

706 What Does It Mean to Love God?

Phil Sanders

God's Answers to Life's Questions

God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. We all know that God loves us, but what does it mean to love God?

Today we're asking the question, "What does it mean to love God?" Mark tells of this discussion in Mark 12:28-34: One of the scribes came and heard them arguing, and recognizing that He had answered them well, asked Him, "What commandment is the foremost of all?" Jesus answered, "The foremost is, 'HEAR, O ISRAEL! THE LORD OUR GOD IS ONE LORD; 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.' "The second is this, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.' There is no other commandment greater than these." Loving God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength demands everything. Do you love God like that?

Love is the language of God's law. One word characterizes all God's law—and what a word! Love is bigger than deeds—if you love, you will act. Love is bigger than trust—if you love, you will trust. Love is bigger than fear—if you love, you will respect. Love is the only thing that recognizes the total personality of the other person in a relationship. It is the warmest possible human response. While it is possible to fear some *thing* or to depend on some *thing*, you can only genuinely love *someone*. Paul said in 1 Cor. 13:1-3, "If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have *the gift of prophecy*, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. And if I give all my possessions to feed *the poor*, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing." Loving God and others is truly the highest good anyone can accomplish. One thing is sure: if we are ever to be anything in God's eyes, we must learn to love.

We usually think of love as something that is freely given. A person "falls in love." But God in this passage commands that we love Him. The command, "Love the Lord your God," calls us to make a willing commitment to God that is personal, comprehensive, and wholehearted. For the Christian love is not merely affection, it is a choice. It is an act of heart and soul, mind and strength to give oneself to God fully and freely. God demands every part of us, and He will not settle for a little love or a half-hearted love. He wants a complete commitment to Him, to His teaching, and to His way of life. To love God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength is not for the immature or the insincere. It will require everything from us to love God like that.

First, **we are to love God with all our heart.** The heart has always been a symbol of man's inner self. There is obviously some overlap of loving him with all your heart and all your soul. The heart, however, usually speaks to the emotional, inner spirit of a person. To love God with the heart is to love him supremely, more than all other beings and things, and with all the passion possible. To love him with all the heart is to fix the affections supremely on him, more strongly than on anything else, and to be willing to give up all that we hold dear at his command. To love God with all our heart, then, we must commit our undivided attention to the task of loving him. Everything we are must be focused on this love. To love God with all our heart is to involve our deepest emotions in this love. He loves God with all his heart, who loves nothing in comparison of him, and nothing but in reference to him:—who is ready to give up, do, or suffer any thing in order to please and glorify him: my love for Him controls every emotion, every choice, every plan, and every desire.

Jesus said in Matthew 6:24, "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon (or wealth)." God is not willing to allow His people to divide their loyalties. He wants "all" our hearts. He wants our complete willingness to love and follow Him. James rebuked the people of his time for loving the world. He said in James 4:4, "Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God." Loving the ways of the world—its behavior, its attitudes, and its sinfulness—means that we oppose the ways of God. You can't love sin and love God at the same time. You will love one and hate the other. Choosing the world's values means despising God's values. This is why John said in 1 John 2:15-17, "Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. The world is passing away, and *also* its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever." If you choose the world over God, you are choosing to lose all the promises of God as well. That leads a loss you can never get over.

Moses urged the Israelites in his day to keep their hearts close to God. He said in Deut. 10:16-21, "You shall therefore impress these words of mine on your heart and on your soul; and you shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. You shall teach them to your sons, talking of them when you sit in your house and when you walk along the road and when you lie down and when you rise up. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates, so that your days and the days of your sons may be multiplied on the land which the LORD swore to your fathers to give them, as long as the heavens *remain* above the earth." When I was in Israel last June, every door in the hotels in which we stayed had a mezuzah, a little box, to store the Scriptures of the Shema, reminding them to love the Lord with all their heart, all their soul, and all their strength. Near the Temple Wall, many Jews wore leather phylacteries on their heads and their left arms. They wore these leather boxes with scrolls to remind them of their love and commitment to God. While Christians do not wear phylacteries, the Word of God ought to be just as much in our hearts. God's Word ought to live inside of us. We need to love it, study it, memorize it, and live it out in our lives.

Second, **we are to love God with all our soul.** Our soul gives us a sense of who we are and where we are going. It is that combination of mental and emotional awareness which determines our desires and our intentions. In essence, our "soul" is our personal being. To love God with all our soul is to love him with all our being. When we love God with all our souls, we are ready to give up life for his sake—to endure all sorts of torments, and to be deprived of all kinds of comforts, rather than dishonor God. We live life with all its comforts, and conveniences, to glorify God. For the Christian who loves God with all his soul life and death are important only when they lead to God. Early Christians were willing to die for their faith, because they loved God more than themselves. John said this about martyrs in Revelation 12:11, "And they overcame him (the devil) because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life even when faced with death." There was something more important than life. It was following their Lord to eternity. Jesus, you'll remember, said, in Mark 8:35-37, "For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul? For what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" If you lose your soul, you have lost it for an

eternity. It is better to lose your life in this world, so that you will have your soul saved in the next world. Are you willing to give him your life itself? Does your worship genuinely reflect your inner desires and intentions? Do you love him with your total being?

Third, **we must love God with all our mind.** God gave us minds so that we could put all of our intellectual capacities to work in loving him. He could hardly be satisfied with blind love, for he knew that the more we understood him the more we would love him. Paul said in Galatians 2:20, "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me." To love God with the mind means that we will apply ourselves to know God, and his holy will. As we study God's Word we will receive or welcome with humility, gratitude, and pleasure, the sacred truths which God has revealed to man. We will banish from our understanding and memory every useless, foolish, and dangerous thought, together with every idea which has any tendency to defile our souls. We will see God in all things—think about him at all times—acknowledge him in all our ways. Paul said in Colossians 3:2-4, "Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory." A person who loves God with all his mind, will use his mind to keep God close. Is your faith fully informed or based on blind trust? Is your mind trained to think of how great and perfect God is morally? Do you strive to be like God?

Fourth, **we must love God with all our strength.** God demands an intense love that consumes all our energy. The kind of love he is looking for is genuine, warm, intelligent and energetic. In other words, he wants our total person to be involved in loving him. The person who loves God with all his strength exerts all the powers of his body and soul in the service of God. He sacrifices his time, body, health, ease, for the honor of God his Divine Master. He employs in God's service all his goods, his talents, his power, credit, authority, and influence. It is not enough to talk about loving God, we must do it, live it, and give it. John said in 1 John 3:18, "Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth." There is always a difference between the fellow who boasts and the fellow who does, the fellow who pretends and the fellow who walks the walk. We have all known people who want others to think they are loving and working people but who are not willing to live what they believe.

Jesus simply said in John 14:15, "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments." Love is not talking about keeping the commandments of God. Love is not simply believing what God says. Loving is believing strongly enough to do what God says. Paul said in Galatians 5:6 that faith works by love. Faith and love act—that is how you know somebody believes and somebody loves. When you really love God, you cannot help but want to show it. Everyone knows that you love God, because they see you doing His will and keeping His commandments. Paul said in 2 Corinthians 5:14-15, "For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf." My friend, does the love of God control your life? Do you keep His commandments? Have you obeyed the Lord's gospel? Have you devoted all your physical and material capabilities to him? Are you willing to take up your cross daily and follow Him?

Jesus told the story of a woman who sacrificed everything for God in Mark 12:41-44. The Bible says: And He sat down opposite the treasury, and *began* observing how the people were putting money into the treasury; and many rich people were putting in large sums. A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which amount to a cent. Calling His disciples to Him, He said to them, "Truly I say to you, this poor widow put in more than all the contributors to the treasury; for they all put in out of their surplus, but she, out of her poverty, put in all she owned, all she had to live on." We don't know anything about this poor widow. We don't know her name, who her family was, how old she was, whether she ate the next meal, or whether anyone helped her. All we know is that she gave all she had to God. There, my friend, is true love for God. I hope in your heart, and soul, and mind, and strength, you too have that kind of strength. I pray that you are willing to take up your cross and follow the Lord.

Love is a great motivator. Love will move us to do things that nothing else will. Love for a family has led many men and women to change their lives—to stop smoking or drinking or to start living the Christian life and going to church. When I hear of someone's Christian commitment beginning to fail, I like to urge them to take a long look at the cross. The power of the cross is the love Jesus showed there. One can hardly take a long look at how Jesus suffered for us and come away unmoved. Jesus took the worst that humanity could give Him, but He still was willing to die for you and for me. It's almost as if Jesus said, "Do you worst to me, and I will still love you! Be as cruel as you want, and I will still pay the price for your sins!" While we were still helpless, ungodly, sinners, and enemies, Jesus died for us. If you take the time to ponder that thought, my friend, you will come to understand—at least a little bit—how much God loves you. The Lord wants you to be saved and to live with Him in heaven. Don't harden your heart against Him. Don't refuse the love of God, because no one will ever love you the way that the Lord Jesus loves you. Let His love motivate your love. Let the cross melt your heart and turn your life around. Don't be so cruel as to say no to the Lord who gave His hands, His brow, His back, His side, and His heart to you. Love Him, serve Him, and live as a child of God. You can become a child of God by faith in Jesus Christ. When you believe in Him with all your heart, you will want to turn away from every sin and follow after Him. You'll say no to all the things of this world and will want to embrace all the things the Lord teaches and says. You'll be willing to confess the name of Christ before others and to be baptized. Christian baptism is an immersion in water in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. When you are baptized, you are born again into God's family, added to His church, and cleansed from every sin. It's a new beginning of a blessed and joyful relationship. I pray that today you'll decide to obey the Lord in baptism and become a child of God.

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Concord Road Church of Christ
8221 Concord Rd., Brentwood, TN 37027
1-877-226-5747

phil@God-answers.org

www.tv.God-answers.org