



Loving
GOD

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Topics subject to change without notice

APRIL 6 – LOVING GOD

The brightest things in life come because of the love of God. Of all the tasks of mankind, nothing is more important than loving God. In this lesson we're going to explore how God wishes to be loved and served.

APRIL 13 – LOVING GOD TOTALLY

Can you truthfully say you totally belong to the Lord? God doesn't want part-time friends or people who are only fond of Him. God expects His people to be totally committed to Him and to His way.

APRIL 20 – LOVE AND LAW

Jesus said, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments" (John 14:15). The Scriptures teach us how to love God the way He wishes to be loved and the need for keeping His commandments.

APRIL 27 – DO YOU LOVE ME?

Jesus asked Peter three times, "Do you love Me?" For Jesus, love is not merely a feeling. To say that we love the Lord means living for Him by serving others and by fulfilling the work He has given us to do

Loving God

Of all the tasks of mankind, nothing is more important than loving God. Today we're going to explore the subject of loving God. The Scriptures teach us how much God loves and cares for us, but they also challenge us to love God, to give Him our hearts. Christianity is first and foremost a relationship through Christ with our Father in heaven who hears our prayers and meets our needs. Without the love of God this world would indeed be a hopeless and cruel place. The brightest things in life come because of the love of God. The Bible helps us to understand what love is and how love matters in life. That's why we turn to God's word for understanding and guidance.

Imagine you've awakened in a world without love. It's a world where people don't care—and they don't care that they don't care. It's a world where offenses begin fights and wars, because there is so little tolerance. It's a world where people are selfishly ambitious, stepping on others and climbing to the top, abusing others merely to survive. It's a world where the lives of old people and the unborn are cheap, where morals are nothing as long as you get what you want. It's a world where people hardly marry, and those that do rarely stay that way. It's a world where children fend for themselves. It's a world where people sit silent when evil takes place, where protecting the weak is unimportant. A world without love would be a world without hope and filled with all the ugly substitutions that people find to take love's place. Part of what makes hell so terrible is that you can't find any love there.

Our reading today comes from James chapter 4:7-10. "Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you." That's a reading from God's holy word. Let's pray together. Oh Father, help us to submit to You, and to draw close to You. And Father, help us to resist the devil. In Jesus Name we pray, Amen!

First John 4:19 simply says, "We love because he first loved us." Among our greatest treasures, none surpasses the love of God for us. We learn love through knowing God. John explains, "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love. By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him" (1 John 4:7-9).

We often like to talk about how God loves us, but this month we're focusing on how we should love God. We're not focusing this month on how we want to love God, but on how God wants to be loved. Loving God means learning how to please Him. We want to please God, so it's important for us to take our minds off other things and focus on Him. That's not as easy as it sounds, since there are so many things competing for our attention. We must be careful not to drift away from God.

We choose what we love, and many things battle for our affections. The Lord Jesus said, "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 money (or mammon)" (Matthew 6:24). What's true of money is true of many things; at some point we must decide whether we will serve God or not.

First John 2:15-17 says, “Do not love the world nor the things in the world. And 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. And the world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever.” We can’t hold onto worldly desires and hold onto Christ at the same time. We must choose between the two. We must decide whether we will take our faith seriously and truly devote ourselves to God.

The apostle Paul, guided by the Holy Spirit, made this prediction, “But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; (and then he said) avoid such men as these” (2 Timothy 3:1-5). This passage speaks of mankind at its worst, people who pretend godliness but have no room for the Lord or anyone else in their lives. They love themselves so much they have little room for God in what they do. When the choice is made, they’re going to do what they desire. They cannot imitate the Lord Jesus and say, “not My will but Yours be done,” because they love themselves.

They are lovers of money. They want the pleasures that money gives them. First Timothy 6:9 -10 says, “But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many grief’s.” Some who blame God for their problems ought instead to look in the mirror, for they bring many of their sorrows on themselves. People who will do anything to get rich often find themselves filled with heartaches and regrets.

The First Timothy passage says, they are “lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God.” They think sin makes them happy, but sin always hurts. Sometimes I hear people justify their sins with “God wants me to be happy!” Yes, God wants to bless us; but God doesn’t bless people by blessing their sins. God’s blessing comes from righteous living, not from following fleshly desires. Peter warns us to “abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul” (1 Peter 2:11). Sinful lust enslaves us and hardens our hearts; it robs us of true joy, and true peace, and love. It never lasts. “The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever” (1 John 2:17).

People in the last days will fall into the habit of “not loving good.” They no longer want to be pure and holy, they don’t want anyone else to be; and they don’t want to even hear about it. They’re so given to sin, they can no longer tolerate righteousness. The Lord Jesus said, “And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil” (John 3:19). Some today know more about zombies, and vampires, and witches than they do about the apostles. Their hearts are far away from God.

When people fail to understand the love of God, they eventually become heartless and unloving. They cease to care even for their own families. They have closed their hearts. The Lord Jesus predicted, “And because lawlessness is increased, most people's love will grow cold” (Matthew 24:12). For this reason, they become unappeasable or irreconcilable. You can’t satisfy them or make friends with them, because they are so given to themselves. People begin

losing their love for God when they stop counting their blessings. They become ungrateful, as if the world owed them whatever they have. They cannot be content with what they have and appreciate it, because they covet what others have.

What can we do to show our love to God while we're surrounded by a sinful and secular world? James 4:7-10 has the answer. First, "Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you." First, we must submit ourselves to God. We must choose to make the Lord Jesus the ruler of our hearts. To do that, we must take ourselves off the throne. Romans 6:16-18 says, "Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, that you're slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness." No matter what our past has been, we can obey God from our hearts and make changes to our lives. Submitting to God isn't slavery; submitting to God frees us from the sin that ruins us. God gives us hope!

Second, we must resist the devil. The passage says if you will resist the devil, he will flee from you. The devil is strong and evil, but he is not stronger than the Lord Jesus. First John 3:7-8 says, "Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as He is righteous. And whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil," and He did! Jesus triumphed over the devil when He bore the cross to forgive sin and rose from the dead to overcome death. Christians can gladly follow Jesus, for "he who is in you (that is the Lord in you) is greater than he who is in the world" (1 John 4:4).

Many find it easy to flirt with the devil and play with sin; but we can't get close to God while we're flirting with the devil. We must get away from the devil in order to draw near to God. We have to decide we won't run with the devil any more, and we won't run with his crowd any more. We have to decide we're not going to play his games, and we're not going to do his bidding. When we finally get the courage to resist the devil and tell him to get lost, we'll see the devil flee. He won't want to be around us! He knows he cannot win when we have the Lord on our side. We must decide to resist; and with the help of God, with the help of God, we'll overcome.

Third, we need to draw near to God, and when we draw near to God, He will draw near to us. The Father in heaven and the Lord Jesus want to be close to you and to bless you. Jesus died on the cross to demonstrate His love for you. The Lord Jesus said, "I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance" (Luke 15:7). God's heart is open to you, pleading for you to return to Him and to serve Him. I think of the words of Isaiah 55:6-7 which say, "Seek the Lord while he may be found; call upon him while he is near; let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon."

Fourth, the passage says wash your hands, you sinners. We must make a clean break with sin. We've got to repent. We can't draw close to God while you hang on to our sins. Isaiah 59:1-2 says, "Behold, the Lord's hand is not so short that it can't save; Neither is His ear so dull that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, And your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He does not hear." Sin separates you from God, so get rid of the sin and draw close to God. When Adam and Eve realized they had sinned and were naked, they hid in the bushes, and they were ashamed and afraid of God. Sin separates us from God and fills us with shame and regret. Repentance changes the heart, and it opens the door to forgiveness, and it sets a person in a new direction that allows fellowship with God how it can be restored.

Fifth, purify your hearts, you double-minded. We need a clean heart and a clean conscience. This demands coming clean with God, confessing our sins to Him. Proverbs 28:13 says, "He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, But he who confesses and forsakes them will find compassion." Likewise 1 John 1:8-9 says, "If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." As long as we have issues with God we'll find it hard to draw close to Him. Being right with God opens up the door to eternal life and the blessing of God that He gives forever. Remaining in sin will only cause you heartache and ruin. Love the Lord! Love God! Love Him because He first loved you. Don't let anything come between you and God – not sin, not money, not pleasure, not your own desires. The more you love God the more joy and peace you'll find. Get right with God. Let's pray together. O Father, help us to put away our sins, and to forsake them. To love You, and to follow You, and be obedient to Your will in every way. Father, bless each one who is listening, with a deeper desire to love you in their hearts. This is our prayer, in the name of Jesus, Amen!

Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you. Have you entangled your life in other things and drifted away from Him, or is your heart open to God? God calls us to open our lives to Him. The Lord Jesus told lukewarm Laodicea, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; and if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him, and will dine with him, and he will dine with Me" (Revelation 3:20). The Lord wants a close friendship with us. There's a famous painting showing Jesus knocking at a door. In the painting, the door has no handle on the outside; the door can only be opened from the inside. He knocks, but He won't break down the door. He knocks, but you must open your door and your heart to let Him in.

Love calls for a response. It's not enough to be loved by God; we must love in return. Jesus said, "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments" (John 14:15). Love doesn't argue; it pleases by trusting and obeying. The gospel is the good news of God's love and Jesus' sacrifice. So don't be ungrateful for that love; respond by trusting and obeying the Lord. If you know and love the Lord, you'll have no problem trusting Him or His teaching.

If you love Jesus, you can't remain in sin, which offends Him. Love leads us to leave sin behind. Love means telling the world that you belong to Him, confessing Him to be the Christ, the Son of God, and being baptized into Christ. Galatians 3:26-27 says, "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ." Baptism is the time when God washes away our sins (Acts 22:16) and saves us (1 Peter 3:21). So, open your heart to the Lord! Love and obey!

Loving God Totally

Can you truthfully say that you totally belong to the Lord? Today we're going to explore what it means to surrender all to the Lord. The Bible reveals God's love for us and the kind of love He expects from us. God doesn't want part-time friends or people who are only fond of Him. God expects His people to be totally committed to Him and to His way. The Lord did not show us a half-hearted love, but gave everything so that we might be saved. It shouldn't surprise anyone that He demands that we surrender all to Him.

The apostle Paul said, "But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world" (Galatians 6:14). Paul knew the Christian life is the noblest and happiest life, but living for Christ is challenging in a world that doesn't understand or appreciate devotion. Paul said, "I have been crucified with Christ. It's no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Galatians 2:20). Our task today is to live by faith in Christ. When we are crucified with Him, we no longer belong to ourselves. We belong to Him.

Christianity is more than a name to wear; it's a life. Because we belong to the Lord, we surrender every thought, every word, and every act to the will of God. Like Christ, we pray, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven" and "not my will but Yours be done." Do you love God totally?

Our reading today comes from The Gospel According To Mark 12:28-31. "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.'" Let's pray together. Heavenly Father help us to love you and our Lord Jesus with all our heart and soul and mind and strength. This is our prayer in the name of Jesus. Amen!

What did Paul mean when he said he was crucified with Christ? He wasn't at Calvary; he didn't hang on a cross. What does he mean by "I am crucified with Christ?" Paul isn't speaking of a literal cross and nails. He's speaking figuratively. Crucifixion was a means of death. It was cruel, slow and painful, designed to make the person suffer as long as possible. Crucifixions, in ancient times, publicly shamed the criminal to keep others from committing a crime. But, our crucifixion with Christ is a public identification with Him. We are united with Him in His death, burial and resurrection when we are baptized according to Romans 6:4-7. We are crucified with Christ in order to put to death the old self of sin and to be born again. We can't have newness of life until the old man of sin is dead. When we're baptized into Christ, He begins living in us.

In being crucified with Him, we take a stand with Christ for truth and for morality. We say to the sinful and worldly things "So far as you're concerned world, I'm dead to you and you're dead to me. You have no more power over me than you have over a dead body." Paul said, "those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires" (Galatians 5:24). This is a thorough, lifelong, and total commitment. When we come to Christ there is no turning back.

Since we belong to Christ, we can say with Paul, "So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live" (Romans 8:12-13). Our eternal destiny is dependent on whether we choose to live for the Lord or we choose the flesh. We choose to follow Christ by coming to Him and loving what is good.

We want to please God. Romans 6:8-11 says, "Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ being raised from the dead will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus." Christians are willing to give up that old way of life so they can show their love for Christ.

When we're crucified with Christ, we change our behavior and our thinking. This change gets specific. For instance, Jesus' feet were crucified. They crossed His feet upon the upright beam of the cross and drove the long spike into them. That driven nail tore through His flesh. We can only imagine the agony. Our feet should be crucified, too. What do we mean by "crucified feet?" We must watch where our feet take us and never let them lead us into a place that will dishonor Christ. Peter said, "For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps" (1 Peter 2:21). Being "crucified with Christ" means we give Him first place in our lives.

Because our feet belong to Him, we go wherever He sends us.. God had a task for Isaiah to do. Isaiah 6:8 says, "Then I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?' Then I said, 'Here am I. Send me!'" We need that "Here am I; send me" attitude. Some people spend their lives foolishly and selfishly. They never give a thought to how they may serve anybody else. The greatest thing that anyone can do is to take the saving message of the gospel to people who are lost. Jesus said, "Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned" (Mark 16:15-16). There are people lost and dying in sin because no one ever told them about Jesus. Will you tell your friends about Jesus?

They not only nailed His feet; Jesus' hands were also crucified. They were stretched out upon the crossbeam and were nailed to the tree. They nailed his hands down. For the rest of his earthly life, Jesus' hands remained fastened to that cross. Our hands are crucified, too. They are not nailed down, but we must not use them any way we wish. We must be careful what we handle. They should never handle anything that will stain them with sin or wrong. The hands of Jesus were laid upon suffering human beings to bless them, but can you imagine Jesus holding anything sinful in those hands?

Be careful what you handle. Paul said, "Therefore I want the men in every place to pray, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and dissension" (1 Timothy 2:8). People in the early church lifted their hands up to God when they prayed. They were wanting God to know that they loved Him as they approached Him. But Paul was telling them that when we approach God, we need to pray to Him with holy hands, not just lifting hands. Don't lift your hands up to God if you are full of anger at your brother or you're fussing with him. God has never accepted worship from people who have sin in their hearts. Isaiah wrote by inspiration, "When you spread out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; because your hands are full of blood. Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to

do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause" (Isaiah 1:15-17).

God wants our lives filled with holiness when we worship Him. When we choose to follow Christ, we can't select whether we will treat people kindly or whether we will live a moral life. We must take hold of God's will in every aspect of our lives. We can't pick and choose when we will follow the Lord and when we won't. When we say no to God, we are rebelling against Him. It's at that very point where we resist God; we are withholding our love and obedience from Him. We must give our whole selves – body, soul, and spirit – to the Lord. Use your hands for good and serve the Lord. Paul said, "So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith" (Galatians 6:10). We serve the Lord by doing good for others.

This may at first sound silly to you, but you know a Christian should crucify his ears – not in the literal sense. He should put to death or give up whatever he hears that might keep him from serving Christ. If our ears are crucified, we'll be careful about what we listen to. There are voices all about us and some voices will tempt us to sin. But if we belong to Jesus, we won't listen to them. Jesus called himself the good shepherd. Jesus said, "To him [that is the good shepherd] the gatekeeper opens and the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers" (John 10:3-5).

Some of these strange voices say, "Don't go to church to worship. Why you've been busy all week. Have a good time instead of going to church." That's the enemy talking. Some say, "Put yourself first. Indulge in whatever pleases you. Make more money. Forget what the Bible says. You must look out for yourself." The devil is always interested in separating us from Christ and from the will of God. Crucified ears won't listen to such compromise. Other times people say, "It doesn't matter what you believe as long as you love Jesus." But if you really love Jesus, you'll care what He has to say, and you'll distinguish His words from the words of men. Jesus said, "Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice" (John 18:37).

Because what we say matters, we need to put to death any speech that does not follow the will of God. James said the tongue is uncontrollable and cannot be tamed. If we use our tongues for Jesus, we will speak wisely. We won't gossip and we won't repeat the gossip we hear from other people. Solomon said, "He who goes about as a slanderer reveals secrets, Therefore do not associate with a gossip" (Proverbs 20:19). Again Proverbs 10:11 says, "The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life, But the mouth of the wicked conceals violence." Peter said, "The one who desires life, to love and see good days, Must keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit" (1 Peter 3:10). Some people delight in hurting others with their words. They criticize or falsely label, and their words sting. Our words should be soothing and not cutting. Colossians 4:6 says, "Let your speech always be with grace, *as though* seasoned with salt, so that you will know how you should respond to each person."

Along with our hands, our feet, our ears, and our tongues, we must also put to death the things in our hearts that offend God. The old man of sin in our hearts must be crucified so that we can live a new life filled with love for God. Jesus' heart felt the full force of his crucifixion, and no wonder. He came to His own and His own received Him not. The sin of the world was upon Him. God, the Father, for a time forsook Him. As He died they thrust the spear into His side, and water and blood gushed out. His heart was devastated by crucifixion.

Is your heart crucified? Is it dead to sin and evil? Is it a throne upon which Jesus lives? Does He have first place in your life, or is your heart divided between the world and Jesus? James 4:4 says, "You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God." Are you like that? Do you give part of yourself to Christ and hold back the other part? Do you hang onto the world and its pleasures with one hand, and hang on to God with the other? Remember God sees what we are doing. We can't serve God and anything else at the same time. We can't serve God and money or God and alcohol. We can't serve God and drugs. We can't serve God and sex. We can't serve God and anything else. If we are crucified with Christ, our whole heart belongs to Him. That means our whole life belongs to Him too. Paul said, "Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body" (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). When you become a Christian, God becomes your master; and you belong to Him. My friend, do you belong body, soul, and spirit to God? Let's pray. O, Father helps us to devote ourselves to you fully, completely, and totally. This is our prayer in the name of Jesus. Amen!

During World War I a man from Sweden appeared before the American Draft Board. They told him that as an alien he could claim exemption from the draft; but he replied, "No, when I came to America, I came all. If America needs me, I'm ready." As Christians we ought to say, "All of me belongs to Christ. If He needs me, I'm ready." When you're baptized, they immersed all of you. When you love the Lord and die to self, you should be ready to take up your cross and follow Jesus.

How do we die to self and take up our cross? Romans 6:4-7 tells us, "We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin."

Do you believe in Christ? Have you repented and confessed the name of Christ before others? Have you been baptized into Christ? When you do so, you'll receive the forgiveness of sins, and you'll be added to the Lord's church, and you'll become a child of God. When you die and are buried with Christ in baptism, that old man of sin is crucified, and you start walking in newness of life. You are born again; you can enter the kingdom. Put your trust in Jesus and obey the gospel. Die to yourself and take up your cross today and live for the Lord from this day forward.

We do ask that you please get involved with a church of Christ. They love you and support our ministry, for which we're really very grateful. If you are looking for a healthy, Biblical church home, we'll be happy to help you find one. Well, we'll be back next week, Lord willing. So we ask that you keep searching God's Word with us and tell a friend about this program. Let them know what this program means to you. And as always we say to you, God bless you and we love you, and that's from all of us at In Search of the Lord's Way.

Love and Law

Can love and law coexist? Can people keep God's law lovingly? Today we're going to see how loving God and keeping His laws can work together. The psalmist said, "Open my eyes, that I may behold Wonderful things from Your law" (Psalm 119:18). We too need to open our eyes and our hearts to the law of God that we may behold wonderful things. Verse 24 says, "Your testimonies also are my delight; They are my counselors." When we take time to read and meditate on Scripture, we find wisdom and counsel that blesses us. No wonder this psalmist cried out in verse 97, "O how I love Your law! It's my meditation all the day." Is the Bible your delight and your meditation?

When the Pharisees followed their traditions and ignored God's law, the Lord Jesus said to them, "You hypocrites, rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you: 'This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far away from Me. But in vain do they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men'" (Matthew 15:7-9). The problem with the Pharisees and with many Christians is that by making human traditions they lose sight of God. Their hearts are so concerned with themselves that they have no room for God. People who focus on the instructions God gave us, however, are showing their love and respect for Him. God gave us His laws, to show His love for us and to protect us. The law of God isn't a burden or grievous; it is God's means of telling us what is evil and harmful. Love and law can coexist!

Our reading today comes from the Gospel According To Mark 3:31-35. "Then His mother and His brothers arrived, and standing outside they sent word to Him and called Him. A crowd was sitting around Him, and they said to Him, 'Behold, Your mother and Your brothers are outside looking for You.' Answering them, He said, 'Who are My mother and My brothers?' And looking about at those who were sitting around Him, He said, 'Behold My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of God, he is My brother and sister and mother.'"

The Lord Jesus teaches that by keeping the Lord's commandments, we show our love for Him and for the Father. The Lord said, "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments" (John 14:15). That seems so simple, and yet our society questions what the Lord says. People try to distance the need to obey from love. They think if someone keeps a commandment, they are merely observing a meaningless ritual or trying to earn salvation. It seems they may not understand obedience the way that the Lord Jesus understands it. Jesus understands obedience as a means of love.

Again, the Lord said, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him. He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine, but the Father's who sent Me" (John 14:23-24). The Father and the Lord Jesus make their home with those that they love, and they love the people who love them enough to keep their words. Love cares enough to obey. When people fail to keep those words, they show that they don't love the Lord. These words aren't merely the words of Jesus; they belong to the Father. The Lord Jesus, as we read a moment ago in Mark 3:33-35, asked, "'who are My mother and My brothers?' And looking about at those who were sitting around Him, He said, 'Behold My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of God, he is My brother and sister and mother.'"

The Lord Jesus also sets the example for us in how to love the Father. He said, "My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples. Just as the

Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love" (John 15:8-10). We must follow the Lord's example and prove our discipleship by keeping the Father's commandments.

Authentic Christianity, real Christianity; authentic obedience, real obedience is always motivated by the cross, by the love that we have for the Lord Jesus Christ. We can't assume that simply because someone obeys and insists on obedience that he is legalistic or a Pharisee. The apostle Paul said, "For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, and 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" (2 Corinthians 5:14-15). The love of Christ motivated Paul to live for Jesus. There are no selfish or self-serving motives here, but pure and authentic love for Christ. That is what God wants: love that keeps God's commandments, His laws.

Listen to what John wrote in Scripture. First John 2:3-6 says, "By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. The one who says, 'I have come to know Him,' and doesn't keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. And by this we know that we are in Him: the one who says he abides in Him, ought himself to walk in the same manner as He (that is Jesus) walked." To know the Lord in this passage means to have a close, loving relationship with Him. That relationship is determined by keeping commandments. "But whoever keeps His word, in him (in that person) the love of God has truly been perfected." Complete love for God means one is devoted to keeping the words of the Lord.

For the weak or nominal Christian keeping commandments is burdensome; it's a drudgery; but the authentic Christian delights in keeping God's commandments. First John 5:2-3 says, "By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and observe His commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome." True Christians find delight in God's commandments because they know that every commandment of God is for our good and our blessing. They realize that the words of Jesus lead to eternal life and to living abundantly.

Some say that a law of Christ doesn't exist, but the Scriptures speak differently. They've read some passages which speak a truth, but it doesn't give the whole truth. For instance, they might cite Romans 3:28, where Paul says, "For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law." They might cite Galatians 2:21, where Paul says, "I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness comes through the Law, then Christ died needlessly." But the context of both of these passages is speaking of the Law of God given by Moses. The Law of Moses surely does not justify anyone today under Christ. We should not confuse the Law of Moses with the commandments found in the New Testament that come from Jesus our Lord.

I find other people who cite Ephesians 2:8-10, which says, "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it's the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them." Truly we cannot earn our way to heaven, you can't and I can't. No one can say that we've done so well that God owes

us salvation. We shouldn't, however, confuse obedience to Christ with some effort that earns salvation apart from the grace of God. We do not earn our salvation, but we must respond to grace. Faith and obedience are conditions to receive the gift.

Let's say that I have placed a treasure worth millions of dollars in your back yard, and I tell you about it. I say, all you have to do is to go out there and dig it up, and you have to go to that exact location where I placed it. If you fail to dig or you dig in the wrong place, you won't enjoy the great gift. You must follow directions to enjoy the blessing. Who would imagine that because you did a little digging that you earned that treasure? Why, you didn't earn the treasure; you simply met the conditions of the gift. So it is with obedience and God; obedience is the proper response to the gift so that one may enjoy eternal life. Our salvation is a treasure beyond our ability to pay, and no one can work hard enough in a lifetime to earn an eternity with God; but if we fail to follow the Lord, we won't be able to enjoy His blessing.

Obedience is a response to the grace of God, not some work of merit that earns us salvation. While the grace of God is unmerited and undeserved, it's by no means unconditional. While God offers His grace to every man, not everyone accepts that gift. Many choose to serve the world and they lose sight of the price Jesus paid to save us.

The Scriptures do indeed speak of the law of Christ, and God expects faithful Christians to keep Christ's law. Listen to the inspired Word of God. Paul said, "For though I am free from all men, I've made myself a slave to all, so that I may win more. To the Jews I became as a Jew, so that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law though not being myself under the Law, so that I might win those who are under the Law; to those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, so that I might win those who are without law" (1 Corinthians 9:19-21). Paul was under the law of Christ. Galatians 6:2 says, "Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ."

Like Paul, James also understood that Christians are under a law. James 2:10-12 says, "For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all. For He who said, 'Do not commit adultery,' also said, 'do not commit murder.' Now if you do not commit adultery, but you do commit murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. So speak and so act as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty." Yes, the law of Christ is a law of liberty.

Obedience to the Lord is not an option; it's a necessity to please God. John 3:36 says, "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him." When people refuse to do as God instructs they cannot expect to have eternal life. Instead, they can expect to face the wrath of God. Everything that is in the gospel points to faith and obedience. Paul said that he "received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name (that is the name of Christ) among all the nations" (Romans 1:5). He wanted people not only to believe but also to obey.

In fact, the apostle Paul, in the book of Romans, tells how a slave of sin is freed from that sin and becomes a slave of righteousness. Our transformation into children of God is not by faith alone but includes our obedience. Romans 6:17-18 says, "But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed, and having been freed from sin, you became the slaves of righteousness." God set these slaves of sin free from that sin, when they became obedient from

their hearts to His teaching. If you believe the gospel, you will obey the gospel. Your salvation comes when you become obedient!

The apostle Paul wrote, “and to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power” (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9).

Jesus sets the example of obedience for us. Jesus obeyed the Father so that we can be saved. Hebrews 5:8-9 says, “Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered. And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation.” Jesus wasn’t a legalist or a Pharisee; He was obedient because He loved the Father. In fact, Jesus said, “but so that the world may know that I love the Father, I do exactly as the Father commanded Me” (John 14:31). Jesus not only obeyed the Father, He obeyed Him exactly. He did just as the Father commanded Him. He didn’t add to the instructions or take away from them. He carefully did exactly what the Father told Him to do. Doing things carefully and precisely as we’re instructed shows conscientiousness, carefulness and love. It means we take the Lord seriously and lovingly, just as Jesus did His Father.

Why does keeping the law of Christ matter? Because if we love Jesus, we’ll keep His commandments. We do love the Lord Jesus, and we know keeping His commandments shows our love for Him. We too can say, “but so that the world may know that we love the Father, we do exactly as the Father commands us.” Do you love the Father? Are you keeping His commandments? If you choose not to believe in Christ, you cannot be saved. The Lord said, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned” (Mark 16:15-16). If you love the Lord, you’ll trust in Him and believe the gospel. You can’t refuse to believe and be saved. That’s His teaching!

If you choose not to repent of your sins, you cannot be saved. The Lord said, “unless you repent, you will all likewise perish” (Luke 13:3). Jesus said, “If your right hand makes you stumble (that is to sin), cut it off and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to go into hell” (Matthew 5:30). If you love the Lord, you’ll forsake your sins. If you aren’t willing to repent, you’ll perish. That’s His teaching!

If you choose not to confess Jesus Christ as the Son of God, you’ll be cast aside by Christ. The Lord Jesus said, “Therefore everyone who confesses Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 10:32-33). That’s the Lord’s teaching.

If you refuse to be baptized into Christ, you can’t have forgiveness. Acts 2:38 says, “Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” Acts 22:16 says, “Now why do you delay? Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name.” That’s Scripture! If you love God, you won’t argue with God; you’ll obey His word. And you’ll obey quickly!

Do You Love Me?

God loves us, and He wants each of us to love Him. Today we're asking the question, "What does love ask me to do?" We know God is gracious and loving; He provides for us every blessing of life. We're so grateful to God for life and every good thing, that we feel the need to respond to Him. The Scriptures inform us how God has provided for us and how we should respond to Him. Everyone who gives love wants to be loved in return. When Jesus Christ sacrificed Himself upon the cross, He showed to us an undeniable love. We shouldn't be surprised, then, that the Lord Jesus wants our love and commitment.

I became a Christian because of the love of Jesus. His love, His power, His teaching, His wisdom, His truthfulness, His compassion won my heart and my loyalty. I became a Christian because of the grace and forgiveness Christ offered. I knew that I needed His grace. I wanted to go to heaven and I didn't want to be lost eternally. Jesus Christ bore a cross to demonstrate His love, and He gives us a cross to bear as well. Christianity is a daily commitment to the cause of Christ. The Lord Jesus said, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it. For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses or forfeits himself?" (Luke 9:23-25). Have you made a loving commitment to the Lord?

Our reading today comes from The Gospel According to John 21:15-17. "So when they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?' And he said to Him, 'Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.' He said to him, 'Tend My lambs.' He said to him a second time, 'Simon, son of John, do you love Me?' He said to Him, 'Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.' He said to him, 'Shepherd My sheep.' He said to him the third time, 'Simon, son of John, do you love Me?' Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, 'Do you love Me?' And he said to Him, 'Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You.' Jesus said to him, 'Tend My sheep.'"

Some people today believe in a "designer Christianity." They think they can make up their own blend of religion, and God will be satisfied. Some think God ought to be happy with anything that we offer to Him. It's almost as if God owed us and He ought to be happy that we give anything to Him in the way of service or worship. Many forget that God created us; we didn't create Him. They forget that we're dependent upon God, but He's not dependent upon us. They forget that Jesus died for our sins to rescue us from sin and spiritual death. Christianity isn't something that we design as we like; it's a revealed faith from God that we should follow. We owe our very soul's salvation to God. Our soul is worth more than the whole world. Let's get serious about our faith.

What do we owe Jesus? First, you and I owe Jesus our love. After Peter denied Jesus three times on the night that Jesus was taken into custody, Jesus later confronted Peter. The Bible records their conversation in John 21:15-17: "So when they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?' And he said to Him, 'Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.' And He said to him, 'Tend My lambs.' He said a second time, 'Simon, son of John, do you love Me?' And he said to Him, 'Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.' He said to him, 'Shepherd My sheep.' He said to him the third time, 'Simon, son of John, do you love Me?' Peter was grieved because He said to him

the third time, 'Do you love Me?' And he said to Him, 'Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You.' And Jesus said to him, 'Tend My sheep.'" Loving is so important, but I've learned that I have to learn to love somebody.

The Bible teaches us how we're supposed to show our love for Jesus. The Lord said, "If you love Me, you'll keep My commandments" (John 14:15). I can't claim to love the Lord and rebel against the things that Jesus teaches. I can't claim to love the Lord and then make fun of the will of God or claim the Lord doesn't teach the truth. How I love the Lord is by listening to his Word and obeying it.

If I love the Lord, I'll draw close to Him and I'll worship Him. I can't claim to love the Lord if I never take time to worship Him. The Bible says, "let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our assembling together, as the habit of some is, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near" (Hebrews 10:24-25). How can you say to the Lord that you really love Him if you never worship at church. What does that say to God? You might be pleased with yourself, but is God pleased with you? You can't love God on your own terms and never consider what God wants or desires. What kind of love is that?

Our worship must be real and come from our hearts. God knows our hearts. Some people go to religious concerts and they think they've worshiped because they heard something religious coming to them. But no matter how moving a concert is, God wants something different from you. What He wants is your heart, your lips, and your life, not as a spectator but as a participant. The Lord Jesus said, "But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth" (John 4:23-24). Genuine worship comes from our loving hearts and it honors the God of heaven. We must never confuse religious entertainment with worship. Genuine love seeks to honor the Lord.

Second, I owe Jesus my loyalty. Since I belong to Him, I ought to wear His name and never be ashamed to own Him as my Lord. Colossians 3:17 says, "And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him." As church members, we're the bride of Christ and we ought to wear His name. I don't understand why some separate the name of Christ from the church. We're blessed to wear the name of "Christian" and to be a member of the church that belongs to Jesus Christ. Jesus built the church, He purchased it with his own blood, and He serves as the head of the church, and is the Savior of the church. Why wouldn't the church want to wear his name? Why wouldn't a Christian honor Christ in every aspect of his life?

The Lord Jesus said, "For whoever is ashamed of Me and of My words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when He comes in His glory, and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels" (Luke 9:26). Some folks are simply ashamed to admit that they are Christians and that they go to church. They'd rather stay silent than to be ridiculed for their faith by the world. What kind of loyalty is that? The apostle Paul, who died for his faith said, "I have been crucified with Christ; and it's 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" (Galatians 2:20). That is loyalty to Jesus Christ! We need that kind of loyalty! Jesus needs to live in our hearts and in our lives.

We can't accept the world's morals and claim loyalty to Jesus. Our lives must show our faith. The Bible says, "Therefore be careful how you walk (that is how you live), not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil. So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is" (Ephesians 5:15-17). Unfortunately, some Christians live like they've never heard of Jesus or read a Bible. Their mouths are full of ungodly words and their actions show that they don't care about Jesus Christ. First John 2:6 says, "the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk (that is to live) in the same manner as Jesus walked (or lived)." If we're to be loyal to Christ, then let's live lives worthy of the name of Christ, and really be "Christians."

The Lord Jesus said, "No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he'll be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon (or money)" (Matthew 6:24). Some people live to make money, and nothing else matters. If you make money your god, then Jesus won't be. This is true of anything. You can't serve two masters faithfully. You'll decide to follow one and reject the other. If you wear the name of Christ, then serve Him. Don't let anything come between you and the Lord. The apostle Paul said, "So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him (that is the Lord). For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil" (2 Corinthians 5:9-10). Do you please the Lord Jesus Christ?

Third, I owe Jesus my obedience. He is the one and only LORD, and he is my LORD. Jesus led the way when it comes to obedience. Jesus was willing to sacrifice everything in order to accomplish the will of His Father. Jesus said, "For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life so that I may take it again. No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I received from My Father" (John 10:17-18). Jesus willingly laid down His life for our sakes because He received the commandment from His Father. He didn't argue with the Father; He didn't ask to be excused; and He didn't recommend someone else go to the cross. He acted because He had authority from the Father to act. His Father loved Him for it, and the Father loves us when we serve Him from a pure and loving heart.

Jesus asks us to obey him by taking up our cross. He knows that He has asked us to sacrifice ourselves in order to obey Him. Jesus himself knows what it is to sacrifice in order to obey. Obedience is necessary if we are to please God. Jesus once asked, "Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do what I tell you?" (Luke 6:46). If we want Jesus as our Savior, we must also recognize Him as our Lord. If we recognize Him as Lord, then we ought to do whatever He commands, go wherever He sends, and be whatever He asks. Obedience means we submit our will to His will. We don't excuse ourselves from our duty; we don't act on our own without God's authority. We don't argue with God; we serve Him.

Obedience means I'll follow Christ and keep His teaching regardless of the cost. I'll follow Jesus because I trust Him to save me and to lead me in the right path. I'll follow Jesus even when I don't understand. I don't know everything; and God sees and knows things I'll never know. I trust God, and I trust my Lord Jesus. I'll follow Jesus when it's easy and I'll follow Jesus when it's difficult. The straight and narrow road may not seem easy, but it's the only road to eternal life. I'll follow Jesus whether anybody else does or not. My friends may

not go with me; they may even ridicule me for following Jesus, but I won't take any other course than to follow my Lord.

Fourth, I owe Jesus my sacrifice. A chaplain was speaking to an injured soldier who was on a cot in a hospital. He said, "You have lost an arm in the great cause." "No," said the soldier with a smile. "I didn't lose an arm - I gave it." Jesus didn't lose His life at the cross; He gave it purposefully. He gave His head to a crown of thorns; He gave his back to a terrible scourging; He gave his side to a spear; He gave his hands and feet to the nails; He shed his blood for our sins; and He yielded up his spirit to God. Jesus knew what it was to give of Himself. The Bible says, "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich" (2 Corinthians 8:9). Again, 1 Peter 2:24 says, "He himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. For by his wounds you have been healed." Jesus made a very personal and very costly sacrifice so that we could have forgiveness and eternal life.

Why does all this matter? Because if we love the Lord, we'll show our love by our worship, our service, our obedience, and our sacrifice. We'll never stop being loyal. The Father sacrificed His beloved Son so that we might live. Many never give that a second thought. Do you? I certainly hope you will.

Have you considered the ultimate sacrifice that Christ made on your behalf? Will you commit your life to Him to serve Him? To become a Christian one must put his trust in the Lord and be willing to follow His teaching. People become Christians because they come to know the love of God through the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. Jesus said, "And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself" (John 12:32). Be drawn to Christ and His love. Be drawn to leave an old life of sin and take on a new life of righteousness and love. Be willing to confess the name of Jesus before others and to wear His name, so that everyone knows who you are and whose you are.

Then out of faith and love, be baptized into the death of Christ, where he shed His blood. That's when the blood of Jesus cleanses you from sin. Baptism unites us with Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection. Colossians 2:12-13 says, "having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions."

At baptism, we have a forgiven, new life. God raises us up with Christ, and the Lord adds us to His church. When we're baptized, God makes us his children and heirs of eternal life with Christ. We die with Christ in baptism so that we may live with him forever. I pray that you will give yourself to Him. I pray you'll put your trust in Him, repent of all your sins, confess Him, and be baptized. Don't put it off. Be baptized today!

Please get involved with a church of Christ. They love you and they support our ministry. And if you're looking for a healthy, Biblical church home, just know that we'll be happy to help you find one.