

3

Love God

“Loving God with all of our heart, mind, strength, and soul” is seeking the highest good and glory of God, in all circumstances, at all times, by God’s power.

If Christians had to pick just one verse of the Bible to be written to us, we would undoubtedly respond, “I’m glad we have John 3:16.” In it, we have the plan of God, the expression of the plan, and the execution of the plan to save us. We have the Good News—the gospel. The verse teaches three key things: 1) God loves people. 2) Love prompted God to sacrifice His Son for us. 3) Through love, God saves believers from perishing.

With His saving gospel, God has dealt with our utmost problem: our sin problem. This problem of ours gives each one of us a death sentence. People of faith are freed from death and become entirely secure because of what God did out of His love.

But God didn’t stop at just getting us to Heaven; God continues daily to emphasize love in everything He does. In Matthew 22:34-40, Jesus taught that *all* of the Old Testament commands flowed out of the two greatest commandments. The Bible teaches,

Now when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees,

THE WAY OF DISCIPLESHIP

they assembled together. And one of them, an expert in religious law, asked him a question to test him: “Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?” Jesus said to him, “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. The second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the law and the prophets depend on these two commandments” (Matthew 22:34-40).

The 613 commands of the Old Testament may be categorized into moral laws, civil laws, and ceremonial laws. However, all of these commands that the Jews were accountable for were summed up by Jesus with, love God with all of your being (Deuteronomy 30:6) and love your neighbor as yourself.

God’s Secure Love

How have you loved God last week? How about last year? When I look at my own life, I am usually disappointed. I never feel like I am “loving the Lord as well as I should.” Instead, I empathize with Paul, “For I do not do the good I want, but I do the very evil I do not want!” (Romans 7:19).

While we will continue to fall short every day, we should strive to have daily, renewed commitments to holiness and love. Jesus taught that, obedience is the way in which we express love to God. Specifically He said, “If you love me, you will obey my commandments.” (John 14:15). Consequently, the two greatest commandments should be our regular focus. We should not allow ourselves to become complacent in our weakness, but instead continue to keep holy love with obedience as our continual goals.

At times, as we live our lives, we will make big mistakes and may even fail in a way we never imagined possible. We then may wrongly allow our emotions to ask the question, “Does God still love us?” We should be on guard for this. Our emotions do not determine God’s love; He does love us. How much? 100%. For “No one has greater love than this—that one lays down his life for his friends” (John 15:13). We need to be convinced that we cannot earn more of or all of His love. For “He saved us not by works of righteousness that we have

LOVE GOD

done but on the basis of his mercy, through the washing of the new birth and the renewing of the Holy Spirit” (Titus 3:5). His love and gift of eternal life are not based on what we do. These are given to us even in our unmerited, undeserving attitudes and actions. “God demonstrates his own love for us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Roman 5:8b).

Are you trying to work for and be “good enough for” God’s love? The love He has for His people was demonstrated for us in His Son’s death. He cannot—nor will He—prove it more! “Because Christ also suffered *once for sins*, the just for the unjust, to bring you to God” (1 Peter 3:18a; emphasis added). We have God’s love; be loved! Feel love if possible. Listen to the words of Spurgeon,

*“Some Christians [...] when their spirit is lively and their hopes bright, they think God accepts them, for they feel so high, so heavenly-minded, so drawn above the earth! But when their souls cleave to the dust, they are the victims of the fear that they are no longer accepted. If they could only see that all their high joys do not exalt them, and all their low despondencies do not really depress them in their Father’s sight, but that they stand accepted in One who never alters.”*³

Love Results in Actions of Obedience

Think about someone you love deeply. When we love someone, we do things out of joy for them; it is not a chore to do what that someone desires when we have loving feelings toward them. “Love loves to love.”⁴

Likewise, our willingness to obey God will be directly associated with our love for Him. Our lack of obedience *always reflects our lack of love*. John 14:15 is the proof text for this truth, “If you love me, *you will obey* my commandments” (emphasis mine). Notice, love comes first, then action. The verse explains

³ “Consider What Your Actions Say,” Truth for Life from Charles H. Spurgeon, accessed Sept. 24, 2019, <https://www.truthforlife.org/resources/daily-devotionals/09/24/1/>.

⁴ 33 Series Video, “Die to Live,” A Man and His Marriage, Volume 5, part 2, presented at Fellowship of Huntsville Church, Sept. 16, 2019.

the cause and effect between love (our motives and desires) and actions (the evidence and expression of our love). We continuously need to recommit to loving God; we can lose this drive quickly due to our fallen nature.

Live to Please God

God communicates with us through our minds, our wills, and our emotions.⁵ All of these are the parts of our being which we line up to God's will—through His power. When we line up our lives to God's will, the Bible teaches that we please God.⁶ Paul wrote, "Therefore I exhort [or command] you, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a sacrifice—alive, holy, and *pleasing to God*—which is your reasonable service" (Romans 12:1-2, emphasis mine). "So then whether we are alive or away, we make it our ambition *to please him*" (2 Corinthians 5:9, emphasis mine). Also, "And *do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God*, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption" (Ephesians 4:30, emphasis mine). The Bible is replete with commands for us to please God. It should govern our thought life and actions.

The first step to pleasing God is to better understand what *He wants us to do*. We need to love God—yes. We must also learn from God the specifics or the "how to" of those expressions.

It is best—in my view—that we should pursue aligning our lives to please God by starting each day reading the Bible and praying. This early, disciplined approach seems to focus the mind and heart toward the most Loving Person right away. Through the living words of the Bible, God prioritizes our human interactions on love throughout the day.

Some may say, "I don't have time." We simply need to be a disciplined person (and maybe wake up earlier). There is no better time. We have time for what we make time for. Reading a chapter a day takes five minutes; do

⁵ A.W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God* (Camp Hill, Pennsylvania: Christian Publications, Inc., 1982), 13.

⁶ Some say we actually cannot please God. Instead, they would explain that "God is unemotional toward us." There are significant theological reasons and implications, no matter one's perspective, on this idea. Still, this truth remains: the Bible teaches that *we need to live our lives with pleasing God as a motivation*.

LOVE GOD

it. It doesn't take much to fall out of love with Him. It is not easy to stay aligned with God. By contrast, satisfying our selfish selves feels natural and *much easier*. Our old nature, our flesh, desires everything that pleases it, so setting our focus each morning on God helps us to orientate our thoughts and activities away from self and toward the loving selflessness.

Setting our minds on God in the morning, however, is not enough. We must focus on, "How do I please God in this situation, in this moment?" As our focus becomes persistent, as the love for God becomes a disciplined priority, we will see the impact in our lives. We will see all the tangible ways in which the love of God forms meaningful thoughts and actions with others. We will begin to think of God more concretely and be more convinced in the faith. To quote Spurgeon here again:

"We should not be satisfied with a superficial hope that Jesus loves us and with a bare trust that we love Him. The old saints did not generally speak with 'buts' and 'ifs' and 'hopes' and 'trusts,' but they spoke positively and plainly. 'I know whom I have believed,' said Paul. 'I know that my Redeemer lives,' said Job. Get definite knowledge of your love for Jesus, and do not be satisfied until you can speak of your interest in Him as a reality."⁷

Our love will grow towards God as our concrete beliefs in Him and His ways grow.

Scripture Passage

Luke 10:25-28

⁷ "True Love For Christ", Truth for Life from Charles H. Spurgeon, accessed Sept. 3, 2019, <https://www.truthforlife.org/resources/daily-devotionals/09/03/1/>.

THE WAY OF DISCIPLESHIP

Questions

- 1) What is keeping you from loving God with all of your being right now? Confess those things now.

- 2) Are there any long term issues that are keeping you at a distance with God?

- 3) Are you living in a sacrificial way with God? How?

Aim Point

- 1) Confess where you have fallen short to God in your love toward Him. Be honest. This is what Tozer wrote about in regard to the necessary, naked honesty with the Lord: “Let the inquiring Christian trample under foot every slippery trick of the deceitful heart and insist upon frank and open relations with the Lord.”⁸

- 2) Make God’s word a priority; it is essential to life. If you are skeptical, give it a try for a month or two. I believe you will see the impact quickly. Put your Bible on the breakfast table; read the Bible out loud (to your children if you have them). If you have family members living with you, make His word a priority in the family home. Lead.

- 3) If you feel abandoned by God right now, read the Psalms in the mornings over the next week. What you will find is people throughout time have had a hard time understanding God’s ways. At times they felt abandoned by God (Psalm 9:12), even rejected (Psalm 27:9), they felt that God was not listening

⁸ A.W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God* (Camp Hill, Pennsylvania: Christian Publications, Inc., 1982), 29.

LOVE GOD

to them (Psalm 30:10), etc. However, these Psalms always end with not losing hope or faith in God. They always turn to faith and praise.

4) Pray. Talk to the Lord as you do any other person—especially to Him. We are hoping to fuse our personalities with the Great Personality. We forget that God is a person with whom we should regularly be interacting with. Instead, we choose the lesser relationship; we often are just learning *about Him*.

5) Let us never lose our love toward the Lord, but when we do, let us get back in His word quickly and get to praising God in song and prayer. Let us set our hope on The Day that we will all rejoice together with Him as the Apostle Peter taught the Church.

6) A great, classic book is A.W. Tozer's, *The Pursuit of God*. I wholehearted recommend it for rethinking or remembering our love for God.