

Hear O' Church – One Lord, One Life
“Go into all the world” – Part V
Deuteronomy 6:1-9, Mark 12:29-31, Romans 12:1-2
September 20, 2015

These are the commands, decrees and laws the Lord your God directed me to teach you to observe in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess, ² so that you, your children and their children after them may fear the Lord your God as long as you live by keeping all his decrees and commands that I give you, and so that you may enjoy long life. ³ Hear, O Israel, and be careful to obey so that it may go well with you and that you may increase greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, just as the Lord, the God of your ancestors, promised you. ⁴ Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. ⁵ Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. ⁶ These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. ⁷ Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. ⁸ Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. ⁹ Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

Deuteronomy 6:1-9 (NIV)

That passage of Scripture, from the O.T. Book of Deuteronomy is the most important passage of Scripture in all of the Bible for the Jewish people. It is known as the Shema. The word “shema” in Hebrew means “to hear.” What Moses was telling his people, God’s people, was that they need to listen up, they need to be quiet and hear what he has to say, because this is very important.

Our western culture today is one which is very different than the one which existed in the ancient Near East. While we in the west in the 21st century put our emphasis on knowledge, reasoning and scientific proof, the people of the ancient Near East emphasized the spiritual, the mystical and the magical realms. Theirs was a culture which was filled with many gods and demigods (demigods - mystical figures who were greater than humans but a little less than a god). The people of the ancient Near East were pluralists. There was a god over just about anything you can think of. There was a god of the forest, a god of the family, sex gods and sex goddesses, a god of the harvest, a god of the river, a god of the sun, the moon, the stars and on and on and on. Each and every god was to be feared and appeased on a regular basis. While we have trouble worshiping one God today think of how difficult it would have been to worship many gods. The people of the ancient Near East were polytheists, meaning they worshipped many gods.

Yahweh, the one true God, comes along and he speaks through the prophet Moses, telling His people to listen up, to hear, this is very important: “No, there are not many gods there is only one God and I Am. I Am the great I Am!” It was a call for the Israelites to live their lives under the Lordship of one God and not that of many competing gods. It was a practical call for them not to live their lives as if there were a different god for every area of their life.

Judaism loudly proclaims that there is only one God and that he is Lord over every aspect of life. Polytheists can compartmentalize their lives and distribute their worship across many gods. Monotheism says no such thing. Monotheism says that there is only one God and that He is the God over everything! Why is this important for us Christians today? Because Christianity is a continuation of Judaism.

When Jesus was asked by one of the scribes which is the greatest commandment, what he was doing in his answer is just quoting the Shema from the O.T.:

“The most important one,” answered Jesus, “is this: ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.’³⁰ Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’³¹ The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.” Mark 12:29-31 (NIV)

Interestingly Jesus’ answer here was pretty much out of character for him. Usually when Jesus was asked a question he responded by asking another question or he responded with a parable. That was the common way that rabbi’s of Jesus’ day taught. But here Jesus answers right away, with no question back or in a parable. He answers rather quickly and plainly which should tell us it’s very important. And he doesn’t just give us one commandment he gives us two. The number one greatest commandment is to ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ And the number two greatest commandment is to ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’

Some would say that it’s really only one commandment but that is not what Jesus said. Jesus said the loving the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength is the first and greatest commandment and that loving our neighbor is the second. The truth is we cannot love our neighbors as God requires us to love our neighbors without us first loving Him with everything we have, and if we love Him with everything we have than we cannot help but love our neighbors the way he wants us to.

What Jesus is saying is that God has to come first in our lives over each and everything else. While we may not have other so called “gods” (with a small g), we certainly do have our idols – ourselves being our primary idol, as well as our biological families, our children, our spouses, our jobs, sports, hobbies, television, movies, internet, music, games, food, cell phones, Facebook – the list is endless. We have more gods (with a small g) and more demigods competing for God’s attention and affection on our lives than at any time in human history. We’re fooling ourselves if we think that polytheism does not exist in our world today.

While we might not refer to all of our idols as gods, we have become very good at separating the sacred from the secular. We compartmentalize our lives. Here I have my church life, where I behave a certain way. Here I have my family life where I try and behave in a way that is pretty similar to my church life, or maybe not? Then I have my work life, where I can behave a different way and I don’t even need to acknowledge my faith in Christ, and I have all my hobbies over here, where once again I usually don’t have to acknowledge my faith or behave and act in a certain way. Most Christians today live very disintegrated lives.

Missiologists Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch tell us that if we Christians are to do mission the way God calls us to do mission in the 21st century, then we need to have a sense of the Jewish concept of Shema:

“A re-Hebraizing of Christianity is so vital for the emergence of the missional- incarnational church. The claim to unify our lives under the one God has truly radical implications for us

today as we struggle to find new ground on which to base our discipleship. Biblical monotheism means that we cannot live like there is one “god” for the church and another for politics and another in economic life or still another for the home. No, all of life, every aspect of it, every dimension, is to be brought under and unified under the one God, Yahweh. Seen in this light, the Shema is a claim of God’s exclusivity and a direct challenge from God about the role of idols in the believer’s life.”

“Secular,” by definition means “non-sacred” or “apart from God.” Throughout the history of Christianity this has been called dualism and it has always been a very dangerous place to be. Dualism limits God and it limits God’s mission in the world. When quoting the Shema, Jesus was saying that all dimensions of our lives are to be brought under his care.

When trying to come up with a video clip for this morning I was torn between the one I showed and one of many to pick from the great movie Chariots of Fire and the story of Olympic runner Eric Liddel, who wouldn’t separate his faith from the gift of running which God had given him, saying, “I believe God made me for a purpose, but he also made me fast. And when I run I feel His pleasure.”

As Brad Brisco and Lance Ford share in their book *Missional Essentials*, “So as we seek to Shema (to hear from God) we aim to recognize God’s activity throughout our daily routines. By understanding that God is everywhere and seeking to restore and redeem broken people and the brokenness throughout all of creation, our lives take on new meaning – spiritual meaning.”

Brisco and Ford once again quote from Henri Nouwen, thought to be one of the great spiritual giants of the last half of the 20th century, for that very reason, that he was so gifted at being able to integrate the spiritual/sacred with the secular.

“There is a real tendency to think of the spiritual life as a life that will begin when we have certain feelings, think certain thoughts, or gain certain insights. The problem, however, is not how to make the spiritual life happen, but to see where it actually is happening. We work on the premise that God acts in this world and in the lives of individuals and communities. God is doing something right now. The chipping away and sculpting is taking place whether we are aware of it or not. Our task is to recognize that, indeed, it is God who is acting, and we are involved already in the spiritual life.”
Henri Nouwen

Brisco & Ford add:

“The sacred-secular divide as a mindset, or paradigm, has enormous implications for the life of the Christian. When we live under this misguided belief, we leave God out of the equation of the majority of our actual daily living. But when we seek to hear God in our daily routines, believing that the Lord is bringing his kingdom to earth, we hear and see things we might have never observed beforehand.”
Brad Brisco & Lance Ford, *Missional Essentials*

God is the God over everything. We cannot go where God is not. And God passed his dominion over everything to his Son, Jesus Christ. He is Lord over all of life – from our life here at church, to our life behind closed doors at home, to our life at school, at work, in our

neighborhood, when we're playing and watching sports, when we're at the grocery store, and on and on and on. Our awake life, our sleeping life, our sex life, our dying life. It's all His! The apostle Paul spends the first eleven chapters of his letter to the Romans explaining everything that God has done for all of human creation in His Son, Jesus Christ. And he gets to the end of Romans, chapter eleven, and he writes, "For from him (him meaning Jesus) and through him and for him all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen" (Romans 11:36 NIV)

Then he begins chapter 12 with the practical implications, what it means for Christians: *Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy (in view of everything that God has done for us in Jesus Christ), to offer your bodies (selves) as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. ² Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.*

Worship is not just what we do on Sunday morning, or when we sing. If we look at the first time the word worship is used in the Bible, we get a true understanding of its meaning. The first time the word worship is used in the Bible is in Abraham's sacrifice of his son, Isaac. It is used initially when God told Abraham to offer up the most important person or thing in his life and he didn't give a reason why. Abraham told his servant in Genesis 22:5, "stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you." Abraham was not going up the mountain to sing some nice worship song to God, he was going up, in obedience to God, to put his most prized possession to death. His worship was defined by his obedience. John BeVere writes in his book Good or God? "True worship is revealed by who we obey, not who we sing to."

Worship is not just what we do on a Sunday morning when we're at church, or when we're home and we pray, it's what we do every day, twenty four hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year.

I'm not sure that there is a passage in the Bible that Eugene Peterson did a better job of translating into contemporary language than Romans 12:1-2:

So here's what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him. Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you.

Paul is urging us to offer everything up to God as an act of worship. He is Lord over every area of our life. Since God is one, we have the obligation to bring every aspect of our lives, communal and individual, under this one God, Yahweh.

Jesus takes the Shema, “O Hear O Israel,” God’s people of the Old Testament, and he applies it to Christians, God’s people of the New Testament – “O Hear, O Church.” The first and most important commandment of the Old Testament is still the first and most important commandment of the New – “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind and all your strength.” It is the call to bring our minds, our hearts, our souls and our bodies all under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. God is no longer understood as involved in just the “spiritual” dimension of our lives, because we have eliminated the sacred-secular divide from our concept of God and how God works.

Brisco & Ford close this chapter in *Missional Essentials* with these words:

“This is a cornerstone precept of the biblical worldview. We commit our whole life to God. Nothing is off limits. If the entire world, including our immediate world, and all that within it is truly under the ownership of God, then there can be no part of my life that is not open to his rule. “It is very possible to be a confessing monotheist (belief in one God), while being a practicing polytheist (belief in many gods). To confess Jesus is Lord means our loyalty is with him throughout every sphere of our lives, including our sexuality, our activity as consumers, our roles as neighbors, workers, and friends. We have one life, under one Lord.”

How does all this apply to being more missional in our own community? Well, if there truly is only one God, and that He is God over all, then God is already at work in our community. God is already at work in people’s lives trying to draw them to Him. And He uses His people to help Him carry out His mission here on earth, that which started way back with Abram, who would become Abraham, and then Moses, and down the line until fulfilled in His own Son, Jesus Christ. And Jesus has passed that mission on to us: “Therefore go (out there) and make more disciples, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded.” As Christians, those who have been “born again,” saved and sanctified through the redeeming work of Jesus Christ on the cross and His resurrection we have four primary callings upon our lives:

1. Love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength.
2. Love others as God loves us.
3. Become better disciples of Jesus ourselves, each and every day.
4. Help to make other disciples.

Most of us Christians are pretty good at making excuses why we cannot do those things. Like, “It’s just not my calling,” or “I just have too much on my plate right now,” or “I don’t have time to invest in other people,” or “I don’t know enough,” or “I have too many issues of my own,” or “I’ll start when things slow down and I get my life in order.”

As convincing as these excuses may seem to us, Jesus’ commands don’t come with exception clauses. He doesn’t tell us to follow unless we’re busy. He doesn’t call us to love our neighbors unless we don’t feel prepared. He doesn’t tell us to help make disciples unless we just don’t feel called to it.

In fact Jesus issued a pretty strong warning to those who were making excuses:

⁵⁷ *As they were walking along the road, a man said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go."*

⁵⁸ *Jesus replied, "Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head."*

⁵⁹ *He said to another man, "Follow me."*

But he replied, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father."

⁶⁰ *Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God."*

⁶¹ *Still another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say goodbye to my family."*

⁶² *Jesus replied, "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God."*

Luke 9:57-62 (NIV)