

LOVE YAHWEH WITH ALL:
A SERMON ON DEUTERONOMY 6:5

Jason S. DeRouchie, Ph.D. / jason.derouchie@bcsmn.org
Associate Professor of Old Testament / Bethlehem College and Seminary
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Introduction

Yesterday we looked at Deuteronomy 6:4: “Hear, O Israel, Yahweh our God, Yahweh is one,” which Jesus cites in Mark 12. Today we are going to look at the second half of this “most important commandment” in 6:5: “And you shall love Yahweh your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.” Some have called this the “all-command,” because the word “all” occurs 3x in this one verse: *all* your heart, *all* your soul, and *all* your might. The use of “all” doesn’t allow for split affections or divided allegiance. If indeed there is one God who stands supremely powerful and supremely valuable, this demands a supreme and total loyalty from you and me, a loyalty that starts with the heart.

The message today seeks to answer two questions: (1) What does it mean that we need to love Yahweh with *all* our heart, soul, and might (v. 5)? (2) What do I do if I don’t love him like I should?

Loving Yahweh Your God

In Deuteronomy, loving God is central to all Moses’ message. The seriousness of the call is stressed in Deuteronomy 7:9–10: “Know therefore today that Yahweh 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, and repays to their face those who hate him, by destroying them. He will not be slack with one who hates him. He will repay him to his face.” Loving God, that is, loving Jesus in a way that leads us to follow him is so important, for he alone is life—“the way, the truth, the life” (John 14:6). Why would we choose death?

With All Your Heart, Soul, & Might

Heart. The first call is to love God with all our hearts. This may actually catch some off guard, for many of us grew up in churches that taught the Old Testament was only about externals and gave no thought to the heart. Not so! Throughout the Bible, God has always called for relationship that starts from the inside, and the heart-focus is a central part of Moses’ sermons in Deuteronomy. For example, turn back to Deuteronomy 4:39–40: “Know therefore today, and *lay it to heart*, that Yahweh is God in heaven above and on the earth beneath; there is no other. Therefore you shall

keep his statutes and his commandments.” Moses charges, “Get these truths *inside* of you, and once within, they will generate a new kind of living.” Similarly, return to our passage and look at 6:6: “And these words that I command you today shall be *on your heart*.” We should hear at this point an anticipation of Jeremiah 31:33, where God says that in the New Covenant, “I put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts.” God called the Old Covenant community to love him from the heart, and Jesus’ use of this passage tells us that nothing has changed. We are to have our desires, will, emotions, attitudes, perceptions, and even our thoughts enraptured by love for God. The heart is everything internal—all of it declaring we love God.

Soul & Might Introduced

Loving Yahweh our God with all our heart gives rise to a call to love him with all our soul and all our might. What exactly does Moses mean here? A common interpretation is that heart, soul, and might are three different aspects of who we are as people. Picture a circle with three smaller circles within it. For example, one commentator suggests that the “heart–soul” distinction is between “mental and emotion energy and activity,” whereas “might” points to “self-discipline” (D. L. Christensen, *Deuteronomy 1:1–21:9*, 143). But this view fails to treat the words in the way Moses uses them elsewhere and, as we will see tomorrow, it fails to address the greater context.

Soul

While there are places in the Bible where “soul” can be compared to “spirit” and thus point to something solely internal (Job 7:11; Isa. 26:9), in the Pentateuch, “soul” refers to one’s whole being as a living person, which includes one’s “heart” but is so much more. For example, the first place the word for “soul” shows up is in Genesis 2:7, where we are told that “Yahweh God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of the life, and the man became a living creature/*soul*” (cf. 9:5). Elsewhere corpses are called “dead souls,” which simply means the person, once alive, is now dead (Lev. 21:11), and in Leviticus 26:11, Yahweh declares, “I will make my dwelling among you, and my soul [i.e., *my being*] shall not abhor you.”

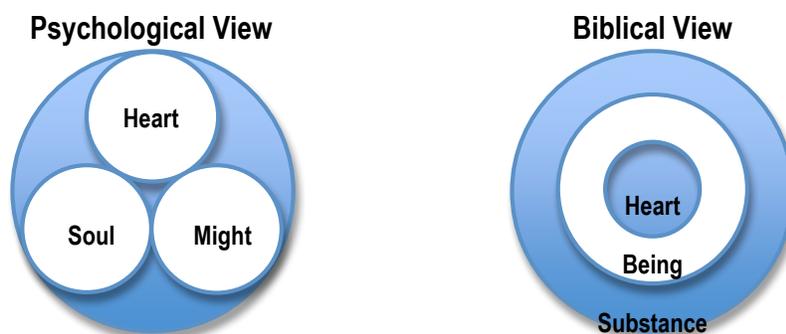
In light of these texts, it seems Moses is starting from within calling us to love God with everything internal (a small circle) and then moves one step larger saying that everything about us as a person is to declare Yahweh is our God (a larger circle around the small circle). So we are to love God with our passions and hungers and perceptions and thoughts. But we are also to love him with how we talk, and what we do with our hands, and how we utilize our talents, and how we react to challenges—our entire being is to display we love God.

Might

What then does “might” mean? Here we have a greater challenge, because usually in the Old Testament (298x) this word is an adverb, meaning “very.” The word translated “might/strength” in Deuteronomy 6:5 is the same word we see in Genesis 1:31, where God declared his creation “*very* good.” But in our passage the word is used as a noun, and we see this function in only one other text—2 Kings 23:25, where we are told that King Josiah “turned to Yahweh with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his *might*.” So if the word usually means “very,” what would it mean to love the LORD will all our “very-ness”? Interestingly, the Greek translator in the Septuagint rendered the word “power,” whereas the Aramaic translator in the targum used the word “wealth.” Both of these may actually be pointing in the same direction, for the strength of a person is not simply who he is but what he has at his disposal.

Think with me: If Moses’ call to love Yahweh starts with our heart, moves out to our being, could not our “very-ness” be one step bigger and include all our substance or resources? That is, the call would be to love God not only with our physical muscle but with everything we have available for honoring God, which would include a spouse, children, house or dorm room, pets, wardrobe, tools, cell phones, movies, music, computers, time, and the like—all that we are inside and out and all that is identified with us crying out, “Yahweh our God, Yahweh is one!” Covenant love, then, would be wholehearted, life-encompassing, community embracing, exclusive commitment to Yahweh!

The Locus of Covenant Love in Deuteronomy 6:5



Whole-hearted, Life-encompassing Love

But if we are on target here, every closet of our lives needs to be opened for cleaning, and every relationship in our lives needs to be influenced by our love for God. You can’t be one person at church and another person on a date. What you do on the internet needs to be just as pure as what you do in devotions. The way we talk to our parents needs to be as wholesome as the way we talk to our pastors. There

needs to be an authentic love for God that starts with God-oriented affections, desires, and thoughts, that permeates our speaking and behavior, and then influences our purchases, our dress, our driving, our media engagement, and our friendships. Whether eating or singing, jogging or blogging, texting or drawing, love for Yahweh, for the one true God, is to be operative and evident.

What Do We Do If I Don't Love As I Should?

While the Old Testament included the call to love God with one's heart, most of those who heard the call never heeded it, because their hearts were hard. Look at the wording in Deuteronomy 10:12 and 16. 10:12 begins with a call to God-oriented living, growing out of a heart encounter with the living God: "And now, Israel, what does Yahweh your God require of you, but to fear Yahweh your God by walking in all his ways, to love him, to serve Yahweh your God *with all your heart and with all your soul.*" You hear in those words an echo of our passage in Deuteronomy 6:4. But now look at verse 16: "Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn." Israel's stubbornness ran deep; indeed, they were in desperate need of heart surgery. "Stubborn" (9:6, 13; 10:16; 31:27), "rebellious" (1:26, 43; 9:7, 23, 24; 21:18, 20; 31:27), "unbelieving" (1:32; 9:23; 28:66)—this is the language that describes Israel in Deuteronomy.

Does it describe you? Would those who know you best say, "You have been rebellious against God from the day I knew you"? You hear so many calls to love God with all, but they bounce off, having no real impact and creating no real longings. You go to Northwestern where a banner waves, "Contagiously Christian," yet you are continually drawn to things not pleasing to the Lord. Perhaps its pornography and masturbation; you've battled them for so long—maybe it was your father's problem before it was yours. While part of you wants to be pure, the battle continues to rage, and you feel defeated. Or maybe your struggle is apathy or laziness. Yes, you know more discipline in your devotions or in your exercise or in your studies would be good, but that's just too much work. Or perhaps you are so gripped by a desire to be wanted, to be appreciated, that you are giving your body to someone who really doesn't love you, or he wouldn't be touching you now. Or maybe you are denying your body the food it needs, and you continue to get more sick, all so that you can match some unhealthy ideal you've crafted in your mind. Or maybe your heart has been so bruised by a member of the opposite sex, that you are considering finding comfort in an unhealthy relationship with the same sex. Whatever it may be, if you find that you are struggling to love God in every way and all the time, then the rest of this sermon is for you.

The Need for Dependence & Divine Enablement

We are going to look at two passages. The first is Deuteronomy 29:2–4: “You have seen *all* that Yahweh did before your eyes in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh and to all his servants and to all his land, the great trials that your eyes saw, the signs, and those great wonders. But to this day Yahweh has not given you a heart to understand [know] or eyes to see or ears to hear.” Are you like Israel? Your past is checkered with hearing words of God and even witnessing the power of God, and yet your life today has no real change. Though Israel knew a lot about God, they didn’t really know him. Though they had seen God at one level, at a deeper level they remained blind. They had heard God’s voice, but in reality, they were deaf. Their hearts were hard, their senses dull, resulting in no passion, no fire, no love. They remained stubborn, rebellious, and unbelieving; undisciplined, impure, *and condemned*. And they couldn’t change it! That is what’s amazing. Verse 4 says that a knowing heart, seeing eyes, hearing ears are all gifts of God. Left to ourselves, we will never have them.

If you find yourself not understanding the greatness of God, not seeing and savoring him as satisfying, not hearing his truth in a way that makes you change, your only hope is God! Dead hearts can’t create life. Lazarus couldn’t get himself out of the tomb. But the one who could showed up. “Lazarus, come forth” (John 11:43). He is here today, he—the one, true God—has the power to make you into a different person today! The hope of this passage is found in this fact. While God hadn’t worked in his people yet, he promised that one day he would. Turn over to 30:6: “And Yahweh your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love Yahweh your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.” This is the New Covenant hope, and we are living in the day of fulfillment! Jesus is here, and he has the power to heal.

Today, March 17, 2010, God can do heart surgery on you, reorienting your affections, transforming your longings, cleansing your thoughts, bringing purity to your heart once again. Some of you feel dirty and abused, and God wants you to feel clean and loved. Yahweh can make your hungers for purity greater than your hungers for lust. Yahweh can give you self-discipline where it’s been absent. Yahweh can replace your tendencies toward anger and bitterness with patience, self-control, and love. Yes, love! Yahweh through the person of Jesus, who has all authority in heaven and on earth, can help you love him with *all* your heart, *all* your being, and *all* your substance.

“See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god beside me; I kill and *I make alive*; I wound and *I heal*” (Deut. 32:39). The one who is all about New Creation is here today. The Surgeon is here, and if you feel your heart being seared right now,

don't fight it. If you long for this work to be done, pray for it. Repent, and find God begin to grant you a new capacity to love him today.

There is going to be a prayer team up here in the front, ready to help you deal with God. Whole-hearted, life-encompassing, community embracing allegiance. New hungers, new passions, purified desires. It can start today.

Closing Benediction

“Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forevermore. Amen.” (Jude 24–25)