

James

Loving God, Loving Others

October 09, 2011

I. Introduction

- A. In our study of James, we saw that God introduced the requirement to love others as we love ourselves. He did this in relation to being impartial within the Body of Christ. He referred to this requirement of love with two phrases: The Royal Law, and the law of liberty.
- B. Today I want us to take a side trail and consider what it means to love our neighbor as ourselves. But to do that, we must also consider what it means to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength.
- C. Prayer
- D. **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?" [29] Jesus answered, "The foremost is, 'Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is one Lord; [30] 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.' [31] 'The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these." [32] The scribe said to Him, "Right, Teacher; You have truly stated that He is One, and there is no one else besides Him; [33] and to love Him with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as himself, is much more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices." [34] When Jesus saw that he had answered intelligently, He said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God."
- 1. God, in His great wisdom, not only presents two commandments on love, but He hangs the second on the first. You see, the first commandment is to love God above all else – then comes loving others as ourselves. The reason for this is because the second commandment rises out of the first. It finds its reason in the first. It gains its defining boundaries in the first. And it remains genuine as long as it is given because of the first. And what I mean by that is that our love for others remains genuine as love as we love them for God's sake, and not for our own sake.
- 2. Let me explain what I mean when I say that the commandment to love others as ourselves rises out of the commandment to love God supremely. Who or what we love the most, we please the most. This

means that who or what we love has a profound effect on the way we treat others – be they those who are nearest and dearest to us or those we have only just met.

3. So what is my point here? The natural outcome of loving God more than anyone and anything else in your life is living to please God more than anyone or anything else in your life. This means that when you love God the most, you will love others – not on the basis of how they are treating you, but on the basis of pleasing the One, that is God, whom you love the most. In other words, if you will love God more than yourself, and more than anyone or anything else in your life, then you will love others as God would have you love them – which is as you love yourself.
4. Now it is true that you can be self-centered and selfish and still treat others in loving ways – especially when you want something from them. But your loving ways will always be limited or restricted by your selfishness. In other words, you will only love others as much and as far as your self-centeredness will allow.
5. Therefore, God has given us not one, but two great commandments, and if we keep them in their proper order, we will not only love God more nearly as we ought, we will also love others as we love ourselves – for we will love them for God’s sake (whom we love the most) and not our own sake.

E. With these truths fresh in our mind, let us turn our attention to what it means to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength.

II. What It Means To Love God

A. Simply stated, to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength means two things.

1. **First**, to love God with **all** our heart, soul, mind and strength means to love Him with **all** our being or with **all** our energy or with **all** that we are and have.
 - a. In fact, the inclusion of the word “**ALL**” implies nothing is to be left over for loving anything else other than God. It is as if we are to love God so intentionally, so fervently, so sincerely, and with so much passion and energy that we have no intention or fervency or sincerity or passion or energy left over for loving anyone or anything else.
 - b. And yet in spite of the word “**ALL**” in relation to the measure of love we are to have for God, the scripture makes it plain that

the second commandment is just as important as the first: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

- c. This may make it seem like either God is exaggerating how much we are to love Him and doesn’t really mean the “**ALL**” or that there is a competition for supremacy between the commandment to love God supremely and the commandment to love others as ourselves. Yet neither is the case. In fact, the love we show to the least important people in our lives we show, not just to them, but also to God (**Matthew 25:31-46**).
- d. Therefore, to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength means to love Him above everyone and everything else so that nothing stands in the way of loving God supremely.
- 2. **Second**, to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength means loving Him for himself – which is significantly different from loving God for what He has done and is doing for us.
 - a. You see, to love God for any other reason than Himself – that is, to love Him for what He does for us or what He gives us – is to love something other than God more than God. Let me demonstrate this in two ways:
 - (1) First, when I love God for what He has done and is doing for me, the focus of my love is still “ME”, which means I still love myself the most and not God.
 - (2) Second, when I love God for what He has done and is doing for me, then it isn’t God I love, but what He is doing or giving to me.
 - b. Therefore, to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength means loving Him for himself.
 - c. Now, you may be thinking that loving God for himself seems impossible or unrealistic.
 - (1) After all, it seems that we all start our Christian life coming to God because of what He has done and will do for us. And what about the scriptures – don’t they speak at great length about what God has done, is doing, and will do for us? And besides that, He is often worshiped and exalted for His many and varied gifts to us.
 - (2) That is all true. And I am not saying we are to overlook or forget about the love He has and continues to bestow on us. Indeed, we ought to be eternally grateful for His love toward us. Yet at the same time, we can focus our attention on the fact that God is worthy of being loved for himself because of

His many attributes and qualities, such as His holiness, righteousness, love, essential goodness, and the fact that He is our Creator, our Lord, and our loving Father.

- B. However, it is my experience that very few Christians love God for himself. Most of us love God for what He has done for us and what He gives us. In saying this, I am not criticizing anyone here, for this is not wrong any more than it is wrong to be of grade school age, or of middle school age or of high school age. But if after growing into our adult years we continue to think, speak, behave, and love as a grade-schooler or middle schooler or even a high schooler, then we have a serious maturity problem that needs correcting. In the same way, if we continue on and on loving God for what He does for us and gives us instead of advancing toward loving Him for himself, we have a serious maturity problem that needs correcting.
1. With that being said, I want to give us as real a picture as I know to give of loving God from the first days of repentance and saving faith to the more mature years of living the Christian life.
 2. Since we begin life as self and flesh focused beings – that is, since we begin life looking out for our own well-being and seeking our own happiness, it is only natural that we begin the Christian life loving God for what He has done for us, what He is giving us, and what He will do for us. At this stage of our Christian life, we still love ourselves for our own sake. This means we are still looking out for ourselves, first and foremost, and even our Christian faith has more to do with what we are going to get out of it than what God is going to get from it. And so, we love God for our sake, and seek after the things and ways of God for the sake of our welfare and happiness.
 3. But changes begin to take place as a result of seeing the faithfulness of God in our lives over a period of time. It is in this stage that our faith grows to the point of becoming convinced that God is good and we are safe in His hands. And it is in this stage that we see character traits and qualities of God that motivate and compel us to adore and worship Him for that which is beyond what He does for us and gives us. In other words, our focus of love begins to change from being primarily self-oriented to being a combination of self and God oriented.
 4. We begin to move out of this second stage when we are convinced that the only reason we disobey God is because we do not love God, and we, almost desperately, want to love God as we ought. We continue moving out of the second stage and into the third as we value dying

to self and denying self for God's sake, and when in true humility we realize we are nothing and He is everything. We press forward into the third stage as we kill off and put away the last of our fleshly sins – whatever they may be – and vigilantly guard our mind so that fleshly desires and unholy thoughts no longer have their way with us. Now I am not saying we have become perfect at this point, but I am saying that we have come to the place where we no longer treasure any sin in any way that might motivate us to willfully return to them – even on rare occasion.

- a. It is at this point in our spiritual growth that our own selfishness seems as abhorrent to us as the selfishness of others. It is here that the glory of God and the fulfilment of His will becomes a precious treasure. It is at this stage that we genuinely delight in searching the scriptures, meditating on God's word, praying often, and vigilantly guarding against returning to old, sinful ways.
 - b. And as we grow in these things, we discover that we are drawing near to God and He is drawing near to us in ways we never before imagined. And it is in this new found intimacy with God that we begin to find great joy and inward satisfaction in ongoing fellowship and communing with God. All this brings us to that place where we find ourselves loving God for himself.
5. Now let me be clear about this. Loving God for himself does not mean we no longer see or appreciate or give thanks for what God has done and is doing for us. The truth is, we cannot be in love with God without seeing His great love for us demonstrated in thousands of ways day by day, and year after year. We cannot see ourselves as we are without weeping over the undeserved gift of God's grace and mercy shown to us over and over again. We cannot look back at our past without thanking God, repeatedly, for not giving up on us or abandoning us to our foolishness and sinful ways. And we cannot see the beauty of our world without wanting to praise Him for such a thoughtful, generous creation.
- a. And yet, in spite of seeing and being deeply grateful for all that God has done and is doing, that is no longer the basis for our love. Why? Because in this third stage, selfishness is mostly dead, our flesh is primarily subdued, humility is strong, and we are no longer important because God is everything to us.

- b. We sing the song, HE IS MY ALL IN ALL. Well, in this stage, you will not only sing the song, you will experientially know the truth of that song.

III. What It Means to Love Our Neighbor As Ourselves – we will pick up this side of the two great commandments in our next teaching time as we give further consideration to this matter of love as talked about in the book of James.

IV. Conclusion

- A. As a reminder – we obey God when we love Him. If we find ourselves deliberately or repeatedly disobeying God, it means we do not yet love Him. These are not my words, but the words of God's dear son, Jesus Christ. Read John 14.
- B. Now to sum up: It seems most, if not all of us begin the Christian life loving God for what He has done, is doing, and will do for us. Though this is acceptable, it is not desirable for us to remain in this condition. Our goal as Christians should be to love God with **all** our heart, soul, mind, and strength, so that we come to love God for himself. May we press on toward this goal, doing those things that are necessary to arrive at this goal in our lifetime.