

"Our Love for God"

God loves us greatly, but have you considered that God wants you to love Him greatly? Hello, I'm Phil Sanders. And this is a Bible study, "In Search of the Lord's Way." And today, we're exploring what it means to love God, so stay with us.

Welcome to In Search of the Lord's Way. When you love God, you'll also love His Word found exclusively in the Bible. The Bible tells the story of the amazing love and grace of God, how God has watched over us all through the years. It's more than a simple love letter; it reveals His steadfast love towards us and what He expects from us. The Bible teaches us how to love God. Thanks for taking time with us today.

Love begins with a decision, but true love for God cannot remain with simply a decision. It must grow until it becomes the first priority. Love starts in the heart but shows in the life. True love will not stay hidden; it'll prove itself by the way that it behaves. Love must act. Romans 5 and verse 8 says, that "God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." God demonstrated His love for us by sending Jesus to the cross. The Lord Jesus sacrificed His life on His own initiative, when we didn't ask for it, didn't deserve it, and didn't quite understand it. That's true love.

The word "love" is often misused. For instance, people say that they love something, when what they really mean is that they like or enjoy it. Now, they may enjoy it greatly, but it certainly isn't the focus of their lives. Loving God can never be on the same level as loving ice cream. Many say they love God when truthfully they only like Him. They've never taken God seriously enough to make a lifelong, complete commitment to Him. They never let God make a difference in their moral or spiritual choices. They love the joy of the grace and forgiveness of God as long as God doesn't mess with their lives. They love Him but want to do as they themselves please.

If you'd like to study more about this topic, we offer the information on this program free. If you'd like a printed copy or a CD, and it's at no charge, mail your request to In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or send an e-mail to searchtv@searchtv.org. Or you can call our toll-free telephone number. That number is 1-800-321-8633. We also stream this program on our website at www.searchtv.org.

The Edmond church will now worship in song, we'll read from Mark 12:28 to 31, and we'll explore what it means to love God.

Our reading today comes from Mark 12, verses 28 to 31. "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.'" That's from the lips of the Lord Jesus Christ. Let's pray together. Father we're thankful that You have loved us so much. And Father we're thankful for the opportunity to show our love for you. And Father help us to show it everyday. And may Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. In Jesus name, Amen!

If I asked you if you loved God, how would you answer? Many people would quickly answer yes, but how does your love for God demonstrate itself in your life? You know it's easy to say that you love God. The Lord, however, defines love in ways that may differ from the common understanding of love. We use and misuse the word "love" so frequently that it's hard to define real love. Today let's explore how love for God demonstrates itself.

First I would ask you, do you appreciate God? You know, love begins with thankfulness. Genuine love for God pays attention to the love that God has shown. Have you considered all of your blessings that come from God's hand and are you truly thankful? Love and thanksgiving intertwine; you can't have one without the other. The person who counts his blessings grows to appreciate and to love, and the person who loves won't fail to remember the kindness and goodness of the Lord.

I've always loved the words of Jeremiah that are found in the book of Lamentations. Jeremiah wrote this book at the time when his world was falling apart. And he saw the love of God in good times and in the worst of times. The Babylonians had once again invaded Jerusalem in 587 BC; and they tore down the temple and destroyed the city. Yet Jeremiah could say in Lamentations 3 verses 22 to 24, "The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. The LORD is my portion," says my soul, "therefore I will hope in him."

Jeremiah never gave up on God. And true love never fails. We live in a society ready to quit on anyone they don't like for any reason. Many keep a remote in their hands, ready to change channels the moment they hear something that doesn't please them. Some feel God is only worthy of our love as long as He does what we want or what we agree with. Instead of obeying God, many feel God ought to obey us. They judge the God who created them, forgetting that He's the source of every blessing they have. The air they breathe, the water they drink, the food that they eat come from His hand. They selfishly stop appreciating and acknowledging the God who made them and sustains their lives.

Many blame God if anything in their lives turn sour. They even blame God for the heartaches that they create for themselves. We should never suppose God has forgotten us or has stopped loving us because times are difficult. When the Roman Christians were going through some rough times, Paul said in Romans 8 verses 31 to 32, "What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?" I tell you when times are tough, instead of forsaking God, let's draw near to Him.

Second, do you desire God? Are you interested in Him? Do you wish to draw close to Him? When people love each other, they want to spend time together. The Lord wants to spend time with you, and He wants you to spend time with Him. Can you imagine loving someone but never communicating with that person? When you consider the time that you spend with God, how loved do you think God feels? We hear God's heart and message by a close study of the Word, and we share our hearts with God when we pray. Our relationship with God deepens as we worship Him. Love involves time and communication. Do you read your Bible, pray, and worship God regularly?

How long has it been since you read the Bible at length? The Lord Jesus said in Matthew 4 and verse 4, "It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God." We need every word that God says. It nourishes our souls, it keeps us going in the right direction, it builds us up, and it gives us hope. Oh I tell you if there was ever a time, we need the Bible.

Let me ask you, when was the last time you spent just a half-hour in prayer? When was the last time that you worshiped at church? Many of you attend church, I know; but do you really worship there? Is your worship focused, is it sincere, and true. You remember the Lord Jesus said in John 4 verses 23 and 24, "But the hour is coming, and now is, here when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." I fear many folks go to church, have a good time as

a spectator, visit friends, but may fail to worship God. Loving God means focusing on what He has done for us and on what He teaches us.

God hears our worship and looks into our hearts. God complained through Malachi, the prophet, that the Jews were making offerings that were polluted. You see they substituted animals that were blind, and sick, and lame, and blemished, for the good ones. Worship was no longer meaningful, because they were saying, "What a weariness this is!" and they sniffed at it in disgust. And the LORD of hosts asks in Malachi 1 verse 8, "When you offer blind animals in sacrifice, is that not evil? And when you offer those that are lame or sick, is that not evil? Well present that to your governor; will he accept you or show you favor?" You see, today, in place of worship, many offer entertainment or meaningless rituals.

Some think that God ought to be pleased with whatever we offer Him, but is He? Loving God means paying enough attention to Him so as to do what pleases Him. Don't you want God to pay attention to your requests? Why should you think that God is willing to accept whatever we offer?

We need hearts that long for God. The sons of Korah wrote in Psalm 42:1 and 2, "As the deer pants for flowing streams, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God?" They longed to worship God, to be close to Him. And David too had that kind of ache for God. David said in Psalm 63 verse 1, "O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water." We love God by seeking Him and drawing close to Him. We should love Him so much that we can't spend not even one day without Him.

Draw close to God, and drawing close to Him means that we live righteously. The Lord Jesus said in Matthew 5 and verse 6, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied." Hungering and thirsting is common for food, but do you hunger—I mean, really hunger—for righteousness? If you truly love God, you will long to be right with Him. Now, no one wants to be in conflict with the person that they love. Loving God also means loving what He loves. He loves what's good and right, but God despises what is hurtful and wrong. God despises sin, because He loves you and knows how sin will hurt you. Loving God means loving righteousness.

In Matthew 6 and verse 33 the Lord said, "But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you." Now many want God but don't understand that having God necessitates being "right" with God. You can't have the grace and favor of God and then just continue in sin. Romans 6 verses 1 and 2 asks, "Well what shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?"

Third, are you committed to God? Now true love involves commitment. Many want the joy of love but without any strings attached. That isn't love—it's selfishness. Love without commitment is fickle and can't be trusted. We live in a society that's afraid of committed love. Millions of couples live together without the commitment of marriage. They want the better but not the worse, the richer but not the poorer, the health but not the sickness. Love without commitment is a fantasy. And without a commitment lasting love isn't possible.

People talk much about placing trust in God, and so we should. God is utterly trustworthy. But trusting God means you're willing to put yourself into His hands. May I ask you, "Can God trust you? Are you trustworthy? Can God trust you to love Him for a lifetime? If you want God to be committed to you, are you willing to be committed to Him?" Someone says, "Well I don't like to be tied down." The Lord Jesus wasn't tied down; He was nailed down. He didn't merely talk about love and commitment; He demonstrated it.

Loving God fully and wholeheartedly means putting Him first, before anything or anyone. He said in Luke 14 verses 26 to 27, that "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot, he cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple." Now the word "hate" here does not mean to despise but means to love less. If you compare your love for Jesus to your family or even yourself, you will love Jesus more.

Commitment to the Lord means staying away from evil. Romans 12 and verse 2 says, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that by testing you may discern what the will of God is, what is good and acceptable and perfect."

Love also means giving myself to what is good. James 1:27 says, that "Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world." Pure religion means helping those who are in need. We show our love for God by loving and helping people.

Committed love means listening to the Lord and keeping His commandments. The Lord Jesus simply said in John 14:15, "If you love me, you'll keep my commandments." Now Jesus wasn't putting a burden on us that He didn't bear Himself. The Lord said in John 15 verses 9 and 10, "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. And if you keep my commandments, you'll abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love." Now love listens, love pays attention, and love submits to the will of the One that we love.

God says in 1 John 2 verses 3 to 6, "And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. Whoever says 'I know him' but doesn't keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him: whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked." My friend, you can't separate obedience from the love for God. Love means living the way Jesus lived, caring for others as He cared, forgiving as He forgave, and doing what is right just as He did.

Well why are we asking and talking about all this? Because God wants us to love Him the way that He loves us. God has loved us with a great love and He wants us to love Him with a great love. When we consider His grace and forgiveness, His daily blessings, His guidance in the Word, and the eternal home that He has prepared for us in heaven, how could we help but love God with all of our hearts, and all of our souls, and all of our minds, and all of our strength? Let's love God. Let's pray together. Father we're so thankful that You have loved us and given us so much. And help us to love You, the way that You have loved us. And may Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. In Jesus name, Amen!

Love always makes a commitment. Now you can say "I love God" when you're willing to make a lifelong, serious commitment to Him. Loving God requires more than words. God doesn't want fair-weather friends or nominal followers. He wants people who will love Him fully, freely, and faithfully. He wants people who will labor for His cause, who won't give up when things get tough. He wants people who will follow His teaching, love His truth, and not compromise the faith.

Will you decide today to be His disciple, to deny yourself, and take up your cross and follow Him? If you want His love and grace to bless you, commit yourself to Him. We become Christians by putting our trust in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God. Our faith isn't private, we must confess it before others. With our faith, we must turn from sin to righteousness, from error to truth, and from evil to good. Repentance means turning from sin to the Lord and His will..

Our faith, and love, and repentance will lead us to obey the Lord in baptism. Baptism is biblical; it's how God unites us with Christ and saves us. Romans 6 verses 4 to 7 says, "Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we've become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; for he who has died is freed from sin." Oh let God free you from sin, be baptized!

We hope that today's study about love has stirred your heart. We offer a free printed copy or a CD of this message, so please mail your request to In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or e-mail us at searchtv@searchtv.org.

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Please get involved with a church of Christ. Now you might be looking for a healthy, Biblical church home, call us, we'll be happy to help you find one. Churches of Christ want guests, and you'll be glad you became a part of their family, and that you worshipped with them. We hope that you'll go and find a congregation somewhere near you, and we'll be glad to help you find one. Well we'll be back next week, Lord willing, with a Bible study. We want to offer our hope and our live to all of you, and the Word of God. Well, we hope you'll tell a friend about this program, and let them know your watching, week end and week out. As always, God bless you and we love you from all of us at In Search of the Lord's Way.