



Dear Friends,

What are you reading in the Bible at the moment?

Recently, I began reading Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy is the last of the five books of Moses that are known as the Pentateuch (Greek word meaning, five books) or Torah (Hebrew word meaning, instruction).

In the book of Deuteronomy, Israel is on the edge of the territory that God promised to his people after delivering them from slavery in Egypt. It's been forty years since Israel left Egypt, and now they're about to enter and inhabit this new land. So, Moses delivers a series of sermons to prepare Israel for their life together under God's rule in God's place. We find these sermons in Deuteronomy.

This week, I read Deuteronomy 6. It contains what is known as the Shema. The Shema is to Jews what the Lord's Prayer is to Christians. It's the prayer that all Jews pray. Like the Lord's Prayer, the Shema confesses fundamental truths about God and how his people are to respond to him:

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. (Deut. 6:4-5)

What struck me as I read through the passage was the number of times it mentioned that Israel is to fear the LORD (6:2; 13; 24). Fear is not a word we regularly use to express how to rightly respond to God. We tend to associate 'fear' with being afraid so that we recoil from, instead of being drawn towards, the object of our fear.

But that's NOT how the Bible portrays the fear of the LORD. To fear God is to treat him in the way that he deserves. To fear God is to be rightly related to him. The word that the Bible uses to best describe the way we ought to treat God and respond to him is WORSHIP. So, to understand what it means to fear God, we should think of it as being most like what it is to worship God. Worship is a more comprehensive word that captures the vast array of biblical words that are used to describe how we are to treat God, such as love, obey, trust, honour, glorify, magnify, exalt, praise, revere, adore, enjoy, etc.

What is helpful about a term like FEAR is that it tries to capture how we are to respond to God's holiness, that is, the way God is different from us, that makes him, God and worthy of our complete devotion. To fear God is to recognise he is not like me. It's not just that God is a perfect version of human beings. He is altogether different in his being. So, God is not just perfectly loving. He IS love. God is not simply completely just. He IS just. God isn't measured against the standards of love and justice. He IS love and justice, and so defines what they are, and is the One against whom we measure love and justice.

I mentioned the Shema earlier because it also expresses how we are to treat God. We are to love God with all our being. By placing these three statements about how Israel is to fear God within the same passage as the Shema, God is reminding us there are many ways to express what it means to worship God, so that fear and love of God go hand-in-hand.

God Bless
Mark Adams