

With all Your Very

Deut 6:4 – 5, BHS	Deut 6:4 – 5, ESV
שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל	Hear, O Israel
יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְהוָה אֶחָד:	The LORD our God, the LORD is one
וְאַהֲבַתְּ אֵת יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ	You shall love the LORD your God
בְּכָל-לְבָבְךָ וּבְכָל-נַפְשְׁךָ	with all your heart and with all your soul
וּבְכָל-מְאֹדְךָ:	and with all your might.

Jesus was once asked what the greatest commandment of all was, and he cited this verse (Matt 22:36 – 38). On this and the second greatest (Love your neighbor as yourself), “depend all the Law and the Prophets” (Matt 22:40). As you can see, the first word is pronounced, “Shema,” which is what this commandment is commonly called.

In the New Testament, people are called to have faith, to believe in Jesus, to be justified and saved. The Old Testament analog to faith is love—love being the great response to God and his salvation. Like a man and a woman professing love for one another in marriage, God’s people are called to love him. Love is a covenant word. Without love for God, the Law is empty and powerless, a mere show before others. Jesus criticized the Pharisees for this sort of meaningless obedience. Even today, mere outward conformity to God’s moral requirements is hypocrisy without the prior motivation of love for God.

We are called to love God with our whole heart. Your heart is the religious center of your personality. Consider that in the book of Proverbs, 40% of the time “heart” is used in the sense of one’s mind (e.g. 6:18). 21% of the time it refers to emotions (e.g. 13:12). 14% denotes the will (e.g. 4:4), 3%

behavior (e.g. 27:23). Finally, 19% of the time the heart refers to the capacity to trust. “Trust in the LORD with all your heart” (3:5). The heart is the orientation of mind, will, and emotions; the heart trusts. It is with your entire inner life—what you think, feel, will—that you are called to love your God.

You are also called to love God with all your “soul.” As you can see, in Hebrew this is *nephesh*. Animals are living *nephesh* (Gen 1:24), and so are we (Gen 2:7). Often *nephesh* refers to the appetite. Ecclesiastes always uses it in this sense (e.g. 6:7). The Song of Songs also exclusively uses it this way—but for a different kind of appetite (e.g. 3:1). You are called to love God with your passions, with your appetites; with your desires and your deep motivations.

Finally, take a look at the last term in the verse above. Those of you who remember your Hebrew may recognize it. The word, *me’od*, is not a noun. It does not mean “might.” It is the adverb, “very.” Of course, the English sentence requires a noun, so all translations put one there. But in Hebrew it says to love the LORD your God with all of your “very.”

In what do you excel? Into what activity do you pour yourself? Fill in this blank: “I am very _____.” What did you put there? With whatever that is, you are called to love God. What about you is very? Love God that way.

Jesus loved God with his whole inner life. He asked his enemies, “Which one of you convicts me of sin?” (John 8:46). He said, “I always do the things that are pleasing to him” (8:29). Jesus yielded his animate life to God. He fasted 40 days. He willingly suffered the breaking of his body on the cross. With his physical, animate life he loved God to the end. Jesus loved God to the

uttermost, with his very. Everything he did during his earthly ministry, and everything he could do, was motivated by his love for his Father.

When Jesus returns for those he loves, we will all be changed and will love perfectly. Until then, the challenge of the Shema is to devote ourselves, each day, to follow Jesus by loving God with our hearts, our souls, and our very. And he supplies his Spirit to enable you to grow in this. So keep at it, Christian people, until the very end. Amen, Come Lord Jesus, our Very!