

The Greatest Command (Love God)

Introduction:

- I. My lesson for this afternoon is the Greatest Command. Let me tell you, ladies and gentlemen, it is hard to narrow anything down to being the greatest. Who is the greatest athlete of all time? We really don't know, do we? Who is the greatest chef that has ever lived? Well, that's debatable. What is the greatest movie that has ever been made? One person will say this one and another person will say that one. You see, it's hard to say that something is the greatest of all time, or even at a given time. There is one thing, however, that we can say with confidence is the greatest in its category because the Bible tells us what it is. That one thing is a command that comes from God. What is the greatest command that has ever been given? Jesus tells us what it is: love God. Love God. We will never have a higher duty than that. We will never have a greater command. So far as commands go, this is the cream of the crop, the *crème de la crème* of all commands. Love God. This command is set forth in Matt. 22:37. Before we read that passage, let's set the stage.

- II. We are in the final week of our Lord's ministry. On Sunday He triumphantly entered Jerusalem mounted on a donkey as the crowd shouted "Hosanna in the Highest" and calling Jesus the Son of David, a clear reference to His messiahship. The next day, that is, on Monday, Jesus enters the temple and sees the money changers defiling the temple and so He drives them out and overthrows the table quoting scripture, saying, "My house shall be a house of prayer, but you make it a den of robbers."

Then, after retiring to Bethany for the night, Jesus comes back to Jerusalem the next day and enters the temple again. There the chief priests and elders challenged His authority which leads Jesus to giving three parables in which He indicates that these Jewish leaders will be excluded from the kingdom of God.

Now, let's pause and take note that all these events (the triumphant entrance of Christ, the cleansing of the temple and the parables condemning the leaders), would greatly anger the Jewish leaders who already hated Jesus and wanted to eliminate Him as soon as possible. The problem was, Jesus at this point was very popular with the common people as His triumphant entrance into Jerusalem demonstrated, and the leaders didn't want to alienate the masses. Furthermore, being under Roman rule, they didn't have the authority to put Jesus to death. So, while they definitely wanted Jesus dead, there wasn't much they could do about it, at least not directly. They did feel, however, that they could get what they wanted indirectly by asking Jesus a series of questions wherein Jesus might discredit Himself among the people or, best case scenario, cause Him to say something that would offend the Romans and be worthy of death.

(1) *First, they try to incriminate Jesus politically (Matt. 22:15-22).* The Pharisees assumed that this question would put Jesus in a no win situation. If He said no, He would be viewed as an insurrectionist and that might lead to the Romans putting Him to death. If Jesus, on the other hand, said yes, the common people with whom He was so popular would be angered. Jesus, however, confounded them by His answer, saying, "...render to Caesar the things that Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." He thus satisfied both sides with His answer. So, the Bible says they marveled and went away.

(2) *Second, they try to incriminate Jesus theologically (Matt. 22:23-33).* He is approached this time by the Sadducees. The Sadducees didn't believe in the resurrection so they come up with a bizarre example of a married man who dies and is survived by six brothers. Based on the law of Deut. 25:5, that a man must marry his brother's widow, they set forth a scenario where each brother dies, leaving the woman a widow seven times over. So, they ask whose wife the widow would be in the resurrection. Like the Pharisees before them, the Sadducees are thinking that however Jesus answers such a bizarre question, He will surely discredit Himself. Jesus, however, instead of participating in their charade, He exposes their shallow understanding of the scriptures by reminding them that in the resurrection there will be no marriage, and then proving, by necessary inference, that there will be a resurrection. Instead of Jesus being discredited by the people, the crowd was astonished at His teaching.

(3) *Third, they try to incriminate Jesus scripturally (Matt. 22:34-40).* Since the Jews divided the law into 613 individual commands, surely this was a question that Jesus could not answer. The Pharisees, however, were hoping to get something more from Jesus than just a wrong answer; they were hoping that Jesus would say something that would contradict Moses and therefore they could set Him forth as a heretic to the people. However, instead of contradicting Moses, Jesus skillfully quoted Moses and once again foiled the plans of these hypocritical leaders. At this point in Mark's gospel the Bible says, "And after that no one dared to ask him any more questions"

IV. Now, it was the answer of Jesus in this third attempt to incriminate Him, that brings us to our lesson today. What is the greatest commandment?

Matt 22:37

37 And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.

In other words, we are to love God with every part and portion, with every fragment and fiber of our being. This, ladies and gentlemen, is the greatest of all commands. So, in this lesson we want to first examine what it means to love God completely, and then we want to see how we prove our love for God in real life.

Lesson:

I. What It Means to Love God Completely?

Jesus separates our being into three areas.

A. First, we must love God with all our heart: Affectionately.

God doesn't want us to obey Him robotically. God doesn't want us just going through the motions when we worship Him or serve Him in any capacity. If there is one thing that the Bible is clear about it is that those who worship God must worship Him in spirit and in truth (Jn. 4:24). To worship God in spirit is to worship God with the right attitude. First it has to do with giving God honor and respect and praise. If we lived in England during the early formation of the English language, we would not have used the word *worship*, we would have used the word *worth-ship*. And that is a good way of describing what we do when we worship God. We are declaring that He worthy of our honor and praise. But let me tell you something, ladies and gentlemen. When it gets right down to it, whenever we worship, serve or obey God in any way, we ought to feel it in our heart. We ought to feel it inside. Everything we do for God should be a demonstration of the affection that we have for Him.

Listen: when God said that He wants to be loved with our heart, soul and mind, He put that in exactly the order that He wanted it. Before we do anything outwardly for God, He wants to know that we love Him inwardly. He wants us to be emotionally invested in Him and in the things that we do for Him. Husbands, let's say you surprise your wife with flowers. How will she respond? She'll say, "Oh, thank you so much baby, they're beautiful." Now, what if you said, "Ah, don't worry about it honey. I felt obligated to get them for you." And besides, they are a couple of days old so I got them cheap." She would probably throw those flowers back in your face wouldn't she? Why? Because it is not the flowers that pleased her, it was the message. It was the message that says, "my husband loves me. My husband thinks about me and shows affection towards me." In other words, it not the flowers that are important, it's want the giving of the flowers represent. I saw a show on TV where a woman was given flowers. Now, she had made it known several times that she really doesn't like flowers that much. But after the man, who she was sort of attractive to, gave her flowers she said to him as she was leaving his office, "Thank you very much for the flowers." He said, "I was told that you didn't like flowers." She said, "I don't, but I like that you gave them to me." It's the message. It's the message. And when it comes to serving God, it's all about the message. God wants to know that we love Him. God doesn't need our service. Nothing we do enhances God's existence. God is self-existent and self-sustained. God doesn't need us, we need God.

So, all our service really does is tell God that we love Him and if we serve Him robotically, it means absolutely nothing to God. We love God with all our hearts.

B. Second, we must love God with all of our soul: Actively.

One of the more difficult subjects in the Bible is the nature of man. Various passages represents man as having three parts—body, soul and spirit. The best description that I have heard in an attempt to distinguish between these parts was given by T.P. Brown in an article in the Gospel Advocate years ago. He compared the nature of man to electrical light. You have the light bulb, the electrical current, and the resulting light. In the analogy, the light bulb is the body, the electrical current is the spirit and the resulting light is the soul. Now scripturally speaking, we know from James that the body without the spirit is dead just like a light bulb without the electrical current is dead. When the current enters the bulb you have light. Now, when the spirit enters the body, you have life. That life is the soul of man. Consider the creation of man in the very beginning:

Gen 2:7

And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.

So, the point of it is this: the word soul, while it can be used in several ways, often refers simply to life, that is the natural life of the body. So then, we must love God with all our soul, that is, with all of our life, or we might say, with all our living.

Listen to me: you can't love God fully just sitting in a chair. Do you understand what I'm talking about? You can't serve God while you remain in a constant state of idleness. Our love for God is proven by our willingness to get up and get busy. All of our good feelings towards God, all of the warmth and affection we feel is just superficial if it isn't backed up by action. The one who loves God with all his soul is the one who is active in the Lord's church. There are too many brethren who say that they love God but they are sitting on the sidelines. Brethren, we have too many talkers and not enough toilers. We have too many who spend most their time discussing but never doing. The point of it is this: to love God with all our soul is to love God actively and this includes every part of our life. It is demonstrated by how we live, what we wear, and by the words we use, etc. So, we love God with all our souls by living for the Lord actively.

C. Third, we must love God with all of our mind: Intelligently.

I am reminded of the words of Paul in Rom. 12:1.

Rom 12:1

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.

Now, some think Paul is simply saying that it is a reasonable thing to serve God because of all that He has done for us. Surely that is true, but it is not what Paul is saying here. The Greek word for *reasonable* is *logikos* (lo-gee-kós) and basically means "*following reason*". Listen to Vine's on this:

NT:3050

Pertaining to "the reasoning faculty, reasonable, rational," is used in Rom 12:1, of the service to be rendered by believers...The sacrifice is to be intelligent, in contrast to those offered by ritual and compulsion (Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words).

So, whatever we do for God must be done thoughtfully. There is a close connection between loving God with your heart and loving God with your mind. In fact, the word heart in the Bible is often referring to the mind, that is, the intellectual part of our being. The truth is, it is because of what we know intellectually that we can and should be affectionate towards God. We know that God was willing to sacrifice His Son so that we might live. We know that, don't we? Now, what does that knowledge do? It causes us to love God.

1 John 4:10 - In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

4:19 - We love because he first loved us.

So, proper love is always a knowledgeable love. We love God because we know what He has done for us. And this reaches out further than just the sacrifice that was made for us on the cross. How many times has God helped us when we were in need? How many times has God picked us up when we were low? How many times has God pulled us out of the fires of tribulation or rescued us from the drowning waters of despair? How many times has God saved us by His providential care? God has helped us more times than we can count. God has given to us more than we deserve. God has loved us even when we were unlovable. He has been kind to us even when we have been cruel to Him. Yes, we love God and that love is based upon what we know. We love God with all our mind because He first loved us.

So, there we have it. What does it mean to love God? Is it just a part of us that loves God? No, we love God with every part and portion, of our being. Now then, how do we prove it?

II. How We Prove Our Love for God?

A. By Keeping God's Commandments.

John 14:15

If you love me, you will keep my commandments.

A statement couldn't be any more definitive than that. If there is proper love, there will be a conformity to the commandments of God. Period! It is not, there might be or could be or should be; it is there will be. "You will" Jesus said, not "you might." "You will!" "You will keep my commandments." This conclusive statement by our Lord completely obliterates the faith only doctrine. It is no wonder that James tells us that faith without works is dead. It's no wonder that James said that we are saved by works and not by faith only. He wasn't talking about meritorious works. He wasn't suggesting in any way that we can earn our way to heaven. No, he was writing about works of faith. He was writing about works of obedience. Why? Because he understood that obedience was needful and necessary because it is a demonstration of our love for God and His Son. You see, James knew what Jesus said. "If you love me, you will keep my commandments" and Jesus said that more than once. A few verses later Jesus repeats this truth, only He reverses the order.

John 14:21

Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me..."

The Greek word for *keep* in both of these passages means, "*to guard from loss or injury; to watch over or to protect*" (Strong, Thayer, Vines). Now, what kind of things do we watch over and protect? They are things that are valuable to us, aren't they? Now, why are the commandments of God of great value to us? It's because they come from God and we know that if they come from God they are not grievous, but rather they are in our best interest. How do we know that? We know it because we know God. Now listen to John one more time.

1 John 2:3-6

3 And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. 4 Whoever says "I know him" but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him,

Isn't that interesting? The same thing that the Bible says about loving God it says about knowing God. Why? Because to know God is to love God.

So if you don't love God it is because you don't know God. But, and here is the point of it all, if you know God, you realize that God loves you and so everything He does, including giving us instructions and commandments by which to live, is done out of that love for us. Those commandments, then, must be in our best interest. Now, since we know this, we are going to keep those commands and in doing so we will be demonstrating that we really know and love God. This is why Jesus is so definitive in His language. "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." Listen to me: it doesn't matter what the commandment is, if you love God you will obey it. It doesn't matter how difficult it is or how much you don't like it, you will obey it. It doesn't matter if you have to sacrifice a little bit, you will obey it and you will do it gladly because you know and love God. When Noah was commanded to build an ark, the Bible says he moved. When Abraham was commanded to go to a place, not knowing where he was going, the Bible says he went. And as the writer of Hebrews says, "time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel," but one thing they all had in common was they loved God with all of their heart, soul and mind and so they obeyed. The first sign of loving God is obedience.

B. By Putting God First.

Matt 6:33

But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

Now, this principle is like many in the Bible, it begins in the heart and then is demonstrated by action. When we think of the kingdom, we automatically think of the church. There isn't anything terribly wrong with that since the church is one aspect of the kingdom of God and the words are sometimes used synonymously. However, the primary meaning of the Greek word *basileia*, translated *kingdom*, points, not to the realm of God, but to the rule, reign and royal power of God. So the point of it is this, to seek first the kingdom of God is to allow God to reign in your heart and to rule over your life. When you are seeking God first, you are allowing God to have the controls and that, ladies and gentlemen, will have an impact on every aspect of your life. Do you remember what we said about loving God with all your soul, that is, with all your life? I said that it will affect how you live, what you wear and even the words you use. Well, here it is in application. To love God with all your soul is to allow God to be the ruler of your life. Now, that rule, Jesus says, must come first. It must come before family, friends, and even foes. It must come before your career. It must come before your recreation. It must come before personal preferences. Listen to me: it must come before your religious beliefs and even before your church. That's right. Let me give you some examples:

Your family comes to visit you and they stay over the weekend. On Sunday you go to worship service in the morning. Now here's the question: are you going back Sunday night? Do you know what is going to determine the answer to that question? How much you love God. If you love God you are going to put Him first and either bring your family with you or leave them at home, but you're going to services because that's just what you do when you are seeking first the kingdom of God.

Let's say you have been a member of a local church forever it seems. You love the people, respect the leadership and you are edified by the good preaching and teaching that you are getting. But then, this church, your church, begins to practice something that is unauthorized. You challenge the practice and give book, chapter and verse to show that the practice is wrong, but the church is determined to continue in this new direction. What do you do? Do you know what is going to determine the answer to that question? How much you love God. If you love God and you are seeking His rule in your life above everything else, you are going to find a new local church because pleasing God is more important to you than anything else and you can't please God while engaging in unlawful activity.

Your marriage is falling apart. You are getting pressure from family and friends to just put an end to it and get a divorce. On the inside you are telling yourself, enough is enough. This marriage is making me miserable and I deserve some happiness. What are you going to do? Do you know what is going to determine the answer to that question? How much you love the Lord. If you are willing to seek the rule of God first in your life; if you really, truly love God, you are going to dismiss the thought of divorce and work on your marriage because that is the will of God for you and every troubled marriage.

Are we getting the point here? It is all about who we are going to allow to rule and reign over our life. Will it be society? Will it be popularity? Will it be want we want? or will it be God? Seeking first the kingdom of God begins with the attitude that says "I'm going to allow God to have control over my life," and then that attitude is played out by the decisions we make in our everyday living. The end result is a life that cries out, "I love God with all my heart, with all my soul and with all my mind and so He comes first before everything and everyone else.

C. By Giving God Honor.

To give God honor is to give Him the respect and reverence that He deserves. To give God honor is to magnify Him in our bodies and to glorify Him by our lives and let me tell you, ladies and gentlemen, no one deserves more honor and glory than our God. Sometimes in the midst of

everyday living, we can get caught up in grind of life and forget to give God the honor and glory He deserves. Let us not make a habit of that, for God is an amazing God isn't He? I heard someone say about God, He is really something else. Sometimes that about all we can say, isn't it? We don't have the words to express how great God is. All we can do is shake our head and say, "He is really something else." When we see the brilliance of a setting sun or the beauty of a moon lit night, and we realize that God created it, all we can say is "our God is really something else." When we think of the depths of God's love and how He was willing to sacrifice His one and only Son just to save us, all we can say is that God is really something else. How in the world could we not love a God like that with all our heart, soul and mind? How could we not demonstrate that love by giving such a wonderful God glory and honor? Even the highest heavenly being gave God the honor that he deserves (Rev. 4:8-11). What a picture of heavenly beings giving God glory and honor and if we love God we will give him the same. How do we give God glory and honor?

- **By trusting God explicitly (Rom. 4:20).**
- **By praising him with thanksgiving (Psa. 50:14-15, 23).**
- **By giving God our best (Mal. 1:6-8).**

Conclusion:

What is the greatest of all commands? To love God with all our hearts, that is affectionately; with all our soul, that is actively, and with all our mind, that is, intellectually. Do you love God with every fiber of your being? This is not a question you can answer both ways. Your answer can't be yes and no. It is either yes or its no. Let's make sure that the answer is yes.

