

THE GREATEST COMMAND OF ALL (Part 2)

Last week we noted that the first and great commandment is to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. In order for us to love God, however, I believe we need to first understand **God's love to us**. I John 4:19 reminds us of that very thing and I remember it being the first verse we taught our oldest son—when he was a just a little boy—to memorize. I John 4:19 simply says “We love Him, because He first loved us.”

In light of that truth, we spent 4 weeks contemplating God's love to us. First, our spiritual life is rooted and grounded in love. We saw in Ephesians 3 that God's love is the “soil” in which our spiritual life grows, as well as the foundation on which our spiritual life rests. In fact, we would not even **have** spiritual life if God did not first love us and send His Son to die in our place so we could be forgiven of our sins and be declared righteous.

We also noted from Ephesians 3 that it is God's will for us to pursue knowing the love of Christ—even though it is impossible to fully grasp. Paul prayed that the Ephesian believers “May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge...” (Ephesians 3:18-19a).

What is the **breadth**—the width—of Christ's love?

--It is wide enough to reach any person—regardless of **where** they are and what kind they are

What is the **length** of Christ's love?

--It began in eternity past and will continue in the future through all eternity. In other words, it will never end!

What is the **depth** of Christ's love?

--It can reach down to the lowest of the low—the worst of the worse. Christ can love and forgive those we would consider unlovable and unforgiveable.

--Christ's love is also deep in regards to how it satisfies. It can make up for the rejection we face from others—or the heart-brokenness we endure when we lose a loved one—and can bring peace in the pains and trials of life.

What is the **height** of Christ's love?

--It's height—it's greatness and loftiness—is higher than our finite minds can comprehend. It is also high in what it does for us—the exalted position it places us in. Because God places us **in Christ**, we are considered as already seated “together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Eph 2:6).

Even though we will never fully comprehend the dimensions of Christ's love, it is still a worthy pursuit. When my wife and I go to Yosemite National Park, we may not get to the final destination of each and every hike. If we do get to the end, the scenery will be worth it. But if we don't, the scenery along the way will **still** be worth it! And so it is with our pursuit of seeking to know better the love of Christ—the “chase” will be worth it, even if we don't catch the prize! One result of better knowing Christ's love to us is that we will love Him more in return.

Take your Bibles and turn again to Mark 12 and follow along as I read verses 28-34. Last week we saw the priority and properness of this commandment; this morning we will focus on the particulars of the commandment.

Why should we love God? First, in way of review, because it is...

1. The Priority Commandment—there is no greater commandment

--It is a commandment—not a suggestion

--It is the priority commandment—not a second or third choice

Jesus stressed the priority—the “firstness” of importance—in His answer to the scribe who posed the question

--v 29 “The **first** of **all** the commandments is...”

--v 30 (end) “this is the **first** commandment.”

--v 31 (end) “There is none other commandment **greater** than these.”

--It is a personal commandment—not just for some

“And **thou**—you—shalt love the Lord thy God...” If God is your God, you are to love Him with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. Are you doing that?

Reason #1 to love God—because it is the priority commandment. Reason #2? Because of...

2. The Properness of the Commandment—there is no greater God

The properness of the commandment—the rightness of loving God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength—is based on at least two things. First, it is based on...

--The Oneness of God. Verse 29 (middle) “Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is **one** Lord:” God does not want to be the **first** God of many gods in your life—He wants to be the **only** God in our life because He is the only God in the world!

--The properness of this command is also based on the worthiness of God. God alone created us, God alone redeemed us and made us His child, God alone keeps us alive, God alone will take us to heaven—His home—to be with Him, so God alone deserves all glory and praise. God is the only Being worthy of being loved with all our heart, and all our soul, and all our mind, and all our strength so it is obviously a proper command for us to do just that.

Why love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength? Because it is the priority commandment—and because it is proper for us to do so. We are not just told “why,” however—we are also told **how**.

3. The Particulars of the Commandment—how we are to love God

A. Meaning of love

If we are going to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, it is important to understand what that means. What does it mean to love God? First, a book definition.

i. A “precise” definition

The word “love” in our text is translated from the Greek word “*agapao*” and is the highest and noblest form of love in the Greek language. “*Agapao*” is a verb that describes God’s love **to us**—an unconditional kind of love that continues even when the one loved is unresponsive, unkind, unlovable, and unworthy. I’m not sure that that is a workable definition, though, when it comes to our love for God because God **is** responsive...and **is** kind...and **is** lovable...and **is** worthy.

ii. A practical definition

An easier definition—at least in my mind—is to think of loving God as **giving to God**. Does not God often define “love” as giving? Consider John 3:16 “For God so loved the world, that he **gave** his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

John 15:13 “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.”

Romans 5:8 “But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”

Ephesians 5:25 “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and **gave** Himself for it;”

I John 3:16 “Hereby perceive we the love of God, because He laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.”

I John 4:10 “Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.”

Since to love God is **to give to God**, what is it that God wants us to give Him? Jesus gives us the answer here in verse 30. Here we have the manner—the way—we are to love God.

B. The manner of loving God

How are we to love God? With all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. Before I attempt to explain these individually, it is important to stress from the beginning that there is some overlap between these words—and no 100% agreement as to how they are being used here. In fact, one commentator wrote “much unprofitable labor has been expended in the endeavor to limit their exact sense.” One example of overlap is seen when we compare “heart” and “soul.” In this text, “heart” comes from the Greek word “*kardia*” which can mean “inner self.” “Soul”—translated from the Greek word “*psuchay*”—also means “self, inner self, one’s inmost being.” So right out of the gate we have two words used—heart and soul—that have similar meanings. In spite of the overlap, though, I believe there is enough of a distinction for us to look at them individually.

i. Heart

Barnes writes: “To love Him with all the heart is to **fix the affections supremely on Him, more strongly than on anything else**, and to be willing to give up all that we hold dear at His command...” Let’s think about the first part of what Barnes says—“fix the affections supremely on Him, more strongly than on anything else...”

--First, there is Biblical support to make such a claim.

Psalms 73:25 “Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee.”

Colossians 3:2 “Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.”

--Our affections are to be set supremely on God more than on anything else. What would that look like? Here’s one way to find out if our affections are set supremely on God. How would you react if....

--You lost all your possessions on one day?

I’m sure I’m not the only one who has seen interviews on television of people who had just lost everything in a fire or flood. Although upset and sad, many of them are thankful because they still had their family.

--How would you react if you lost your only child? We have a couple of one-child families here and I can’t imagine the pain it would cause if one of these families were to lose that child.

--How would you react if you had multiple children—and lost them all on the same day?

--How would you react if you lost your health—if you became paralyzed from the waist down and were wheel-chair bound...or blind...or unable to talk?

Many of the things I just described happened to Job. He lost all his possessions—and all 10 of his children—on the same day. Not long afterward he lost his health and was so miserable, he wished he would die. How would we react if all those things were to happen to us? The truth is that we don’t really know how we would react until we were put in that situation. It would most certainly try our faith—and our love toward God. God calls us to love Him in spite of the loss of all these things.

Loving God with all our heart involves more than just how we handle losses, though, as Barnes points out in the second part of his definition: **“to be willing to give up all that we hold dear at His command.”** Is there a Biblical basis for suggesting that that is what loving God with our hearts will look like? There certainly is!

--In Gen 22, we see Abraham’s affections fixed supremely on God when he was willing to offer up Isaac

--We see Jesus teaching that in **Matthew 10:37** “He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.”

--And we see Paul’s willingness to “count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Jesus Christ my Lord” (**Phil 3:8**).

What are we willing to give up to put God first in our lives? On Feb 5th—not quite 2 months ago—Maya Moore announced that she would not be playing professional basketball for the Minnesota Lynx in 2019. Who is Maya Moore? Maya Moore is considered by many as one of the best women to ever play in the WNBA. In college, she was first-team All-American all 4 years, her team won 2 national championships, and twice she was named College Player of the Year. In the WNBA she has won 4 championships, was rookie of the year, has been an MVP and Finals MVP once and has won 2 Olympic gold medals.

Why is she taking a break from basketball? Here’s what she said in her announcement: "There are different ways to measure success. The success that I've been a part of in basketball truly blows my mind every time I think about it. But the main way I measure success in life is something I don't often get to emphasize explicitly through pro ball. I measure success by asking, 'Am I living out my purpose?' I learned a long time ago that my purpose is to **know Jesus and to make Him known.**"

Does Maya Moore love basketball? She certainly does or she would never have put in the work that she did to become successful at it! But she also loves God and was led by God to give up something she loved in order to put Him first. She is putting into practice what it means to love God with all her heart. Are we willing to give up something near-and-dear to our hearts if God asked us to?

Not only are we to love God by fixing our affections supremely on Him, we are also to love Him with all our...

ii. Soul

To love God with our soul is to love Him with our entire **life** and be willing to give it up for Him. It is more than just giving up a passion like a career or a hobby—it is a willingness to die for Him.

--Again, this is something Jesus taught. **Luke 9:23-24** “And He said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it.”

--Paul practiced it. **Acts 20:24** “But none of these things move me, **neither count I my life dear unto myself**, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God.”

--Countless thousands—if not millions—have been martyred for the cause of Christ. Many have died on the rack—or burned at the stake—for refusing to deny their faith in Christ.

--Still others have knowingly surrendered their physical lives by serving God in places where they knew they would die. Such was the case of Moravian missionaries in the early 1800’s that willingly entered leper colonies in Africa. They were compelled by God to bring lepers the gospel and did so knowing that they would die there. The “beauty” of it—if I can use that term—was that more missionaries were ready to take their place when they did die!

We are to love God with all our heart and with all our soul; we are also to love Him with all our...

iii. Mind. We are to love God with our minds—our intellect. How do we **give** God our minds? -

--Submit to His teaching—not our reasoning and wisdom.

--Seek to know what He says to us and desires from us.

--Strive to use our minds in a way that draws us closer to Him.

Think of how **often** and how **long** we use our minds for that which has no eternal value. Think of how often our minds drift to **us** and our plans and not God and His plans. How we need to bring our thoughts captive as Paul writes in **II Corinthians 10:5** "Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ;"

We are to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. Is strength a fourth way—or the **effort** by which we are to love in the other 3 ways? I tend to think it speaks more to the measure—the quantity and quality—of how we love God with our heart, soul, and mind.

C. The Measure of our love to God

What is the degree with which we are to love God with all our heart, soul, and mind?

--Regarding **quantity**, it is **ALL** which is emphasized 4 times in this verse. We are not to give **part** of our heart, part of our soul, and part of our mind to God—we are to give **all** of it.

--Regarding **quality**, it is to be our best. We are to give these things to God whole-heartedly.

Colossians 3:23 "And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men;"

I'd like to close with a quote from Spurgeon that I have for you in your bulletin:

"Now, what man ever kept this commandment? Surely, none; and no man ever can keep it. Hence, then, the necessity of a Saviour. O! that we might by this commandment be smitten to the earth, that our self-righteousness may be broken in pieces by this great hammer of "the first and great commandment!" But oh! my brethren, how may we wish that we could keep it! for, could we keep this command intact, unbroken, it would be a heaven below. The happiest of creatures are those that are the most holy, and that unreservedly love God."

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS:

1. First and foremost, are you a child of God? As Spurgeon pointed out in the quote we just looked at, no one has kept—or can keep—this commandment perfectly. We all fail miserably in this regard and are consequently guilty—and in need of forgiveness.

2. Child of God—do you love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength? We often don't, do we—but we should. What is God speaking to you about needing to surrender to Him this morning. Let Him have His way in your heart, your soul, and your mind. Don't be half-hearted in your love to Him—do it with all your energy!