

Sunday November 3, 2019
Lesson 10: An Interior Design
Scripture: Deut. 5:6-10, 6: 4-9

Context:

The next lesson on knowing God is from the book of Deuteronomy in the Old Testament. In this lesson we learn about the importance of loving God and having no other gods that we worship. We are reminded that loving God is an endeavor that engages all our senses.

Deuteronomy is mostly known for the rules given to the Israelite community to guide them in their life with God and with one another. The whole book is known as a lengthy speech attributed to Moses before his death.¹ It is a farewell address that gives the community instructions before a leader departs.

Most people know Deuteronomy for the law code found in the middle section of the book. Yet the beginning section also holds the forefront of the law with a few scriptures that have become a staple of the Jewish tradition and also played a huge role in Jesus's teachings. From these scriptures is a foundation for how people are to love God with that leading to all other components of one's life.

The first scripture lesson today focuses on God as the primary reason that the Israelites have left Egypt. It was not an Egyptian god who freed them; it was the God of Abraham who was with the people. Thus, God reminds the people that they are to have no other gods to worship. There are to be no physical objects that they bow down to or adore. It is only God to whom their allegiance is to belong. If they worship those other gods, it will lead their children and their children's children astray. They are to teach their children about God and those lessons are to be passed down.

A little further on in chapter six, this idea of one God is repeated in what is known as the Shema. The word "Shema" means "to hear" in Hebrew and is a word that is used in prayer.² The Shema reminds the people that God is the only God and that the people are to love God with all their heart, soul, and might. Furthermore, the people are to keep this command of love and adoration in their hearts and are to pass them to their children.

The Jewish tradition places great importance on this prayer, and we even see as much in the Christian tradition with Jesus's teaching on this verse multiple times. In the early Jewish tradition, they began writing these words in the form of phylacteries and mezuzahs, tiny scrolls that were attached to the arms and heads during prayer.³ This later expanded to small inscriptions over doors to remind people of the command. They can still be seen in Jewish homes and in places in Israel today. The Shema is something to be repeated from generation to generation.

¹ Michael Coogan, *The Old Testament: A Historical and Literary Introduction to the Hebrew Scriptures*, (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2011), 177.

² Ibid., 179.

³ Ibid., 179.

Application

The text from this lesson is a very visual one. In the instructions given, we are reminded that there is always the temptation to worship a physical god. It is easy for us to conjure up the images we have seen in National Geographic of the places overseas where there is a marble or golden statue of some human form with perfect features or perhaps some animalistic additions. They look like relics of the past, distant from our experience of today.

Yet the words from Deuteronomy remind us that gods can come any form. For the Israelites it happened to be that physical structures were the temptations. It was easy for them to copy the cultures around them and take the clay or stone and turn it into something they could worship.

Today the gods we can worship look very different. We don't need a statue. We have other things that we can worship and give our time and energy towards, pouring all that we have to things that we think will give us life.

Mammon, the god of wealth, has made his appearance not in large temples or in golden statues, but in the way that we lead our lives. The America lifestyle knows about this god. We crave the money that will make us more fulfilled or happier. We crave to be like the Joneses, who have everything their hearts desire. And so we pursue it, filling our bank account to the brim, but never quite satisfied.

Or take the god of leisure. Our society has gotten to the point that we don't feel obligated to make commitments whether that is with our money or with our time. We have made certain things more important whether that's our sports team or the place we like to vacation.

The church as a whole seems to be bemoaning that we are not what we once were with shrinking numbers and less commitment. Yet to a degree we are responsible for it. We have made things second priority, constantly urging that "one day" we will get back into the swing of things.

In this scripture passage we are reminded that loving God means involving our entire being and then modeling that to our children and those generations behind us. Often our children are watching us a lot more closely than we realize. They are watching to see where we place our money and our time. And they will follow whatever example we give them.

I don't know all the solutions for the challenges today. I know that berating people about the gods they follow doesn't necessarily yield the results we crave. But what I do know is that I am to worship God with all my being and leave the rest up to God. I can live my life following Christ, which might set an example for someone else. I can be in relationship with others and let my faith come not through just my words, but in my deed and way of relating to people.

We are called to follow our God regardless of the trends that are hitting the culture. Even when other Christians seem to be worshipping those other gods, the way to engage is not to berate or belittle, but set an example and encourage them. The Shema says to love God with all our heart, our soul, and our might, which is a full endeavor. This passage reminds us that loving God is a full exercise routine, which means we need to have patience and endurance. The life of faith is a marathon, not a sprint.

Today is a good day to think about how you are progressing in your walk with Christ. Are there other things, maybe even hobbies, which have become a god for you?

What are the other gods that you might worship, even justifying their importance in your life? How can you love God with all your heart, soul, and might? How can you encourage others in that journey? What are ways that you can teach your children about the grace of God?

Rev. E. Hunter Pugh
Pastor of Brantley – Brunson Chapel Charge
PO Box 71
Brantley, AL 36009