

Two weeks ago, our Sunday service consisted of testimonies from those who had returned from Israel. I wanted to share with you this morning the lesson that the Lord spoke to my heart. It really didn't come from a specific location, but rather was an observation I made throughout the trip. Three times a day, though some would say four times, devout Jews recite the Shema in prayer. It consists of **Deuteronomy 6:4-11; 11:13-21 and Numbers 15:37-41**. If you fly to Israel on almost any airline you will observe someone put a prayer shawl over his head, wrap bands of leather around one arm, and put a small box on his forehead. They will bob back and forth as they pray these verses. Most Jews believe this is an act of obedience to the passage they are quoting and therefore will be considered as a good deed that will be blessed by God. It is to be prayed when one rises, when the first three stars are visible in the evening, and before one goes to sleep at night. Those scriptures are also placed in a small container on the doorposts of homes and businesses. When devout Jews enter or leave that doorway, they will kiss their fingers and touch the container, which is called a mezuzah.

I felt the Holy Spirit was stirring my heart to look at these passages and see beyond the tradition and ritual. In our Psalms study we keep coming across expressions of love for God's Word. ¹⁴ *In the way of your testimonies I delight as much as in all riches.* Psalm 119:14 ⁴⁷ *for I find my delight in your commandments, which I love.* ⁴⁸ *I will lift up my hands toward your commandments, which I love, and I will meditate on your statutes.* Psalm 119:47-48 They are referring to the Torah, the books of the Law. And to understand why they love it so much, we must understand how the 613 laws, delivered through Moses, set them apart.

The word, Torah, means instruction, or guidance. It helped them form a society that was unique in the world. It had guidance for health, for societal laws that created order and justice, and instruction for worship. Why did they love these rules so much? It guided their lives in such a way so that they could be blessed by God. Other nations practiced the sacrifice of babies, pagan practices that spread sexual disease, ate things that caused illness, and had unsanitary practices, all of which were forbidden by the laws of Moses. Even today many Jews consider what they call "the yoke of the Law" to be a blessing (Acts 15:10ⁱ).

The New Testament looks on these rules differently, even referring to them as a yoke of bondage (Galatians 4:24-25ⁱⁱ). Paul explained in chapter seven of Romans that in trying to keep those laws he simply became discouraged at his constant failure. Though Paul also believed they were a gift from God, he referred to it as "the law of sin and death" (Romans 8:2ⁱⁱⁱ). However, most Jews that became Christians in the first century still practiced those laws (Acts 21:24^{iv}). Many Jewish Christians today also try to keep them. And yet Paul taught that we are not bound by them (Ephesians 2:14-15^v; Galatians 5:1^{vi}). The Spirit sets us free from the rules as He is the life behind those laws. If we are led by the Spirit we are not under the Law (Galatians 5:18^{vii}). As David preached, a few weeks ago, the Spirit of God fills us with the love of God which is a fulfilling of the Law (Romans 13:10^{viii}). That doesn't mean we do anything we want, but

rather that we realize the Spirit will always lead us in ways that are pleasing to God (Jeremiah 31:31-33^{ix}). Jesus fulfilled the righteous requirements of the Law. He is the One who has made us right with God (Colossians 2:13-14^x). That makes it possible for us to receive the Spirit and live in step with Him.

The resurrected Jesus told the two on the road to Emmaus that all the Scriptures pointed to Him (Luke 24:27^{xi}). All those rules taught us we need a Savior. Some of them were illustrations of what He would do. Many of the worship laws pointed to the work He would accomplish. So how are we to see the Shema? In the light of Jesus being the fulfillment of it all, what should it be saying to those who are in Christ?

⁴ *"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.* Deuteronomy 6:4 This single verse is known by even the most liberal of Jews today. I think that is God's design, and here is why. To "hear" in Hebrew *shema*, is to listen and obey, to take to heart. It is one of the most frequent things the prophets rebuked the nation for refusing to do (Exodus 16:20^{xii}; Deuteronomy 1:43^{xiii}, 18:19^{xiv}; Psalms 81:11^{xv}; Jeremiah 7:13^{xvi}; 12:17^{xvii}; 22:21^{xviii} etc.). It is no different for us today. We listen to the Scripture but then don't act on what we hear. **God commands us to hear, for our good!** Out of love for us He pleads for us to hear His good instruction. Jesus tells us the same. In the Sermon on the Mount, He asked why we would refer to Him as Lord but not do what He says, which is another way of saying we refuse to really hear. He followed that by saying if we hear and put it into practice our lives will be on a solid foundation that will stand up to the storms of life. But if we don't hear, the storms will destroy our house (Luke 6:46-49^{xix}). That is just one implication of what is packed into that first word, "Hear!"

The verse continues, *YHWH Elohinu*, which is the eternal God of Israel, singular, the Creator/*Elohim* in the plural! YHWH our Gods are one. He is a plural God but He is one. To understand that we must look at the use of the word "one"/*ehad* in Hebrew. When you want to find the basic meaning of a word in the Bible, find its first uses. In Genesis chapter one, God made the evening and the morning *one* day. Two things were one. In the next chapter the Adam and Eve were to be one (Genesis 2:27^{xx}). We learn from the earliest uses of *ehad* in the Bible that multiple things can be considered as one. This essential verse to Judaism today confirms the Trinity and takes away the argument that God can only be a singular entity (See Genesis 1:26^{xxi}).

But let us continue with what this Unity is further commanding of us. ⁵ *You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.* Deuteronomy 6:5 Our eternal Creator God commands us to love Him with our all. Jesus said this is the Great Commandment (Matthew 22:37-38^{xxii}). Why? Because He first loved us (1 John 4:8^{xxiii}). All that we are and have is from Him. Jews could say He delivered them from bondage in Egypt and brought them to the Promised Land. And all who are in Christ can say He delivered us from the bondage to sin and the judgment we deserve (Ephesians 2:1-5^{xxiv}). We see the price of love on the cross, especially this week as we celebrated Good Friday. "My Lord, what love is this, that pays so dearly, that I, the guilty one may go free." What love indeed. Love Him with your all because

that is where true peace and joy is found. He is life and light. To love Him is to love all that He is, righteousness, goodness, and truth. He is our coming bridegroom. He has more prepared for us than we could ever imagine (1 Corinthians 2:9^{xxv}).

You might ask what is the difference between heart and soul. The Hebrew does seem to overlap just as the English does. What words can we use as synonyms? Desire, being, passion, essence, life, body, thoughts, understanding, are all implied. The Greek of the New Testament word implies feeling as well. I'd call that all-inclusive! And heart and soul are followed by loving with all our might. That means all the effort we can put forth, wholeheartedly, passionately. This Great Command is impossible, unless we let Jesus reign in our hearts and yield to His Spirit. I believe the extent to which we allow the Spirit to teach us to love God in this life, will have a direct correlation to how much of His love we are *able* to experience in heaven.

Jesus taught that when this is Great Command is done, all is done, for all the Law and prophets are summed up in loving God and our neighbor (Matthew 22:40^{xxvi}). If we really love God with our all, we will walk in His Spirit and yield to Him instead of the flesh. We will increasingly experience His love and so love Him even more. If there is one verse to teach your children and grandchildren, this is it. But remember that they will interpret it in by your example. Exemplifying it is the best way to teach it. May God help us to do so.

What is the number one priority of your life? Take a moment to consider what is your chief aim. What runs in the background of your desires regardless of what you are doing? ... Have you discerned it? Now hear the Lord. ⁶ *And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart.* Deuteronomy 6:6 These words of knowing our God is one and that we are to love Him with all our being should be the priority of our life, always on our hearts. Think about that. God asks our love for Him to be from our whole being, our lives' priority, our hearts' desire.

Those words they were commanded to hear and have on their hearts were not just these passages, but a good portion of the book of Deuteronomy, the essence of which is to avoid the idolatry of the nations they were dispossessing and those around them. Idols vied for their love and pulled them away from the love of God.

When we were on a tour of the foundation of the Western Wall, our Jewish guide spoke of their history and the times the nation was overthrown. In these chapters of Deuteronomy God warned them over and over that they would be overthrown if they turned to the idols and detestable practices around them. She never mentioned that. She just said it was too bad they were defeated. But according to Scripture it was the discipline of God to return them to loving Him. It was a good thing.

We can relate, for the culture around us is increasingly idolatrous. The worship of possessions and wealth pervades our culture and pulls away from loving God. Self worship is the most common practice. Things detestable to God are a part of the culture's entertainment. God tells us to separate ourselves from those things just like He told Israel not to worship the idols of the nations, so that He might bless them (2

Corinthians 5:17-18^{xxvii}). If you read those chapters in Deuteronomy you will be struck by the repetitive warnings that were ignored by the Israelites and caused their downfall. The same is true for us. These words He has commanded us, the warnings of the Holy Spirit, should be on our hearts! Realize they are for our good, so that it might go well with us – which are repeated phrases accompanying the commands God gave. What He commands us comes from His heart of steadfast love (Deuteronomy 7:9^{xxviii}).

⁷ You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. Deuteronomy 6:7 What would have happened to the nation if they had done this? There would never have been a conquest by foreign nations. There would never have been a captivity. The nation would have blessed the world.

While we can talk about the commands in Deuteronomy and relate them to current day idolatry and the necessity of loving God, we also have the words of Jesus and the New Covenant. We have the words Jesus spoke and the explanations by His apostles. What if we taught them diligently to our children? It is not guaranteed that they will give their lives to the Lord, but it would certainly give them a foundation to go in that direction. The Holy Spirit could then stir those words throughout their lives. Most of our children are adults, but we can still teach His words to them and to our grandchildren. Again, the best way to do so is to live them as an example that backs up our teaching.

I did not do as good a job of this as I should have in this regard. I'm sure many of you feel the same. Thank God for forgiveness and grace, but let us now take every opportunity given us. Pray for opportunities. Watch for them. Think about how you might naturally share what the Lord is showing you in His Word. Take those grandkids to Sunday School. Encourage your adult children to attend a church where the Word is proclaimed in love.

and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. Deuteronomy 6:7b This is the part that really grabbed me. How often our conversation is simply vanity! What if we talked about the Word when we sat in our house? Did you share what God showed you this morning with your spouse? Do you talk about God's Word when you sit down to dine? We have to be in the Word and meditating on it to do that, but too often we are distracted by the news cycle or a multitude of other things. I asked you to imagine if Israel lived this passage. Now imagine what your home would be like if you lived this passage? How much greater would your knowledge of God's Word be if you did this? What if your whole family did this? Can you imagine the blessings that would be yours?

But it is not just to be confined within our homes. We are to talk of them as we go out into the world (Mark 16:15^{xxix}). If it is on our hearts and minds, if we are really loving God as He commands us to, won't that just naturally be in our conversations. "How are you today?" "Great, this morning I read about Nehemiah's courage in the face of intense opposition. It just reminded me that if I'm doing God's will it doesn't matter what others say. He is going to help me do what He called me to do. Do you know what

I mean?" Now the other person may look at you with a blank stare, or they may start a deep conversation. Or you might ask them how they are, and they will be more likely to go deeper than just small talk. Can we do this? By the grace of God and the help of the Holy Spirit we can, but we must dedicate ourselves to that love that asks us to do this. We don't obey these commands because we must, but because the One who died for us asks us to do it for our good (John 15:10-11^{xxx}).

The verse goes on to say that we talk of them when we lie down and when we rise. That is why the Jews say this when they rise and when they go to bed. They take it quite literal and that is fine, but it certainly should be done with the idea that we set our minds on the Word at the end of the day and the beginning of each day. Can you imagine how that would change your attitude? When I wake up I often start thinking of all that needs to be done and start the day with "must do all this" attitude. But when I do remember to pray before my feet hit the floor, and then thank God for His mercy being new that morning and His help I will receive through the day, I'm whistling a tune of gratitude and the day seems a lot brighter. Then if I'll take some time in the Word and ask God to open my eyes to see what He is saying to me, I have a great start on the only way I'm going to live out these verses (Psalm 119:18^{xxxi}). And how we need to close our eyes at the end of the day with gratitude for all God has done, for His faithfulness to see us through! You'll sleep a lot better ending the day praising God.

⁸ You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. Deuteronomy 6:8 This is what I was describing at the beginning of the message. While the orthodox Jews today take this quite literally, which I don't see as a problem, it means little if we don't take it figuratively. Our hands are symbolic of our actions. If our actions aren't guided by the Word, and if we don't have those boundaries for our actions that the Word sets for us, people will not see the difference in our lives, and will in fact excuse their unbelief by our behavior. I don't encourage tattoos, but it would be helpful to picture our hands with a big tattoo declaring they are the Lord's. **They are His hands to serve others with His love.**

The frontlets between our eyes pictures us constantly considering the Word and watching for its application to our lives. Jesus probably wore a small phylactery. He didn't condemn them. He condemned them being ostentatious as if to show you are especially pious (Matthew 23:5^{xxxii}). And the same is true of how we share the Word with others. We are not to do so to show how spiritual we are. It should be that gracious and loving outworking of our life in the Spirit.

⁹ You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. Deuteronomy 6:9 This is why Jews post the mezuzah on their doorposts. Again, the physical application is fine as long as we see the spiritual implication. We should be reminded when we leave our homes that we are representing Jesus, the Word incarnate, to the world. And when we return to our homes we should remind ourselves that we also represent Jesus to our family. How would He act and what would He say in your field of work? How would He act and what would He say in your home?

Well, I've only finished the first of the three Shema passages. But this gives you a way to consider the other two on your own (Deuteronomy 11:13-21; Numbers 15:37-41). I'm really challenged by this short passage to let the Word be more central to all I do. That is my lesson from the trip. I hope you'll catch the vision these verses give us for having the Word of God be central to all we do and think throughout the day. This Friday we'll have a Good Friday service with communion at 6:30 p.m. Sunday we start a new tradition of Sunrise Service on the patio at 6:30 a.m. followed by breakfast downstairs and our regular worship service at 10:30.

Questions

- 1 Why did the Jews have such love for the Law?
- 2 Are we obligated to keep the Law? Why or why not?
- 3 What does "hear" mean in Hebrew?
- 4 Why does God command us to hear?
- 5 What was God's most frequent complaint against Israel?
- 6 In what way should we love God? Why?
- 7 What is the most valuable life priority?
- 8 What is the problem with idolatry?
- 9 How can we emphasize God's Word to our families?
- 10 How can we apply verses 8 and 9?

ⁱ **Acts 15:10 (ESV)**

¹⁰ Now, therefore, why are you putting God to the test by placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear?

ⁱⁱ **Psalms 119:47-48 (ESV)**

⁴⁷ for I find my delight in your commandments, which I love. ⁴⁸ I will lift up my hands toward your commandments, which I love, and I will meditate on your statutes.

ⁱⁱⁱ **Romans 8:2 (ESV)**

² For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.

^{iv} **Acts 21:24 (ESV)**

²⁴ take these men and purify yourself along with them and pay their expenses, so that they may shave their heads. Thus all will know that there is nothing in what they have been told about you, but that you yourself also live in observance of the law.

^v **Ephesians 2:14-15 (ESV)**

¹⁴ For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility ¹⁵ by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace,

^{vi} **Galatians 5:1 (ESV)**

¹ For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

^{vii} **Galatians 5:18 (ESV)**

¹⁸ But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

^{viii} **Romans 13:10 (ESV)**

¹⁰ Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.

^{ix} **Jeremiah 31:31-33 (ESV)**

³¹ "Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah,

³² not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD.

³³ For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

^x **Colossians 2:13-14 (ESV)**

¹³ And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses,

¹⁴ by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.

^{xi} **Luke 24:27 (ESV)**

²⁷ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.

^{xii} **Exodus 16:20 (ESV)**

²⁰ But they did not listen to Moses. Some left part of it till the morning, and it bred worms and stank. And Moses was angry with them.

^{xiii} **Deuteronomy 1:43 (ESV)**

⁴³ So I spoke to you, and you would not listen; but you rebelled against the command of the LORD and presumptuously went up into the hill country.

^{xiv} **Deuteronomy 18:19 (ESV)**

¹⁹ And whoever will not listen to my words that he shall speak in my name, I myself will require it of him.

^{xv} **Psalms 81:11 (ESV)**

¹¹ "But my people did not listen to my voice; Israel would not submit to me.

^{xvi} **Jeremiah 7:13 (ESV)**

¹³ And now, because you have done all these things, declares the LORD, and when I spoke to you persistently you did not listen, and when I called you, you did not answer,

^{xvii} **Jeremiah 12:17 (ESV)**

¹⁷ But if any nation will not listen, then I will utterly pluck it up and destroy it, declares the LORD."

^{xviii} **Jeremiah 22:21 (ESV)**

²¹ I spoke to you in your prosperity, but you said, 'I will not listen.' This has been your way from your youth, that you have not obeyed my voice.

^{xix} **Luke 6:46-49 (ESV)**

⁴⁶ "Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do what I tell you? ⁴⁷ Everyone who comes to me and hears my words and does them, I will show you what he is like: ⁴⁸ he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock. And when a flood arose, the stream broke against that house and could not shake it, because it had been well built. ⁴⁹ But the one who hears and does not do them is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. When the stream broke against it, immediately it fell, and the ruin of that house was great."

^{xx} **Genesis 2:24 (ESV)**

²⁴ Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

^{xxi} **Genesis 1:26 (ESV)**

²⁶ Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."

^{xxii} **Matthew 22:37-38 (ESV)**

³⁷ And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. ³⁸ This is the great and first commandment.

^{xxiii} **1 John 4:19 (ESV)**

¹⁹ We love because he first loved us.

^{xxiv} **Ephesians 2:1-5 (ESV)**

¹ And you were dead in the trespasses and sins ² in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— ³ among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of

wrath, like the rest of mankind. ⁴ But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—

^{xxv} **1 Corinthians 2:8-9 (ESV)**

⁸ None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. ⁹ But, as it is written, “What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him”—

^{xxvi} **Matthew 22:40 (ESV)**

⁴⁰ On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”

^{xxvii} **2 Corinthians 6:17-18 (ESV)**

¹⁷ Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; then I will welcome you, ¹⁸ and I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty.”

^{xxviii} **Deuteronomy 7:9 (ESV)**

⁹ Know therefore that the LORD your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations,

^{xxix} **Mark 16:15 (ESV)**

¹⁵ And he said to them, “Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation.

^{xxx} **John 15:10-11 (ESV)**

¹⁰ If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love. ¹¹ These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.

^{xxxi} **Psalms 119:18 (ESV)**

¹⁸ Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law.

^{xxxii} **Matthew 23:5 (ESV)**

⁵ They do all their deeds to be seen by others. For they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long,