



WHAT IS Love?

THE FIRST AND GREATEST COMMANDMENT
MT. 22:34-40

What Is Love For God?

- _____ Him fully. (Deut. 13:1-3)
 - Trusting rightly includes *believing* rightly.
- _____ Him joyfully. (Jn. 14:15, 21, 23; 1 Jn. 5:3)
- _____ Him above everything. (Mt. 10:37)
 - “The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.” (Mt. 13:44)

The Shape of Love For God...

- God calls me to love Him with all of my...
 - Heart: The _____ of my emotions, values, and hopes.
 - Soul: The core of my personal _____.
 - Mind: The center of my _____ and beliefs.
 - Studying/thinking deeply about the Lord and His word is not just for book-smart people.
 - Strength: The _____ I give toward these ends.

The Fuel For Loving God...

- Loving God requires _____ that His love for me doesn't depend on the quality of my love for Him. (Rom. 5:8)
- Progressing in our love for God requires _____ His glory, so that I'm transformed into His likeness. (2 Cor. 3:18)
 - “And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.” (2 Cor. 3:18)



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Opener: What does it mean to love God? If a child asked you, what would you say? Different kinds of love—food, golf, dogs, friends, wife, God. These loves are *different*. “I love you like a fat kid love cake”—that’s a saying “I love you a lot” but the difference is not just a matter of degree, but a matter of kind. We don’t just love God 100x more than pizza, we love him differently. In fact, the kind of love we are called to have for God, is fundamentally different from the love we’re called to have for anything or anyone else!! And let me tell you why it’s really important that we get this right...we’ve just read that loving God is the greatest and first commandment.

So right off the bat Jesus sets the tone by helping us feel the weight of this conversation about love—when it comes to what you should be doing in life loving God is first and greatest; nothing before it, nothing more important. Your job, family, your hopes and dreams they’re a zero if you don’t get this right. Just to be frank if you stand before God, without genuine love for God, you’ll spend eternity apart from God. And it doesn’t seem like there’s anything more crucial than answering from a theological perspective—not sentimental— “Do you love God?” Invite you to be honest with yourself. Those who love God will be challenged. **Pray.**

So we’re told we need to love God with all of our heart, soul, and mind. Really this command is divided into to parts: (1) What am I supposed to do (2) How am I supposed to do it. Will spend a lot of time up top!

What Is Love For God?

- Trusting Him fully. (Deut. 13:1-3)

And I have it in a sub-note right there—and I probably should have made it a separate point, but trusting God requires believing everything God says about himself, about you, about the world. Part of loving God means believing that He is who He’s revealed himself to be in the Word not as you wish He was. I love God but my god would command the destruction of the Canaanites in Deut. 20, my god wouldn’t send anyone to hell, my god wouldn’t say that marriage is only between a man and woman, my god wouldn’t sacrifice his son. Then you’re not worshipping the God of the Bible. But it can’t *just* be belief. Even the demons believe (Jn. 2:19).

We need to trust God. **Tight rope walker.** Believing says I think you can, trusting means betting my safety on it. Leaning on you—allow you to support me in a way that I’ll suffer harm you don’t come through. Now a fundamental way we trust fully God is for salvation. Not our own works. But trusting God extends beyond trusting him for eternal life then, it involves trusting him for abundant life now. Great picture in Deut. 13. “If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or a wonder, 2 and the sign or wonder that he tells you comes to pass, and if he says, ‘Let us go after other gods,’ which you have not known, ‘and let us serve them,’ 3 you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams. For the Lord your God is testing you, to know whether you love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul.”

The gods of the nations were a backup plan. Your love for me will be seen in whether or not you trust me and everything I am for you when the world seems like it’s offering a more attractive alternative. **Adam and Eve!** Test: There should be some things you want to do, that you don’t do because you’re trusting God’s design for your life and trust that walking in his will is sweeter than snacking at the table of the world. **I do!!** So we’re not just talking about trusting God for eternal life back then, but trusting him abundant life now. I’m counting on all his promises being true, counting on his returning to take me to himself, I’ve pushed all my chips into the middle of the table—my entire life is resting on this person. So the first element of love for God is trusting Him fully. Appropriate to ask—Are you trusting Christ for salvation? Are the weight of your hopes riding on whether or not God is who he claims to be? Loving means trusting him fully...

- **Obeying** Him joyfully. (Jn. 14:15, 21, 23; 1 Jn. 5:3)

This is where things get interesting especially when it comes to our culture's understanding of loving God. There is this idea—and I'm honestly not sure where it came from—that you can sort of love God “in your heart” but not obey him in your life. Like you can kind of trust Jesus as a savior who rescues you but not submit to him a lord who rules you. And I can't tell you how many people I've talked to who swear up and down that they love Jesus, who even go to church, whose lives are characterized by blatant patterns of willful regular disobedience; Regular obsession with money and possessions, sexual interaction outside of marriage, explosive anger and selfishness, manipulating greed, all with no real commitment or desire to change...completely convinced that there's nothing to be concerned about because “God is love and not one's perfect. But this is dangerous and frankly damning understanding of grace.

In fact, as I studied the word this week I was struck by how astonishingly clear God makes this in the word. “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, 5 but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected” (1 Jn. 2:3-5) “For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome.” (1 Jn. 5:3) “15 “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.” (Jn. 14:15) “21 Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me.” (Jn. 14:21) “24 Whoever does not love me does not keep my words.” (Jn 14:24) And so friends please understand I'm not saying that if you're living in disobedience you don't love God. The Bible is. And this may be a hard word, but believe or not Justin Bieber said the same thing. In his interview posted two weeks ago, “I really took a deep dive in my faith. I believed in Jesus but I never really, like, when it says following Jesus is actually turning away from sin ... what it talks about it in the Bible is that there's no faith without obedience.” Now don't make the mistake that God loves us because of our obedience, that's not true. But God's love empowers our obedience, which means that if you are walking in unrepentant disobedience with no real desire, no real commitment to change, then you have no reason to believe that you belong to the Lord. Heed Paul's warning (2 Cor. 13:5) to examine yourself to see whether or not you are in the faith.

So I would ask yourself, is your life marked by walking in obedience and repentance when you don't or have you bought into a therapeutic version of Christianity where you can enjoy the benefits of god's grace and pass on the imperatives? Because that's a counterfeit. It's fake news. Obedience isn't reserved for varsity believers. Obedience marks the lives of all true believers. So we're trying to understand, what does it mean to do love God—so that we can do it with all of our heart soul mind and strength—and we've said that in involves trusting him—not just for eternal life but every step of the way, obeying him...and finally...

- **Treasuring** Him above everything. (Mt. 10:37)

- o “The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.” (Mt. 13:44)

“37 Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. 38 And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. 39 Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.” This can't be a love of obedience. It's a love that requires our affections—and in Christ's case our highest affections. Love for God means, in part, that he is the object of our highest joy and satisfaction. Thus, the essence of sin, is treasuring, delighting in, longing for something more than God. Some people are uncomfortable introducing feelings into the equation but when you read the word you can't get around it.

“Taste and see that the Lord is good.” (Ps. 34:8) “Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you.” (Ps. 63:3) “Delight yourselves in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart.” (Ps. 37:4) When we talk about loving God, we don't just believe in him like a theory, or follow his teaching like a student, we mean delighting in him as a person. More on that in a moment.

So this is our definition of love. Loving treasuring him in you heart, believing him fully, and walking in obedience. So now that we have an idea of what it means to love God, I want us to spend the rest of the time talking about what that looks like...

In Mt. 22, Jesus is being challenged by a lawyer from a group called the Pharisees. “34 But when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. 35 And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. 36 “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” 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. 38 This is the great and first commandment. 39 And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. 40 On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.” We’ll spend next week talking about love for neighbor, but I want to focus on the first and great commandment given in vs. 37.

And Jesus is quoting the first part of what is known as the Shema. Shema means “hear” in Hebrew and is found in Deut 6, ““Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.[b] 5 You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.” When Jesus quotes in Mt. 22 he says mind instead of strength, and when Mark and Luke quote it, they include mind and strength. So I want to take a quick look at these and help us sharpen our picture even further on what it looks like to love God. Most commentators warn of placing each of these elements in completely separate categories. In fact, the big picture this verse is communicating is that we should love God with everything we have. One commentator said the verse could be rendered, “Love God with total commitment, with your total self, to total excess. Loving God should be over the top.” So while heart, soul, mind, and strength are very related, they are not identical and I think it will be helpful to make a few comments...

The Shape of Love For God...

- God calls me to love Him with all of my...

- Heart: The center of my emotions, values, and hopes.

We’ve already talked about affections, but I’ll simply note how essential this is. I used to think faith is what matters, not affections—not desires and passions. Commitment. Belief! I’m not one of those feelers... And I had to come to terms with the fact that when I stared into the gospel and didn’t feel anything—it didn’t say something about God but about me. If it doesn’t do something before you ask for help.

Honestly, commentators were all over the place on what it means to love God with your soul...

- Soul: The core of my personal identity

My sense of worth, my identity, who I am—is loving you and loved by you. My value and worth and self-esteem isn’t wrapped up in how great I am but in how great He is. What makes me feel like I count in life isn’t my professional success or beauty but the fact that I’ve been rescued and adopted by the king of the universe and invited to participate in bringing the good news of Christ to the world.

- Mind: The center of my intellect and beliefs.

I think this is particularly important in our cultural moment, we are called by God to love him with our minds our intellect. It seems like some people feel that thinking deeply about God is only for intellectual people; for people who want to smoke pipes and think deep thoughts. I just believe. And I’ve seen people who are on fire for God that they hardly know. Zeal without knowledge is not good. Especially in apologetic situations.

- Studying/thinking deeply about the Lord and His word is not just for book-smart people.

- Strength: The effort I give toward these ends.

We can’t be casually interested in love God. Loving God is a lame hobby. Loving God should be my all consuming passion whereby I try as hard as I can to live a life that brings glory to God’s name.

So we’re loving God with everything we are our affections our intellect, we’re finding our worth and reason for living in Christ and we’re going at it as hard as we can. And if you’re like me you’re hearing all this and you’re overwhelmed. You thought you’d be energized by talking about loving God feel so burdened by how inadequate

your love for God is but exhausted thinking about everything you're going to have to do to fix it. And it's at this point where our understanding of God's love for us will either make us or break us...this is where so many pastors stop a message on loving God.

Someone will get up here and talk about how much you should love God and how much you don't love God—and then say but thankfully Jesus forgives us when we mess up. Now get out there and try harder this week. And everyone leaves wounded with this low-level guilt that they hope will motivate them to summon up more love for God in their heart this week. Lady who visited churches with truth but not grace—why did it feel burdensome? I'll tell you why...

In a phrase, the law does not empower what it demands. That is telling you what to do, doesn't give you the power to do it. Just like telling someone who is addicted to cigarettes to stop smoking doesn't empower them to quit. It just makes them feel worse for doing it. And it's the same way when it comes to God. I can tell you all kinds of beautiful truths and commands about serving, and worshipping and loving God and not a single command will give you the power to obey the command. If commands could empower obedience Israel would have been able to love God with all their heart but they didn't—not even close—why? Because they were missing something.

And we get a clear answer as to what that was in Deut. 29. After 29 chapters of telling Israel to love and obey the Lord before they go in to the land vs 4 **“But to this day the Lord has not given you a heart to understand or eyes to see or ears to hear.”** And because of that, he tells them in the beginning of chapter 30 that they're going to be destroyed and deported by the nations...but that one day God will restore them and **“vs6. And the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.”** Ezk 36 says that he'll take our hearts of stone and replace them with hearts of flesh and cause us to walk in his statutes and be careful to keep his commands

Which means that God's love for precedes my love for him. I can't love him with my heart, until he gives me a new one! You see we often talk about our love for God like it's our gift to him. But at the end of the day, my love for God is God's gift to me. I wasn't seeking him, I wasn't running after him. I was dead in my sins and God breathed life into my rebel heart...God's love for me isn't a response to my love for Him. God's love for me produces love for him...and this frees to you embrace the truth that God's love for doesn't depend on the quality of your love for him.

The Fuel For Loving God...

- Loving God requires believing that His love for me doesn't depend on the quality of my love for Him. (Rom. 5:8).

If you don't get this you'll live in constant defeat. “God I know that I don't love you enough but I'll try harder and maybe I'll love you adequately tomorrow” No you won't. Not even close. There's never a moment where I've loved God perfectly. The hope that you have is not that you'll finally figure it out tomorrow, but that that when your love for God fails—and it will—God's love for you won't. Why because his love for you doesn't depend on your love for him. **“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.”** 1 Jn 4:10 - So understand, when it comes to God's love, This isn't “I will if you will. It's you couldn't so I did. You can't so I will. You were dead in sin. A rebel. Your love for me isn't what attracted me in the first place and it's not what's going to keep me around. I set my affection on you. When—before the foundation of the world. Am I'm committed on pain of nail scarred hands, to love you and bring you to myself. So when you wake up tomorrow, and your love for me is far from what is should be just know there will be fresh grace and new mercy. And know for sure that even when you don't love me with all of your heart, I'll still be right here loving you with all of mine.” This fuels our love. Fuel for loving God is seeing how relentlessly God loves us. So that's the belief we have to have to even get off the ground when it comes to loving God and then we need to constantly do one more thing to progress in our love for God...

- Progressing in our love for God requires beholding His glory, so that ~~Pr~~ we're transformed into His likeness. (2 Cor. 3:18)
 - "And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit." (2 Cor. 3:18)

We've said that the law doesn't empower what it commands. That is me sitting up here telling you to love God doesn't give the you power to do it. You we've said you need a new heart, you new right beliefs about God's love for you, and then to grow you need to constantly behold God's glory. **Girl and dancing illustration.** The more we see the more we want! We don't 'just work up love for God. We don't make this white knuckle effort to summon love.

That why we read the Bible. Prayer. That's why we walk in obedience. Lord's Supper. Evangelism.

You know God is up to something when you get in the car and say "We gotta change"

Time of response.