

DEUT 6:4-9—FOUNDATIONS

INTRO: Why are we here? Does our life exist for any reason, purpose, or have any meaning at all? Where do we find meaning and purpose? Where do we get our values? Why do we do the things we do? We are all here, and we have to deal with these foundational issues.

Most of us never spend much time considering the *foundations* of our lives. We're all so busy, we're fairly decent people, and we don't think that—practically speaking—it makes that much difference. But the foundations of our lives do matter and do play out over time—b/c we tend to live according to our foundational beliefs and worldview. IOW, If you believe we are just a meaningless arrangement of atoms and need to grab for all the gusto you can, you will tend to act in certain ways. If you believe that life is all about power or money and that people are out to get you, you will tend to act in other ways. If you believe that there is an omnipotent God who holds that love of God and other people are of supreme value and that when we die He will judge you, you will tend to act in yet other ways.

Today's passage of Scripture, **Deut 6:4-9**, is one of the most foundational passages in the entire Bible. **[READ Deut 6:4-9]** This passage is called the "*Shema*" from the Hebrew word for "hear"—"**Hear, O Israel.**" It is recited 2x p/day by pious Jews. What is it telling us? It is telling us:

PROP: Our relationship with God determines everything else in our life.

O/S: We will see that as we consider: (1) Our relationship with God (v.4); (2) Through our relationship with Him He changes us on the inside (vv.5-6); (3) That internal change affects our external lives (vv.7-9).

I. Our Relationship with God.

"Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one"

A. This great statement was given when Israel was about to enter the land that God had promised to them. All of the surrounding nations were polytheistic. Now you might think that the statement "**The Lord our God, the Lord is one**" simply is a great affirmation of monotheism, as opposed to polytheism. Now it is true that there is only one God—and Moses made that great monotheistic point back in **Deut 4:28** when he said that all other gods are "**the work of man's hands,**" and in **4:35** when he said, "**know that the Lord, He is God; there is no other besides Him.**" But there is more going on here.

B. Here in Deut 6:4 word translated "Lord" is YHWH—the great covenantal name of God in the OT. But in v.4 the Hebrew grammar is enigmatic—there is no verb that says "is." That has to be supplied by the context. This has led to quite a lot of discussion as to the precise translation: "**Hear, O Israel, YHWH our God, YHWH is one**"—"Hear, O Israel, YHWH is our God, YHWH is unique"—"Hear, O Israel, YHWH is our God, YHWH alone."

What is clear from the whole context of the passage is that this passage was calling for the total and exclusive commitment and fidelity to YHWH: inwardly and outwardly. It was God who had chosen Israel; it was God who had brought Israel out of slavery in Egypt; it was God who had established a covenantal relationship with Israel, unlike His relationship with any other nation or people. Israel was to remember that, and internalize it, and act upon it in love and obedience to the Lord.

Why is this passage calling for exclusive commitment to YHWH? To understand this, we need to understand what a "Lord" is. "Lord" means "master," "boss," the one in charge, the one entitled to pre-eminence, the one to be followed and obeyed. Particularly since Israel was about to start a new life in a new land, this passage is recognizing that *everyone* HAS a "Lord." The surrounding nations all had their own lords and gods—but this passage also applies to us as individuals, b/c everyone lives for something. Everyone has a worldview and a motivating force deep within us that determines our understanding of reality, our values, what is most important to us, and how we live and act. We all have something that *functionally acts as our "Lord" and God*—something we live for, and whose voice we listen to and obey.

What this passage is telling us is that there is only one Lord who is worthy to be our Lord. Only one Lord who is *rightfully* our Lord and should be at the center of our being—and that is YHWH, the true Lord God. This passage was telling Israel, which was about to b/g a new life in the land, to do it *right*. To have the true Lord at the center of their life. The passage is saying the same thing to us as individuals—b/c the Bible says that anything else that acts as your lord, besides YHWH, is called an IDOL.

Over the past 2 or 3 months we have been seeing how the OT was pointing forward to Jesus. The same is true here. With the coming of Jesus, YHWH revealed Himself to the world in a personal way that He had

never done before. Jesus is the final revelation of God. The **Heb 1** says that Jesus “**the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His being.**” The NT repeatedly calls Jesus “LORD.” What the NT often does is take OT passages where YHWH was used, and now applies them to Jesus.

The fact that this passage is pointing forward to Jesus is also reflected the word for “God” in v.4 which in Hebrew is “Elohim.” *Elohim* is actually a plural noun. The Jews took this as what is called a “plural of majesty”—like when Queen Victoria said “We are not amused” (referring to herself as “we”). Now God is, indeed, majestic beyond comprehension—but the use of *Elohim* is one of the subtle ways the OT was hinting at what the NT makes plain: namely, that God is Trinity (F, S, and HS). That is amazing, and is a concept that is virtually impossible for our finite minds to grasp. There is only one God, yet that oneness consists of 3 persons—but not 3 separate gods.

BTW, this whole idea of the Trinity is one piece of evidence that Christianity has not been made up by people—b/c no one would create a religion whose central idea is one that most people find incomprehensible if not illogical. Yet the theologians who articulated the concept of the Trinity did so on the basis of the overwhelming evidence of Scripture itself. For example, it was Jesus who said **“I and my Father are One”** and **“If you have seen me, you have seen the Father”** and **“I am sending you the HS—another comforter”** (i.e., “one just like Me”). B/c Christ has come, we can know God—who He is and what He is like—in a direct, personal way that the people of Moses’ day never could.

The connection between Deut 6 and Jesus is also seen in the fact that Jesus requires the same commitment to Him that was required of Israel’s commitment to YHWH in Deut 6 and the rest of the OT. In **Luke 14:26** Jesus said, **“If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple.”** This is a very Hebrew way of speaking. He is obviously not telling us to emotionally hate our parents, spouse or children, or ourselves. Elsewhere throughout the NT Jesus affirmed the primacy of love. Indeed, in **Matt 22** he quoted **Deut 6:5** (**“Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength”**) and said that this is the 1st and greatest command. And then said that the 2nd command—**love your neighbor as yourself**—is just like it. He said **“on these 2 commands the entire Bible is based.** What Jesus is saying is that *compared to our love and commitment to Him*, all other relationships pale in comparison. It’s like all other relationships are hatred compared to our relationship with Him. Whenever there is a conflict between our relationship with Jesus and all earthly relationships, or what we want for ourselves, He must have priority. That is what it means to have Him as our Lord.

This is important, b/c it leads directly to the internal and external change that knowing, and being committed and faithful to Him, brings.

II. vv.5-6—OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD CHANGES US ON THE INSIDE.

A. The truth that both Deut. and Jesus are expressing is that *in every area of life* either the real God will be leading you from the inside-out, or something else will be—*something else will be acting as your God.* **Prov 23:7** says **“As a person thinks within himself, so he is.”** Jesus said the same thing: In **Mark 7** He said, **“It’s not what goes into you that defiles you, it’s what comes out of you—out of your heart—that defiles you.”**

In the Bible, the “heart” is the innermost core of our being; the real “me”; and it is often equated with the mind. That is why **Deut 6:5-6** say: **[READ Deut 6:5-6].**

What God is telling us is: “If I am NOT at the core of your being, something else will be, and that something else—whatever it is—is NOT all-knowing, is NOT all-loving, is NOT all-powerful, did NOT create you, and DOES NOT have your best interest and the best interest of all of creation at heart. IOW, any other “god” besides the true omnipotent, omniscience God in Christ by definition is *no bigger than we are*—weak, frail, warped, self-centered, and deeply flawed at its very heart—b/c as Moses said, any other god is simply **“the work of man’s hands.”** Why do **Deut 6** and Jesus say that God-in-Christ is to be on our heart, at the core of our being *all the time*: in all times and places, for all decisions we make? B/c to the extent that He is not, then something else is acting as your Lord *for that decision*. IOW, you are an IDOLATOR *for that decision*.

Unless Christ is at the very core of our being, we will never be able to transcend ourselves, our flaws, our self-centeredness. Unless Christ is at the core of our being we will filter—either consciously or unconsciously—*everything* through *our own* desires and fears. Everything will revolve—one way or another—around us. That inevitably will lead to conflict, frustration, and a host of other problems, both internal and external, regardless of our education, or how much we make or have. Why? B/c *we cannot change our own heart*. Only the God who transcends us can do that.

B. But the situation is actually more profoundly important than that. What do I mean? Several of my close friends are atheists. Others don’t really know what they believe. So what answer can they give to the questions

of meaning, purpose, and values that we raised at the beginning of this message? The only answer they can give is that we are here b/c: “Millions of years ago some mud began to wiggle. Somehow it reproduced itself, grew legs, crawled out of the slime, and here we are!” But why? The answer: No reason at all. Just happenstance. Where are we going? Nowhere. Things will continue for awhile and then the earth will burn up and then nothing. So what reason or purpose or meaning is there to it all? None whatsoever. *So we have to create our own meaning.*

Most of the people I know like that do not consciously reflect very much on this. They either discard the idea of God altogether, or *functionally* act as if there is no God. (And, I am sorry to say, many professing Christians act the very same way.) They think that God is not necessary, and you can be just as good a person without Him as with Him. But intelligent, reflective people see the implications of this. Jean-Paul Sartre, the existentialist philosopher, who himself was an atheist, very clearly saw the significance of the absence of God. In his 1946 address “Existentialism is a Humanism” he said this:

Towards 1880, when the French professors endeavoured to formulate a secular morality, they said something like this: God is a useless and costly hypothesis, so we will do without it. However, if we are to have morality, a society, and a law-abiding world, it is essential that certain values should be taken seriously; they must have an *a priori* existence ascribed to them [*a priori* = something that is valid intrinsically—in and of itself; not based on experimentation]. It must be considered obligatory *a priori* to be honest, not to lie, not to beat one’s wife, to bring up children and so forth; . . . In other words . . . nothing will be changed if God does not exist; we shall rediscover the same norms of honesty, progress and humanity, and we shall have disposed of God as an out-of-date hypothesis which will die away quietly of itself.

That is where a lot of people are today. But Sartre knew better. He knows that that position is totally unsustainable.

[Sartre then continues:] The existentialist, on the contrary, finds it extremely embarrassing that God does not exist, for there disappears with Him all possibility of finding values in an intelligible heaven. There can no longer be any good *a priori*, since there is no infinite and perfect consciousness to think it. It is nowhere written that “the good” exists, that one must be honest or must not lie, since we are now upon the plane where there are only men. . . . “If God did not exist, everything would be permitted”; and that, for existentialism, is the starting point. Everything is indeed permitted if God does not exist, and man is in consequence forlorn, for he cannot find anything to depend upon either within or outside himself.

What Sartre clearly saw and correctly states is that if there is no God, then life *has* no intrinsic meaning and *can have* no intrinsic meaning. Most people I know live for our families, success, happiness, or personal peace. Some go into politics, to try to change things—“hope and change,” you know. Almost everybody I know, including all of my atheist friends, is like that.

Then again, Al Capone took a different tack. He said, “You can get more with a kind word and a gun than with just a kind word.” Adolf Hitler went into politics. “Hope and change” was basically his mantra too. W/o the foundation of God is there any possible basis to say that Al Capone and Adolf Hitler were wrong?

Without God where do you get this idea of “right and wrong”? I thought we all constructed our own meaning and values. You’re a nice family person; I’m a rapist and a murderer. That’s where I find *my* meaning and purpose. *Prove me wrong.* And it doesn’t matter anyway. Why? B/c we all die, and then nothing. No judgment, no eternal life, no heaven, no hell—your body rots and there is nothing at all.

Without God as our Lord there is no basis for saying that Al Capone or Adolf Hitler were wrong in anything they did, b/c there is no basis to say that *anything* is right or wrong. There is no basis for saying that the philosophy of “*might makes right*” is untrue—b/c any values we have are simply made up by us. We may not rape or kill b/c we are afraid we will be sent to prison, but there is no basis to say that the rapist or murderer any way did anything immoral, b/c there is nothing on which to ground morality itself.

People may say one thing—that there is no God and life has no meaning, but that view of life *cannot account for how life really is*—and it cannot account for how people *really live*. Why? B/c everyone *knows* that that some things are good and some evil; some things are right and others wrong. Try butting in line ahead of anyone—they’ll say “That’s wrong; you can’t do that!” You see, everyone knows that truth exists; that people have inherent value; that there IS meaning and purpose to life.

As Sartre himself clearly recognized, real meaning necessarily *can only come* from the existence of a transcendent God, indeed, for Sartre or anyone *even to say* “there is no meaning” makes no sense. Why? B/c I would respond: “You say ‘There is no meaning.’ Is that a meaningful statement? Are you claiming that is true?”

If our fundamental premise is that there is no God, but our whole lives necessarily are lived so as to deny that fundamental premise—IOW, our lives *necessarily* are lived on the basis that there IS a transcendent

God—then why not re-evaluate our fundamental premise? What the Bible is saying, in **Deut 6** and especially in the coming to earth of Jesus Christ, is that there IS meaning and purpose to life, b/c there is a transcendent God and we can KNOW Him in the person of Jesus Christ. In Christ God became incarnate.

When we know Him, and take the real God into the center of our being, He will enable us to transcend ourselves, to find wholeness, and the meaning and purpose for our being.

C. This passage is also telling us that those who know the real God will b/c different, compared to those who do not know the real God. When **v.6** says that **“these words shall be on your heart”** it is telling us that God in Christ is to be at the very center of our being and life: determining how we think, speak, feel, and act. And He will transform us.

The reason is that Jesus said that if anyone knows Him, HE, in the person of the HS, will come inside of us. HE has the power to change us from the inside-out. The HS is active. So we must consciously, deliberately, and consistently draw upon Him—His presence, His power, His thoughts, His guidance. As we do so, our inner being will be changed on the inside—we can transcend the way we are now; we will b/c more like Jesus Himself. No other “god” can do that.

That is important, b/c:

III. vv.7-9—OUR INTERNAL CHANGE AFFECTS OUR EXTERNAL LIVES. [READ vv.6-9]

A. The idea that what we believe—our religion or worldview—should *or even can* be only a private, inner thing is nonsense. By definition, our deepest beliefs, the motivating influence of our lives, what is at the very core of our being—IOW God or our own little gods—necessarily affects and determines everything we do! These verses are telling us to be conscious, deliberate, and consistent in drawing on the presence of God within us and *applying* His word all the time in all areas of our lives.

Notice how comprehensive this is: v.7: Teach your children and talk of these things at home and when you are out; night and day. IOW in at all times and places.

v.8: “Hand and forehead” The “hand” is talking about our actions; the “forehead” is talking about our mind. “Frontlets” are right here—God and His word should be at the forefront of our mind, b/c what we think determines what we are and what we do. As **Rom 12:2** says, **“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”** IOW, it begins on the inside and changes us on the outside.

v.9: “Doorposts of your house” indicates our private life; “your gates” indicates our public life. The gates of the city in ancient times were where the public business of the city was conducted. This passage is telling us that the Lord and His ways should influence and determine everything: our character; our values; how we do our work; how we vote, how we treat people, what we do with our money—everything.

Are we doing this? How conscious and deliberate and consistent are we in *applying Christ* to all areas of our lives all the time? How well do we know His word? If we don’t spend time in His word, how can we hope to apply what He says? His word is the primary means that He uses to transform us on the inside—as we take His word deep into the core of our being. This is foundational, b/c remember: SOMETHING is going to act as our God—it will either be God Himself, or it will be something else. How we live *demonstrates* who or what *really* is our Lord.

CONCL: I know that much of what I have said today may have sounded abstract and philosophical. But we are talking about the foundations of our lives. The Bible makes clear that our life *has* real meaning. I hope we see that—by its very nature—real meaning can only come from the transcendent God.

In fact, everything we do in this life has more meaning than we think it does. Why? B/c everything we do in this life is preparing us for *and has implications for our eternal life*. For example, Jesus said **“If you give even a cup of cold water to somebody b/c of Me, I see, I will remember, and I will reward you, and those rewards will last FOREVER.”**

That is one reason why **Deut 6** says this is to be an all-the-time thing—why we need to consciously, deliberately, and consistently have God at the forefront of our mind and at the very center of our being in all things, at all times, and in all places. If we do, He will change us from the inside-out. As the habits our hearts change, our character will change. As our character changes, our life—in all its dimensions—will change. If you keep this passage in the forefront of your mind, Christ will use it to change you—and it will be wonderful.