

4. The greatest commandment

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I've never come across a good teacher who is not methodical and wise in teaching. A person might have a great knowledge or skill in a certain field, but if that person is not methodical and wise, he or she can not be a good teacher. Being the best quarterback in the NFL does not guarantee that he would be the best coach.

Moses was a case in point. He was a very methodical and wise teacher in God's truth. First he reviewed what the Lord had done for Israel and reminded them His goodness and mercy in chapter 1 through 4. Then he reaffirmed the basic principles of God's law which is known as the Ten Commandments in chapter 5.

Now in chapter 6, he summarized the Ten Commandments in one commandment which is known as "Shema". He wanted the nation's obedience to be based on a single spiritual principle from the Lord, not on individual opinions. Only after he laid out this God's commandment, did he apply His commandments to specific areas of Israel's life throughout the rest of the Book of Deuteronomy.

Though 85% of the people in America claim that they are Christians, you and I know that not all of them are real Christians. Even among born-again Christians, many of them don't have a firm biblical foundation regarding who God is and how we are supposed to live as His followers. They'd prefer their own unbiblical views over what the Bible says. Their typical answer is, "But that is not how I believe..." Our God really doesn't care how we interpret His Word. God's Word is the ABSOLUTE TRUTH and FINAL AUTHORITY. There is no discussion for who is right.

A. REMEMBER AND OBSERVE AS YOU GO

Deuteronomy 6:1-3 "Now this is the commandment, and these are the statutes and judgments which the Lord your God has commanded to teach you, that you may observe them in the land which you are crossing over to possess, 2 that you may fear the Lord your God, to keep all His statutes and His commandments which I command you, you and your son and your grandson, all the days of your life, and that your days may be prolonged. 3 Therefore hear, O Israel, and be careful to observe it, that it may be well with you, and that you may multiply greatly as the Lord God of your fathers has promised you--'a land flowing with milk and honey.'

God's commandments, the law of God has two purposes:

- 1) **Reveal who God is and how holy and merciful He is**
- 2) **Reveal who we are and how unholy and sinful we are**

For six times in this Book, Moses called Canaan "a land of milk and honey". It describes the richness and fruitfulness of the land. Milk was a staple food and honey was a luxury. In other words, the Lord would provide them everything they needed and much more if only they would obey His commandments.

There is always a danger that the new generation would become proud and think that God has blessed them because they are good and deserve His blessings. For that reason, Moses reminded them that all the blessings they had was because of God's promise with their ancestors, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

B. HEAR, O ISRAEL

Deuteronomy 6:4-5 "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one! 5 You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.

The orthodox Jewish confession of faith is called "the Shema" after the Hebrew word which means to "hear." This phrase is still recited each morning and evening by devout Jews all over the world – "Shema Yisrael Yehovah Elohim Echad Yehovah." The literal translation would be "Hear Israel, the Lord God one Lord."

It is so important that Jewish boys in orthodox homes are required to memorize it as soon as they can speak.

Let's dissect this one word at a time:

1) Yehovah: We know this as 'Jehovah' which means 'the Lord.' The strict orthodox Jews would not write down its full spelling for their respect for the name of the Lord, they only spell it "YHWH" which we, the westerners, pronounce 'Yahweh'. Though we do not know the exact pronunciation, you generally would pronounce it 'Yehovah.'

2) Elohim: The definition of this word is 'God.' However, this is where it gets really exciting. The original manuscript didn't use the word 'El' which is the singular. 'Ela' would be 'dual.' You see, in Hebrew, they have a singular, a dual, and a plural which indicates three or more. Moses particularly used the word 'Elohim' which is a plural, not 'El' or 'Ela.' So God's name here indicates a plurality. Then the plot gets thicker.

3) Echad: This word is not just any 'one.' It is a special 'one.' It means 'a compound unity as one.' It was the same word used in Genesis 2:

Genesis 2:24 Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

Moses did NOT use the word 'yacheim' which denotes a singularity. If he used this word and said, "the Lord is 'yacheim,'" then it clearly means nothing more than a singular.

But he used the word 'echad' for a compound unity. So let me put forth the definition of this Hebrew phrase for our understanding: "Yehovah Elohim Echad Yehovah" – the Lord God that is three in plurality, is a compound unity one Lord." That is a biblical evidence of the Trinity doctrine you can hang your hat on. Isn't that absolutely cool or what?!?!?

Let's take a look at v5. God wants our complete love. This love is appropriate because He loved us completely and He loved us first in spite of who we are. Even though He knew what kind of selfish, wretched, and unholy beings we are from the beginning, He still loves us. It is the only right thing for us to love Him back.

When we really love Him, our time, our submission, our will, and our finances will be released from us to Him.

Jesus called this the greatest commandment in Matthew 22:37-38. Then He gave us the second greatest commandment as well in next verses.

Matthew 22:37-40 Jesus said to him, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' 38 This is the first

and great commandment. 39 And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' 40 On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."

C. TEACHING THE NEXT GENERATIONS

Deuteronomy 6:6-9 "And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. 7 You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. 8 You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. 9 You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

To teach our children and grandchildren, we must have the commandments from v5 and 6 in our hearts. Through our lives, they must be communicated to our next generation. The next generations should see our devotion to our Lord when we pray; when we read His Word the Bible; when we serve; when we talk; and the way we live.

By the time of Jesus the Jewish people base the practice of wearing phylacteries on these verses. Jesus condemned abuse of the wearing of phylacteries among the Pharisees. They would wear ridiculously large boxes of phylacteries to show off their greater spirituality than others.

I am sure that you've seen mezuzah on the right side of door frames of Jewish people's homes or buildings. This is a small container holding v4 and 5 that is nailed to a doorpost. It was a sign that the house was to be a sanctuary for the Lord and a place where the Lord was loved, obeyed, and taught.

D. THE DANGER OF PROSPERITY

Deuteronomy 6:10-16 "So it shall be, when the Lord your God brings you into the land of which He swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give you large and beautiful cities which you did not build, 11 houses full of all good things, which you did not fill, hewn-out wells which you did not dig, vineyards and olive trees which you did not plant--when you have eaten and are full-- 12 then beware, lest you forget the Lord who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage. 13 You shall fear the Lord your God and serve Him, and shall take oaths in His name. 14 You shall not go after other gods, the gods of the peoples who are all around you 15 (for the Lord your God is a jealous God among you), lest the anger of the Lord your God be aroused against you and destroy you from the face of the earth. 16 "You shall not tempt the Lord your God as you tempted Him in Massah.

In this abundant blessing from the Lord for Israel, they had an inherent danger: They would forget the Lord who brought them out of Egypt to the Promised Land.

This ugly and vicious cycle that was mentioned here was repeated time after time during the Book of Judges.

We usually fail to notice the danger of success and prosperity. Oh how vulnerable we become during the time of well-fed and well-to-do. We don't rely on the Lord for our daily bread and somehow thinking that all the prosperity we have is because of ourselves. Fat chance!

Note v13, please. The word 'fear' here is not of shrinking fear from an angry God. Rather, the idea of fear is more in the concept of an awe-filled respect, a desire to please the Lord and have the fear of bringing shame to His name because of our sins.

V13 is the verse Jesus quoted back to satan when tempted by him to avoid the cross and win back the world, if He would only bow down and worship him.

Matthew 4:8-10 Again, the devil took Him up on an exceedingly high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. 9 And he said to Him, "All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me." 10 Then Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve.'"

Please go back to the second half of v13:

Deuteronomy 6:13b and shall take oaths in His name.

Didn't Jesus teach us not to swear by the Lord's name in Matthew 5? Although the concept of the oath in God's name can certainly be abused, there certainly is a permissible use of oaths by those who follow God, since the Lord Himself uses oaths in the Book of Hebrews.

Hebrews 6:13 For when God made a promise to Abraham, because He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself, 14 saying, "Surely blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply you."

In v16, Moses reminded them about the major doubt that their parent generation had toward God at Massah. In Exodus 17, Israel tempted and tested the Lord by doubting His love and concern for them because they didn't have water to drink.

Anytime we deny God's love for us, or demand He do something for us, we are testing Him as if He must answer to our standards, and tempting Him to judge us.

Again this is the verse the Lord Jesus used to get back satan in the wilderness, when He was to jump off the pinnacle of the temple to see if the Father loved Him enough to protect Him. Jesus didn't need the proof of love of the Father, because He knew that the Father God loves Him.

E. DO WHAT IS RIGHT AND GOOD

Deuteronomy 6:17-19 You shall diligently keep the commandments of the Lord your God, His testimonies, and His statutes which He has commanded you. 18 And you shall do what is right and good in the sight of the Lord, that it may be well with you, and that you may go in and possess the good land of which the Lord swore to your fathers, 19 to cast out all your enemies from before you, as the Lord has spoken.

What it says in v18 is a repeating comment to the Israelites from the Lord through His prophets in the OT. If they obeyed the Lord, He blessed them; when they disobeyed they would be cursed.

However, this is not the source of blessing in the NT. We are blessed by faith in Jesus Christ, since He fulfills the law with His atoning sacrifice in our place. The watch word for blessing under the Old Covenant were 'earning and deserving'; while under the New Covenant, 'believing and receiving.'

Though we don't have judgment from God for our disobedience, the Lord brings forth correction for the sake of making us to be better Christians. Of course, the Lord allows the natural consequences of our disobedience to come to us.

F. HOW TO AVOID APOSTASY IN TIME OF PLENTY

Deuteronomy 6:20-25 "When your son asks you in time to come, saying, 'What is the meaning of the testimonies, the statutes, and the judgments which the Lord our God has commanded you?' 21 then you shall say to your son: 'We were slaves of Pharaoh in Egypt, and the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand; 22 and the Lord showed signs and wonders before our eyes, great and severe, against Egypt, Pharaoh, and all his household. 23 Then He brought us out from there, that He might bring us in, to give us the land of which He swore to our fathers. 24 And the Lord commanded us to observe all these statutes, to fear the Lord our God, for our good always, that He might preserve us alive, as it is this day. 25 Then it will be righteousness for us, if we are careful to observe all these commandments before the Lord our God, as He has commanded us.'

Often, the apostasy which comes from prosperity afflicts the next generation more than the present. They grow up expecting such prosperity and blessing, without understanding the repentance and walk with God which led to the prosperity.

Parents need to relate to their children how they came to a personal relationship with Jesus, so the children understand that they must come to the same relationship.

G. APPLICATIONS

1) Loving the Lord should not be considered as a duty for a believer.

It is our honor and privilege.

2) An attitude of gratitude is a wonderful weapon against unbelief, disobedience, a hard heart, and a bitter spirit.

If we're in the habit of thanking the Lord in everything, including the painful experiences of life, then the Holy Spirit will fill our hearts with love and praise instead of satan filling us with bitter venom.