



Love the Lord Your God

Series: Sermon Series

Mark 12:28-30

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Introduction I want you to open your bibles to Mark 12 this morning as we continue to look at the Greatest Commandment in Scripture. Jesus is in the midst of one of His many debates with the false authorities of Israel. In this context leading up to these words, He is dealing with the Herodians – political followers of Herod the unrighteous king, the Pharisees – the spiritual legalists and conservatives in Israel, and the Sadducees – the spiritual liberals and political/operators of Israel. They are trying to discredit and trip Jesus up so that they can have an accusation against them to justify their hatred of him. Jesus handles these guys perfectly and then a scribe – a recognized expert in the Jewish Law comes and asks Jesus the big question. Let's look at it. Mark 12:28ff...

Like we saw last week, when Jesus is asked this great question regarding what is the greatest commandment of them all, He doesn't hem and haw around, or stall, kind of looking for answer. Instead, he answers clearly and decisively with the commandment given to Israel, God's covenant people, in Deuteronomy 6, as they were preparing to enter the Promised Land. Last week, we looked at the overall context of that commandment and what we saw was this overarching truth -- "The ideal life for each member of the people of God AND for the body as a whole is to live a life that is governed and defined as one of fervent love for God as a proper response to God's love for them."

God has loved us with an amazing, sacrificing, gracious, undeserved, unearned love and all of our love to Him is a response to God's love. Again, the words of 1 John ring in our ears -- (1Jn 4:9-10, 19)

We do not love God to earn his love. We do not love God to earn his blessing or reward. We love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength because God first loved us. This is what saved people do. Like we saw last week, this commandment is the defining principle of the people of God. It is, after all, the Greatest Commandment, the one that we should desire to obey above all else. Before we take apart and really examine what it means to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, I want to address from the very outset a few misconceptions about loving God that are actually quite common.

1) Correcting Misconceptions I can't possibly address every single incorrect understanding about loving God, and I am sure that some more will surface as we go through this text, but let me give you just a few that are particularly prominent in the church these days. First let me say that, contrary to some thoughts...

Loving God is not a personality type. Some people treat love for God like it is. Impulsive, introverted, extroverted, ambitious, relaxed, phlegmatic, sanguine, God-lover...etc. I just don't have the "God-loving" personality. Loving God is not an issue of a certain kind of personality. In fact, here's the truth. Fallen man makes a lot of personality types but the Bible never does. Instead, it speaks in terms of obedience and disobedience, of the effects of the fall and the transforming power of grace, about righteous and unrighteous responses to sin. The Scripture speaks much of the sin nature but not much about personality types at all. Every redeemed human being has been redeemed to be a wholehearted lover of God in Christ. Compromise, passivity, and neglect of the love of God are not issues of certain personalities but of sin that needs to be overcome in our lives. Our whole person must be trained for Godliness, as Paul says: (1 Timothy 4:7b-8, ESV) Part of that training is training yourself, training your heart and soul and mind and strength, according to the Scriptures and by the power of the Holy Spirit, to love God. That leads to the next one...

Loving God is not automatic; it must be cultivated. Some people have the misguided idea that love for God is just automatic and it needs no tending and no cultivation at all. To realize the foolishness of this, all you have to do is consider the nature of true, passionate, biblical love between a husband and a wife – there is a reason that the relationship between Christ and His people is described in terms of Bridegroom and Bride. Love is not automatic in a marriage. True, at first there is that flash of love, that deep emotion, that feeling of being in love, but if it

is not cultivated, it soon cools. The seeds of deep and abiding love are present when a man marries a woman, or they should be, but those seeds need to be nurtured. And nurturing takes work. When God drew us to salvation in Christ, when we knew the greatness of His love for us to lay down His life to redeem us from our sin, when we experienced His grace and forgiveness, there is such a joy, such a wonder that consumes us. We desire to really know and love Him. But here's the thing. You must continue to do the things that stoke an ever-growing love for God in Christ. Pursuing a deepening love for God is your responsibility as a redeemed soul. Now some people will use God's sovereignty as an excuse for spiritual failure in their lives, as an excuse for sin in their lives, and they do so here especially. They say things like, "God has to change my heart if I am really going to love Him and honor Him. It's up to God to change my heart..." Can I tell you something? If you truly are a Christian, your heart has been changed already. That is the essence of the new birth. Listen to the way that God explains it in Ezekiel: (Ezekiel 36:26–27, ESV)

We need to call the sin of not seeking to love God with all of your heart, soul, mind, and strength -- and every other sin for that matter -- what it is -- rebellion. And what rebellion demands is confession and repentance and fruit in keeping with repentance -- the fruits of righteousness.

Loving God is not a vague, undefined, warm fuzzy feeling. Real love for God is not indefinable. Loving God is not a matter of having some sort of feeling divorced from practice, a feeling divorced from obedience. It is not just a warm fuzzy feeling minus the will devoted to His purposes or the mind devoted to knowing him. I could just as well say that loving God is not simply a matter of being a servant, divorced from feelings of love for God. I could also say that loving God is not a matter of knowing theological fact apart from personal emotion nor is it mindless and groundless emotionalism. That is why loving God is described in terms of heart, soul, mind and strength -- it is a total-person, all-consuming love that Jesus is talking about.

Loving God is not an option, it is a command. None of the commandments of God are optional, but especially this one -- the Greatest Commandment and it is the one, together with the command to love your neighbor as yourself, which are the grounds for the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets. "On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets." (Matthew 22:40, ESV) Loving God is a command. So serious is this command that Apostle Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, can write in 1 Corinthians 16:22 "If anyone has no love for the Lord, let him be accursed. Our Lord, come!" (1 Corinthians 16:22, ESV)

Last, Simply because we cannot ever love God in the way that He deserves is not a legitimate excuse not to try. Imagine if you tried that reasoning in your marriage, how far do you think that would fly? “Well, dear, there is no way that I can love you in the way that you deserve, so I’m just not going to try...” Certainly we cannot love God perfectly, if we could we would not need a Savior. No one has ever loved God perfectly except Christ the Son but that does not relieve us of the pursuit of loving God as His redeemed people, called out of darkness and out of sin and out of this world to love Him with all that is in us. I like what John MacArthur has to say at this point: “To say that Jesus died for man’s sins is to say that he died for man’s hatred of God, which is the essence of all sin. Christ died for man’s lack of love for God. And just as He offers forgiveness for past lack of love for God, Christ also provides for future love for God. The great Forgiver is also the great Enabler...” He is right. The same love and grace by which the penalty of our sins is fully paid is the very same grace and love by which the power of righteousness by the Spirit, and grace-empowered love for God can become a sincere, though imperfect while we are in these bodies of flesh, reality in our lives. So with these things in mind, let’s take a look at the Greatest Commandment, phrase by phrase.

2) The Greatest Commandment...Phrase by Phrase (v. 30) Look at verse 30 with me: “And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.” (Mark 12:30, ESV) That is the commandment, so let’s break it down now and look at it phrase by phrase.

You shall love the Lord your God... Now what do we need to see here? First, I want you to notice the very personal nature of this commandment. You –that’s singular in the Greek – shall love the Lord your God. This is a personal commandment. In other words, it does no good for us to point at someone else who is inconsistent, comparing ourselves to someone else who is not loving God as they should. However anyone else responds to this commandment has nothing to do with you and your love for God. To say to God, “I would love you but there are just so many hypocrites who don’t” is foolishness, isn’t it? Rather the opposite should be true. If there are so many hypocrites, be determined not to be one. If there are so many pretenders, make sure that your love for God is faithful and real.

Second, I want for us to be reminded, from this first phrase, that it is love that God desires from us as His people. Why does God command love from us? He does it because He is a personal

God. God is a person – not an impersonal force, not a collection of theological facts, not a worldview, not a system of thought, not an idea or a concept. God is a person – a person who wants to be loved by His people. God is person and He wants a person- to-person relationship with His people whom He has redeemed at the cost of the bloody death and glorious resurrection of His Son Jesus Christ. You were created and re-created for just this purpose.

The word translated here as “love” is *agapaō* which speaks of that Holy Spirit generated love in the heart of the obedient saint, the divine love that finds its source in the work of grace that God does in the human heart when He brings a sinner to saving faith in Christ, a divine love that encompasses your life. This is supreme devotion that God is speaking of here. There are plenty of words that are used in the OT to describe this sort of love – delighting in Him, taking refuge in Him, rejoicing in Him, blessing Him, taking courage in Him, to seek Him, to be glad in Him, to trust in Him, to be fully devoted to Him. These are all words that are used as synonyms or to explain what love for God entails.

Simply stated, to love God means to delight in Him and to be awestruck by His glorious power and grace, and to value Him above everyone and everything on earth, including and especially yourself. We are to love God supremely in such a way that nothing takes His place in our souls as God. With these things in mind, how does God command us to express our love to Him? How does God want me to love Him?

The way that Jesus says that we are to love God is with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength. The concepts and ideas brought forth by these words overlap some – these are not compartmentalized categories, but there are some specific ideas that are indicated in the various words that are used here. In fact, some commentators see this command as calling for love from the heart – and then what that looks like as being defined by soul, mind, and strength. That actually makes a lot of sense. So let’s look at it – Jesus says, love the Lord your God

with all your heart...The heart in Scriptural terms, is understood to be the core of who you are, the core of your person. It is what makes you ---you. The heart is a way of talking about the very center of who you really are, the entire inner being of man – not external appearance but internal reality. The heart, in biblical terms, is the core of who you are. What you think, how

you feel, your motivations, impulses and passions all flow out of your heart—from the very core of your being where everything has its root. It encompasses your mind, your understanding, your emotions, and your will – your soul, mind and strength. It is from the heart that everything else flows. Proverbs 4:23 speaks of the importance of our hearts saying: (Proverbs 4:23, ESV)

So what does it mean that we are to love the Lord with all our heart? The idea is that we are to love God with all that we are and to do so with a pure devotion. Loving God means loving Him without pretense, to be genuine in our love for God and not just say that we love Him and then love as if He did not exist. Loving God with all of our heart is to love Him with integrity and sincerity and not just with words. That was one of the chief problems of the Pharisees. Mark records Jesus saying to them: “Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, “ ‘This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me;” (Mark 7:6, ESV) The righteous answer for that problem was not the withdrawing of the lips but the drawing close with the heart – with the whole of your person.

Let me give you an illustration – Gabe is obsessed with football – dresses, plays at school, draws pictures, watches it on TV... He is not yet redeemed, not yet saved and so His obsessions are not rightly placed, but that is the idea of loving something with all your heart, with the fullness of your being – then Jesus sort of breaks it down – love the Lord with all your heart and that means with all your soul.

... with all your soul...When we speak of the soul, we are speaking of our emotions, our will, attitudes, appetites and desires. When God redeems us, he redeems all of us and that includes our emotions and our will. Let’s consider our emotions first. God commands that we love Him with our emotions. That means that we cannot love God with some detached passivity. Love for God should touch us at our deepest levels. Some people say – “I’m just not emotional” and think they can get a pass. Some people get emotional about all of the wrong things. God redeems our emotions so that we delight and get excited and get passionate about the right things and the chief “right thing” is Him . You cannot say that I love God and yet fail to express it. God commanded in the OT the expressive love of His people. Just read the psalms – you cannot avoid this. (Psalm 34:1, ESV) (Psalm 22:23, ESV) (Psalm 95:6, ESV) (Psalm 9:2, ESV) (Psalm 95:2, ESV) (Psalm 63:4, ESV)

Those are just a few of many in the Psalms and again, these commands are not optional. And you cannot do them in a reserved manner. Restraint and reserve when it comes to expressing love to God is not a virtue. Now neither is there virtue in emotion for emotion's sake, but there is much value in a hot-hearted, passionate, consuming love for Christ. You see beloved, you can't just say, "Well, that's not me. That is not how I am. I am not an emotional person." That's just not true, unless you are a Vulcan. Your emotions may be stunted or wasted on other things. But, as a believer, if you are not passionate about and toward God in Christ – the person, not theology, not creation, not personal convictions, not all the other things that we can get passionate about apart from the person of God -- that is an either an issue of rebellion in your own heart -- the fear of man or of pride, or it is an issue of discomfort with expressed love that needs to be overcome and needs to be fully submitted to the regenerative power of the Holy Spirit or it is an issue of a soul that is undernourished on the grace and the greatness of God.

You may say – I cannot control my emotions. I cannot control how I feel. Perhaps, but your emotions have been redeemed to be used primarily for what is good and holy and pure. You may not be able to control what you feel, but you can control what you feed your soul that leads to affection. What we set our focus on eventually becomes our treasure and where our treasure is our emotions will follow. If we desire to love God completely we must treasure God supremely and that means that we must see and recognize the glory and worth of who He is and then set our focus and attention upon Him as our treasure – loving Him will be the inevitable consequence.

But loving God is also a matter of the will. What that means is this. There is not such thing as loving God apart from loving him with your will and loving Him with your will means submitting your will to His word and obeying Him. Love requires the whole-hearted pursuit of obedience in our lives. There is no such thing as love for God that does not result in obedience to God. Anyone who talks of loving God, makes profuse displays of affection for God, and confessions of affection for God separate from real obedience is nothing short of hypocrisy. Real love to God in Christ is expressed by obedience – (John 14:15, 21a ESV) The fruit of true love for Christ, the evidence of faithful love for Christ is a life characterized by obedience to His revealed will, obedience to the commandments of Christ.

Love is matter, also, of our attitudes, appetites and desires. It is expressed by bringing our desires and our attitudes into conformity to God's revealed will – a Sermon on the Mount

lifestyle of humility, purity, righteousness, integrity, holiness, rightly value of things, prayer etc. This is what it is to look like. This is love expressed to God. Jesus doesn't stop there. Love God with all your soul and

...with all your mind...Loving God with all your mind refers to your intellect, ideas, perspectives and to a fully developed faith. You must think upon Him, study Him, think His thoughts after Him – the Word of God. You have to engage your mind. There is only one source for truth and that source is the Word of God. The point that Jesus is making is that real love for God is not mindless and empty-headed, but we are to love God because we know Him and have meditated upon who He is and what He has done. If we do not know who God is, if we know nothing of God, then it is impossible to love God for who He truly is.

Real love for God requires that we fill our minds with His truth, truth that leads to faith and faith that leads to love. If you think that your mind is not a necessary component of faith, you are incorrect. Real love for God demands that we believe that God is and that he rewards those who seek Him.

Loving God demands loyalty to God's truth. Jesus speaks of the days that are coming, that are already here -- (Matthew 24:11–13, ESV) Loving God means holding fast with your mind to His truth and seeking to have your thoughts, attitudes, opinions, convictions, shaped by it. Ask yourself this question... do you believe that the words of God are true or mostly true? Before you answer with the Sunday school answer, check yourself. How much of what you think or believe is governed by human wisdom or what seems right to you? By modern psychology? By majority opinion? By pragmatism – because it works? Really examine why you believe what you believe and you may be surprised.

Real love to God demands that we bring our minds under the Lordship of Christ and keep them for Him(2 Corinthians 10:3–5, ESV) God wants every thought in our minds to be taken captive for Christ.

Left unattended our minds will be used for worthless things -- fears, lusts, all sorts of unworthy things. Love for God is shown when you glorify Him in the way in which you think; the clarity

with which you think; and the purity in which you think. To love God with all our mind means to submit our minds, thought patterns, opinions, and decisions to God's Word. It means to lean not on our own understanding but to bring every thought into obedience and captivity of the Savior.

Jonathan Edwards said that the "intellectual life and the passionate life are friends and not enemies". You need is a constant supply of fuel to stoke the fire for God in your mind and that fuel is His word. Last, you must love God

...with all your strength. It is not enough to love God with heart, soul, and mind, this love must find its expression with all of our faculties and powers, with our bodies surrendered to God. As Paul wrote in Romans 12:1 -- (Romans 12:1, ESV) All of our strength refers to all our talents and gifts and physical powers. All of these are to be surrendered and devoted to Him for His glory. All that we are, every aspect of our lives is to be in light of the majesty of God and His matchless grace.

Love so amazing, so divine demands your soul, your life, your all. You cannot love God moderately. The only fitting response to the covenant Lord is to love him with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all our strength.

Beloved, I truly believe that you desire to love God like this, so let me close with some suggestions about how we can express our love to God.

3) Expressing Our Love To God

Worship God with your whole person. Determine to love and esteem and worship God with all of your faculties and not simply the ones that are most comfortable or easiest for you. Emotions, mind, service, will...

Pursue communion with God in His word and In prayer. To love God you must commune with and know God. We love God by allowing no rivals, no other gods. We let no one and no thing threaten His central place in our lives. It is our first priority to know God, to deepen our relationship with Him.

Follow after Christ. There is no real love apart from discipleship. In Mark 8 we read these words: (Mark 8:34–35, ESV) You know how it is – imitation is natural with those whom you love, for good or bad.

Get your mind right. (Romans 12:2, ESV)

Delight in God Himself and not only the gifts of God. Determine to delight in God and not merely the things you have from His hand.

Seek to obey God in every instance. Bring your life, your home, your thought life, your relationships, into conformity to God's Word. Determine to seek obedience to God in every area of your life.

Give yourself to faithful service for the sake of His glory.

Bear His name much upon your lips. You talk about what you love. See to it that God and the things of God dominate your conversation with believers and with unbelievers.

Love what He loves, hate what He hates and learn to discern the difference.

Love for God, loving God with heart, soul, mind and strength is a multifaceted thing. It seems overwhelming and yet you have been redeemed and made new by the Spirit of God and blood of Christ so that you would love God in just this way...

We need to give real consideration to what loving God really needs to mean for us. Meditate on the words that you have heard this morning. Take ownership and responsibility of your heart before God and really consider how you need to grow in love for Christ.

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