

ARM Prison Outreach International

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"God Loves You. Do You Love God? Really Love God?"

A message about loving God appropriate for "Valentine" season!

Editor's Note: This "MM" is the 2nd email sermon of 2004 in a series that ARM is sending as an encouragement to preachers and Christian workers around the world. Valentine's day is coming! It gives us a great chance to teach about God's love for us and our love for God. This message develops the idea that really loving God means more than lip service! Credit is given to Larry Farthing (yes, he is my brother) for this pertinent message. It is my prayer that this message will encourage you and those you teach. Use it as a devotional, edit it, share it, use it or components of it! May God bless your labors! -- Rod Farthing, Development Director

"God Loves You. Do You Love God? Really Love God?"

TEXT: Matthew 22:36-40

Jesus had just stopped the Sadducees in their theological tracks with irrefutable evidence of life after death. Now the Pharisees take another shot at Him. They send one from their number who is an expert in the Law to ask Jesus which of the commandments was of most importance, or the "*greatest.*"

This was a question discussed regularly in rabbinic circles. Among the 613 commandments they had gleaned from Scripture (365 negative and 248 positive), they differentiated between "light" and "heavy" commandments. However, the distinction was not intended to suggest that some commandments were unimportant or could be neglected. All were to be given equal weight.

So if Jesus' response implied that certain commandments were unimportant, they would have cause to publicly repudiate Him. So He answered with the words of Moses in Deuteronomy 6:5 -- words that the Pharisees themselves held in utmost esteem.

Then He quoted from Leviticus 19:18 regarding the command to love our neighbor as ourselves, and added, "*All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.*"

But before we get into this command to love God, think of the love God has for us and has shown for us. This well-loved hymn wonderfully describes God's love:

The love of God is greater far Than tongue or pen can ever tell;
It goes beyond the highest star, And reaches to the lowest hell.

The guilty pair, bowed down with care, God gave His Son to win;
His erring child He reconciled, And pardoned from his sin.

Could we with ink the ocean fill, And were the skies of parchment made;
Were ev'ry stalk on earth a quill, And ev'ry man a scribe by trade,
To write the love of God above Would drain the ocean dry,
Nor could the scroll contain the whole, Tho' stretched from sky to sky.

O love of God, how rich and pure! How measureless and strong!
It shall forevermore endure The saints' and angels' song.

But I want us to focus this morning on OUR love for God. What does it mean to love God?

First of all, to love God means to

I. OBEY HIM.

God laid the groundwork when He instructed the Israelites through Moses in Deut 6:1-8

- 1 These are the commands, decrees and laws the LORD your God directed me to teach you to observe in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess,
- 2 so that you, your children and their children after them may fear the LORD your God as long as you live by keeping all his decrees and commands that I give you, and so that you may enjoy long life.
- 3 Hear, O Israel, and be careful to obey so that it may go well with you and that you may increase greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, just as the LORD, the God of your fathers, promised you.
- 4 Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.
- 5 Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.
- 6 These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts.
- 7 Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.
- 8 Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads.

Throughout Scripture, one thing is unmistakably clear: the primary message is obedience to God. Even Jesus said, *"If you love me, you will obey what I command you."* Paul wrote in 1 Thessalonians 1:8 that when Jesus returns, *"He (God) will punish those who do not know God and who do not OBEY the gospel of our Lord Jesus."* The writer of the letter to the Hebrew Christians says about willful disobedience: *"If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God"* (10:26,27).

In order to learn God's commands, the Israelites would memorize them, talk about them night and day, and teach them to their children. To aid them in being obedient, they would wear things on their hands and foreheads that had the commandments of God written on them. They would write them on their door frames and gates.

We, too, need to learn God's laws, and we need reminders. We need to be in the Word, both privately and with others. We need to memorize it. We need to develop aids to help us remember. I heard about one man who put up "Post It" notes on which he had written Scripture verses all over his office and car.

So to love God means to obey Him. Consider these six passages in the book of Deuteronomy that tie love and obedience together:

1. 10:12,13 - *"And now, O Israel, what does the Lord your God ask of you but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to observe the Lord's commands and decrees that I am giving you today for your own good."*

2. 11:13 - *"So if you faithfully obey the commands I am giving you today -- to love the Lord your God and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul."*

3. 11:22 - *"If you carefully observe all these commands I am giving you to follow -- to love the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways and to hold fast to him."*

4. 19:9 - *"Because you carefully follow all these laws I command you today -- to love the Lord your God and to walk always in his ways."*

5. 30:6,8 - *"The Lord your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants, so that you may love him with all your heart and with all your soul, and live. . . . You will again obey the Lord and follow all his commands I am giving you today."*

6. 30:19,20 - *"This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the Lord your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For the Lord is your life, and he will give you many years in the land he swore to give to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob."*

It should not surprise us that obedience to God's law is a major part of loving Him. After all, Jesus said in John 14:21, *"Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him."* And the beloved apostle John wrote in 1 John 5:3, *"This is love for God: to obey his commands."* Do you love Him?

Second, to love God means to

II. OBEY HIM WHOLEHEARTEDLY.

The Bible describes our obedience to God in terms of great dedication and intensity -- with wholehearted-ness. That being true, along with obedience being a major part of loving God, it follows that we are to obey Him with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. In other words, we are to put everything we have into it.

However, our love for God tends to be in a "cruise-control" mode. You know what "cruise-control" on a car is, don't you? It's a great piece of equipment.

It's not so good for our relationship with God, though. For many of us, once we have arrived at a comfortable "obedience" level, we push the "cruise-control" button in our hearts, ease back and relax.

On the contrary, race-car drivers would never use cruise-control on the track. They want to win the race. They want to go as fast as they can. They're totally focused on their driving, watching out for hazardous situations and looking for every opportunity to gain time and speed. They are never satisfied; they're always striving to do better.

I think this is what it means to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. In the words of Hebrews 12:14 we are to *"make every effort...to be holy,"* and in the words of the apostle Peter, to *"make every effort"* to add to our faith the various facets of Christian character (2 Peter 1:5-7).

Are you giving the Christian life all you've got, or are you one of those who have found a comfortable obedience "cruise-control"?

Third, to love God means to

III. BE MOTIVATED BY LOVE.

Love is a verb, not just a feeling. In fact, godly love can love regardless of feeling.

Love is also a motive. Our love for God must not only be shown by obedience; our love for God must be our MOTIVATION for obedience. What's more, our motivation for our obedience to God may very well be more important than the LEVEL of our obedience. If we obey Him only because we fear Him, or because we want something from Him, or because we want to look good and pious in the eyes of others, we are not motivated by love. Paul said in 2 Corinthians 5:14, *"For Christ's love compels us..."* Love is to be our motivation.

In John 21:16 Jesus asked Peter, *"...do you truly love me?"* Peter answered, *"Yes, Lord, you know that I love you."* Jesus said to him, *"Take care of my sheep."* Where are the sheep? In the flock. What is the flock of God? The church. If we really love God, we're going to be taking care of the church.

I John 4:20 says, *"If anyone says, 'I love God,' yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen."*

Do you love God?

Finally, to love God means

IV. TO GROW SPIRITUALLY.

1 John 4:19 says, *"We love because he first loved us."*

Think about this: Our genuine love for God can only be a response to His love for us. If we do not believe God loves us, we cannot love Him. To love God, we must believe that God is for us, not against us, and that He accepts us as His child, not as a slave.

We must grow in our realization of His love for us and in our love for Him if we are to love Him as we should.

Here's how we can grow:

1. Continually confess our sins according to 1 John 1:9. We cannot love God if we think we are under His judgment and condemnation. When we confess and receive His forgiveness, we are free to love Him with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength;
2. We must grow in faith by trusting God more -- by taking Him at His word -- by walking by faith, not by sight. Our love can only grow as faith grows.

So I ask again: Do you love God? Are you growing in faith and love?

CONCLUSION:

A woman was married to a man whom she did not love. He made her get up at five o'clock each morning and serve him breakfast at six. He ordered her to wait on him hand and foot. He made her life miserable by his demands. Finally, he died.

She married again, this time, to someone she loved very much. One day while cleaning out some old papers, she came across the strict set of rules her former husband had written out for her to obey. Carefully she read them over: "Get up at five. Serve breakfast at six." On and on she read. Then she stopped and thought: "I'm doing for my new husband exactly what my former husband demanded, but I am glad to do it. In fact, I can't do enough for him. What's the difference. I know. I LOVE HIM."

God isn't difficult to obey at all when we really love Him with all our heart and soul.

Do you love Him with all your heart and soul?