. As the people obeyed, they would enjoy God’s blessing in the land.

These instructions were for “the Israelites, their children, and their grandchildren” which is another way to say “each generation” of Israelites needed to know and obey these commands that the LORD gave His people. The idea in the passage is not that just these three generations would need to hear these things, but that each successive generation would need to hear these things.

Another way of putting this would be to say that you and the “next generation” should be taught to know and obey the commands of the LORD. The Israelites had a divine obligation to know and obey for themselves, **but also to make sure that the next generation of Israelite knew and obeyed the commands of the LORD.** So, part of obedience to the command was to make sure that children and grandchildren in the community knew and obeyed the commands of the LORD. If only the present generation was the focus, then the people were disobeying God’s command.

After repeating the need for the people to obey the law of the LORD, Moses moves to a summary of the law. As one OT scholar (Peter Craigie) put it, Deuteronomy 6:4-5 is the “principal law” or “main law” of the Israelites. He writes,

The command to love is central because the whole book is concerned with the renewing of the covenant with God, and although the renewal demanded obedience, that obedience would be possible only when it was a response of love to the God who had brought the people out of Egypt and was leading them into the promised land.

As the principal law, our passage commands God's people to love Him with all their being. Let's take a little closer look at verses 4-5.

First, we note that the passage begins with a declaration about God: "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one." These words are known as the *Shema*, which is a Jewish confession about the LORD. In Hebrew, the first word in the phrase is "shema," which means "listen or hear." The whole phrase sounds something like this: "Shema, Yisrael, YHWH (Adonai) Eloheinu, YHWH (Adonai) echad." The Jews would repeat this confession in prayer daily. Eventually, within Judaism, other passages of Scripture were added to this confession (Deut. 11:13-21, Num. 15:37-41).

This confession was a pronouncement of absolute allegiance to the LORD alone. As the first two commandments of the ten commandments told the people, they were to have no other gods before the LORD and they were not to make "graven images" to represent the LORD. Taken together with the first two commandments, we can conclude that Deuteronomy 6:4 is an expression of monotheism, which is the belief that there is only one true God.

Now, to be sure, this passage does not deny that the other nations had their own gods that they worshipped. Furthermore, this passage does not deny that the so-called gods of the other nations were likely demonic, meaning, that demonic activity was associated with the worship of these so-called other gods. Such demonic activity likely caused the people to be deceived into thinking that they were actual, self-sufficient gods. It is reasonable to believe that surrounding nations were deceived and manipulated by spiritual beings, demons that would manifest themselves in and through the idols that the people had fashioned from metal and wood.

Deuteronomy 6:4 is not denying that such events happened. Instead, Deuteronomy 6:4 is saying that while at times it might appear that there are other gods like our God, they are not really gods. They are not worthy of the title, "God." For the Israelites, there was only one God, Creator and Sustainer of all things, to whom they were to be loyal. And, when compared to the LORD, all of the gods of the nations were no gods at all.

So, here in verse 4, we have a declaration of the LORD as the unique, supreme God over all. This is Israel's God. This is the God to whom they owe their full allegiance. This is the God that no other being in the universe can challenge. This is the God beyond all comparison. And this God, the LORD, commands that His people, who He redeemed from Egypt, are to love him with the entirety of their being, which is the point of verse 5.

"Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength." The point here is not so much that we need to separate the heart, soul, and strength and figure out how do we love with each of these different aspects of our being. Instead, the "heart, soul, and strength" are representative of the whole person. There is not a single aspect of our being that is not claimed by the LORD. He is worthy of all our love with all our life. We must not exclude any aspect of ourselves from loving Him.

The question that comes, then, is: "How does someone grow in loving the LORD with the entirety of their being?" Verses 6-9 tell us. This life of full-fledged love of the LORD requires that the commands of the LORD take root in us as our lives through meditation on the law of the LORD. One thinks of Psalm 1, which speaks of meditating on the law of the LORD "day and night." In verses 6-9, we see that it is day and night and in every place, God's people should think of His law.

Conclusion

If God's people are going to keep God's commands, then our lives must be marked by meditation on the Word of the LORD. If our hearts want to grow in love for the LORD, then we must know and obey His Word. So, what is this relationship between meditating on God's law and growing in our love for God? Well, it is based on this principle: What we meditate on, think about, memorize, fixate on, impacts how we live and think in the world as the people of God. God has designed us this way. We become like the things that we meditate on.

You say, what do you mean by that? What do you mean that we become like the things that we meditate on? Essentially, what I mean is what Psalm 115:1-8 says about idolatry. Listen to what the Psalmist writes,

- ¹ Not to us, LORD, not to us
but to your name be the glory,
because of your love and faithfulness.
- ² Why do the nations say,
"Where is their God?"
- ³ Our God is in heaven;
he does whatever pleases him.
- ⁴ But their idols are silver and gold,
made by human hands.
- ⁵ They have mouths, but cannot speak,
eyes, but cannot see.
- ⁶ They have ears, but cannot hear,
noses, but cannot smell.
- ⁷ They have hands, but cannot feel,
feet, but cannot walk,
nor can they utter a sound with their throats.
- ⁸ **Those who make them will be like them,
and so will all who trust in them.**

Those who makes idols and trust in idols will become like those idols. But you say, "That passage doesn't say anything about mediation, pastor. You said we become like the things that we meditate on. Where is that in the text?"

Good question. Meditation on the LORD and His law is what He has prescribed to keep us from the sin of idolatry. As Moses told the people, "These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates."

In other words, do whatever it takes to get these truths into you. Meditate on them. Think deeply about them. Make them a matter of the heart, that you might not simply know these things but cherish them. Why? Because God desires our hearts to be turned to Him! God is not interested in our ceremonies. He is interested in our affection. He desires for us to love Him, and He has designated that we demonstrate our love for Him by trusting Him enough to obey what He commands. This requires us to believe that God's will for us than our own.

So, we show our love for God by trusting Him enough to obey what He has said, even when it conflicts with the values of the culture that we live in.

We hold fast to the belief that there is only one true God, the LORD, who has revealed Himself in Jesus Christ for our salvation, even while the world says that there are multiple ways to God.

We obey with the entirety of our being when God commands us to honor our parents, not murder or hate others, not commit sexual sins, not lie or steal or covet our neighbor, even while the world that we live in says otherwise.

When we obey the LORD instead of the world, we are demonstrating that our allegiance is ultimately to Him, and that we love Him more than being accepted by those who do not love Him.

This is the relationship between love and law. For, when we obey God rather than others, we are demonstrating that we trust him more than others and that we desire to glorify him more than others, which shows that He is our treasure, He is who we value more than anything else.

And if we are going to grow in this love, then must meditate on this LORD and his perfect law of liberty in Christ to us. This is how we grow to love the one true God in the Spirit and in truth with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, as Jesus would put it in Luke 10:27.

God longs for our hearts to love Him and demonstrate such love for Him by trusting Him, by believing in Him enough to obey Him.

Concluding Questions

- 1) Are you indifferent to obedience because you have a skewed view of grace and love?
 - a. John 14:15 – “If you love me, keep my commandments.”
- 2) Do you spend time alone with God in prayer before His Word?
 - a. Luke 5:16 – “But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.”
- 3) Are you trusting in your own effort to change your heart toward God?
 - a. 2 Corinthians 3:1-11; Romans 2:29, 7:6; John 6:63