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MINISTRIES

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Parashah Points: Va’etchanan – What it Means to Love God

Welcome to another episode of Parashah Points—short thoughts from the weekly Torah Portion.

This week’s Parashah Point comes from Va’etchanan, which is Hebrew for “I pleaded,” and it goes from Deuteronomy 3:23 to Deuteronomy 7:11.

In this Torah portion, Moses tells how God prohibited him from entering the Promised Land. Then Moses exhorts Israel to obey God’s commandments, recounts the setting up of the cities of refuge, recites the Ten Commandments and the Shema, and then gives instructions regarding the conquest of the Land.

There’s a lot we can talk about in this Torah Portion. Today we’re going to talk about what it means to love God.

There’s a passage in the book of Deuteronomy known as the *shema*, which is Hebrew for “hear” or “listen.” This passage in Scripture is foundational to both Judaism and Christianity. For thousands of years, the Jewish people have traditionally prayed the words of the *shema* every evening and morning as an expression of their worship. And when Yeshua was asked about the greatest commandment in the Torah, the first part of His response was to quote the *shema* (Mark 12:29-20).

So how do we walk out the *shema*? Let’s begin by reading what it says:

Deuteronomy 6:4-5

“Hear, O Israel: The Lord [YHWH] our God, the Lord [YHWH] is one. You shall love [YHWH] the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.

So we are commanded to love YHWH with all our heart, soul, and might. But what does that look like exactly? Well, we can get some insight into what this means by digging into the meaning of each of these words.

First, we are told to “love” YHWH, which comes from the Hebrew word *ahavah*. This word involves our emotions and often refers to having an affection or care for someone. You see it in the sense of parental love, such as Abraham loving his son, Isaac, or in the sense of a close friendship, like the “love” shared between David and Jonathan. So we cannot neglect the emotional aspects of loving God. But love is much more than a feeling; it’s also an action.

That’s why Scripture often connects loving God with keeping His commandments. Like in 1 John 5:3, which says, “[This is love for God: to keep his commands. And his commands are not burdensome.](#)”

We might say that we love God, but if we are not keeping God’s commandments, according to how the Bible defines it, we don’t *really* love Him according to God’s perspective. God’s perspective is the perspective that is important. It’s the same in marriage. We can say we love our spouse, but if we are not walking that out every day, it’s an empty and meaningless statement.

It’s no wonder that the verses directly following the *shema* tell us that we are to bind God’s commandments as a sign on our hand and as frontlets between our eyes. They are to always be on our mind, in our actions at home and wherever we go. We are to study them and teach them to our children. God’s words are to be on our “heart,” the passage says. And that leads us to our the next point.

We are to love YHWH with all our “heart,” which comes from the Hebrew word *levav*. This word, and its more common shorter form—*lev*—refers to the physical organ in our chest. We see this in 2 Kings 9:24, for example:

2 Kings 9:24

[And Jehu drew his bow with his full strength, and shot Joram between the shoulders, so that the arrow pierced his heart \[*lev*\], and he sank in his chariot.](#)

In the mind of ancient Hebrews, the heart—not the brain—was understood to represent the thinking and feeling organ of humans. In fact, not once in the Bible is a physical organ that we would call a “brain” ever mentioned. So when the ancient Hebrews spoke of the heart, they were referring to what they believed to be the source of our thoughts, will, and emotions—and we’ll see this word expressed in these ways all throughout Scripture. (Genesis 6:5; Deuteronomy 8:5; 1 Samuel 1:8; Psalms 4:7; Jeremiah 11:20, etc.)

So to love YHWH with all our “heart” is to commit our thoughts, our will, and our emotions completely to Him:

Proverbs 4:23

[Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.](#)

The second part of the *shema* is to love YHWH with all of our soul, which comes from the Hebrew word *nephesh*. The most basic meaning of this word is appetite or thirst—our natural desire for food and water, for example. That’s why the traditional application of the command to afflict our *nephesh* (soul) on Yom Kippur is fasting. But the word is also often used to refer to the entire physical person.

So to love YHWH with all of our “soul” is to commit our entire physical being, with all of our physical desires, talents, and abilities, completely to God.

Lastly, we are to love YHWH with all of our “might,” which comes from the Hebrew word *me’od*. This

word is translated as “might” or “strength” in most English translations, but as Dr. Tim Mackie points out, that’s not really the true sense of the word:

The most common meaning of *me’od* is “very” or “much.” It is what grammar nerds call an adverb, a word that comes alongside other words to augment their meaning [...] The point is that everything in a person’s life: every moment, every opportunity, every ability and capacity offers a chance to love and honor the one who made you. It is a call to love God with all of your “muchness.”

-Tim Mackie, Word Study: Me’od, www.thebibleproject.com

So to love YHWH with all our “might” is to commit every moment and opportunity and ability that we have, completely to God.

As often as we read the words of the shema, may we be inspired to walk out our love YHWH with all of our heart, soul, and might.

Thank you for joining us for another Parashah Point!

We pray you have been blessed by this teaching. Remember, continue to test everything. Shalom! For more on this and other teachings, please visit us at www.testeverything.net

Shalom, and may Yahweh bless you in walking in the whole Word of God.

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