

# LOVE THE LORD THY GOD...

The scriptures are very clear. The people of God who are called by His name are to love Him with all their heart, soul and might. This is expressed in Deuteronomy 6:4-5 where it states, *"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD: And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might."*

This thought is repeated in Deuteronomy 11:1; 19:9; 30:6; 30:16 and 30:20. Jesus reiterated this throughout His ministry to those who would be His disciples. He declares this as the "first great commandment" as found in Matthew 22:37, *"Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment."*

Notice that Jesus refers to it as a "commandment." The word "commandment" comes from the Hebrew word *"mitzvah"* in the Jewish scriptures and the Greek word, *"entolē"* in the New Testament. Both words refer to a law, precept or ordinance that has been established and given by one in authority. The Hebrew implies it as "a good deed" that will bring God's blessings. Unfortunately, today, whenever we hear these words we immediately think of bondage and legalism. Actually, it is quite the opposite. As the Hebrew alludes to, these "commandments," if adhered to and lived out, will bring God's blessings upon the individual.

As we all know, a society without law and order becomes a society filled with "lawlessness." The result of lawlessness is everyone doing what seems to be right in their own eyes. There is no respect for other's property or life. The ultimate outcome is chaos which opens the door for more and more wickedness and evil. It amazes me that we as the Body of Christ recognize the need for laws and for a judicial system overseeing those laws in the secular, civil realm but for many in the Body of Christ there is disdain for the "laws" and justice of God.

The result of this disdain for God's laws and ordinances has brought chaos to the Body of Christ. We have come to the place where many go forward doing what seems to be right in their own eyes, thereby, openly rejecting the commandments and precepts of the Lord. The acceptance of what God calls sin is running rampant within the Body of Christ under the guise of the "hyper grace" movement. But yet many in the Body of Christ who believe that the laws and ordinances of God are no longer to be taught, adhered to or followed declare outwardly that, "They love Jesus. They love God."

However, this is in direct contradiction to the words of Jesus found in John 14:15 where He explicitly declares, *"If ye love me, keep my commandments."* He continues in John 14:21 by saying, *"He that hath my commandments, and keeps them, he it is that loves me: and he that loves me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him."* How much clearer can Jesus state it for us? Yet many still turn a blind eye to these and other scriptures like them. They tell us that these teachings are no longer relevant for the Body of Christ today and the world that we live in. Hmmm.... Jesus' teachings are not relevant. Hmmm....

If we say we love God it needs to be more than just words. It must be expressed by and through our lifestyle. Therefore, our lifestyle is then to be led and directed by God's commandments and precepts. This is what truly loving God is. We do His Word out of a heart of love, not out of bondage or fear. We follow and live the lifestyle that Jesus role modeled and lived simply because we love our God and desire to do what pleases and blesses His heart.

Yes, God desires and wants for us to delight in knowing how much He loves us. However, just as in any good, healthy relationship, it is a two way street. Yes, we are to bask ourselves in His goodness and in His mercy and peace. However, we are to reciprocate in basking God with our actions of love towards Him.

Unfortunately, to many in the Body of Christ, it has become “all about us” and what God has done and continues to do for us. The Body of Christ has become self centered, selfish and continues to simply build up self. Again, I say, we have made it “all about us.”

This has filtered into the corporate gatherings of many fellowships. We say we love God so therefore we go to service every week. Some of us say we love God even more so we go to more than one service a week – maybe two or three. Then there are those that say they really love God so they go four to seven times a week. Wow!!! That individual must really love God!!! To that I say, Hmmm...

On the other hand you have those individuals that never go to any services or gatherings because they say they love God “in their own way.” To that again I say, Hmmm.... I very much believe in the value and blessing of coming together as a corporate Body of Christ. However, the fact is, attending or not attending a corporate gathering is not the benchmark concerning an individual’s love of God.

Over my years of being in the Body of Christ I have heard many of those that attend the corporate gatherings say such things as, “I love the music (worship).” “I love the way so and so sings.” “I love the “ambience” and all the visuals and pageantry of the building and of the service.” “I love that it is so up to date and do all the newest songs.” “I go because they let me do my flags and dance.” “I love the way my pastor teaches.” “I love the different events and concerts my church has.” Etc. Wait a minute...What about gathering together because we love God and we just want to bless His heart.

There are two quotes that have stuck with me through all these years. One was by St Augustine. He wrote in his book of Confessions that he began to be troubled because he was realizing that he was getting more joy out of the singing than what was being sung by him and the other congregants. What St. Augustine was saying was that God was getting lost in all the pageantry and style of the gathering. It didn’t matter what was really being sung. The words could have been totally off, doctrinally. What mattered was how good it sounded and how much he was enjoying the singing. In other words, he realized that it was becoming more about his enjoyment than blessing the heart of His God. Hmmm...

The other quote was by Michael Card, who said, “The main purpose of any worship experience is that God had been worshipped. What you or I get out of it is of a secondary nature.” In other words our times of corporate or personal worship must be all about God. True worship is for an audience of one - God, the Father, Jesus and the Holy Spirit. It must be all about loving and glorifying our God.

As I have mentioned we have made the loving and worshipping of our God into something that is truly secondary to God. As Jesus taught, the real aspect of loving and worshipping God is keeping and doing His commandments. We are not to think that God’s commandments are burdensome to us. Actually, 1John 5:2-3, tells us, “*By this we know that we love the children of God, **when we love God, and keep his commandments.** For **this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous.**”*

We as the Body of Christ must realize that there is no difference or separation between loving God and worshipping God. They both are “two sides of the same coin.” Unfortunately, even though this is true, we have become overbalanced in our thinking when it comes to worshipping and loving God. When we hear the word “worship” we immediately think of music, singing, dance, etc. When we hear the term “loving the Lord” many times we think of music, singing, dance, etc. We sometimes include terms such as “service” or “ministry” when referring to worship and loving the Lord. I am not saying this is incorrect. However, what I am saying is that we may be missing what is primary in expressing both our worship and our love unto the Lord our God.

We are all very familiar with what Jesus taught us in John 4:24 as He states, “*God is a Spirit: and they that worship him **must** worship him in spirit and in truth.*” If we consider that worshipping God and loving God are

“two sides of the same coin,” then we can take from John 4:24 that those who truly “love” Him must love Him in spirit and in truth. So what does this mean?

I believe that Jesus, when He refers to “in spirit,” is teaching us that it is only by and through the Holy Spirit that we can truly have intimate relationship with the Father. We are taken into His realm and we are now able to grasp what truly will bless the heart of our Father. As we know, when we believe and acknowledge Jesus as our Lord and Savior we are made into a “new creature.” Through the regenerative power of the Holy Spirit we are created into new species of being known as a “son or daughter of the Most High God.” (2Corinthians 5:17)

Through the blood of Jesus and His sacrificial atonement for our sins, we are now able to “enter into His presence” and have a relationship of being in “oneness” with the Father just as Jesus is in “oneness” with Him. This brings us into a place of being a member of His Household of faith, God’s family that He loves so much. We are then able to truly love Him with our renewed spirit because He first loved us. (1John 4:19) It is the Holy Spirit who can now lead our renewed spirit in loving the Father in the way that He desires to be loved.

When Jesus, speaks of “in truth,” I believe He is referring to the Truth – God’s Word, His precepts, His ways, His commandments. This is found in John 17:17 as it states, “*Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.*” Notice, the truth, God’s Word, sanctifies us. His word continually cleanses us. His word continually brings us into a place of being in His presence. His Word and our lifestyle of being “doers of the Word” – His precepts, His ways and yes, His commandments - is what allows us to continually express not just our worship of God but by being doers of His Word (His commandments) it expresses our love of our God. Why, because this is what pleases, and blesses His heart. This is what the Father is seeking from His children.

Jesus expresses this in John 4:23, “*But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him.*” As we just previously discussed the “true worshipper” and the “true lover” of the Father are synonymous. Therefore we can say that the Father is seeking after and desires the true worshipper/ the true lover of Him to worship and love Him “in spirit” and “in truth” - according to His Word, His precepts and yes, even His commandments. Both, true worship and loving the Lord is an attitude of heart that leads to a lifestyle that blesses the heart of the Father. This is not just for times of corporate gatherings or in personal times of relationship with Him. It is a lifestyle that permeates every aspect of our lives in everything we do– 24/7.

There are 168 hours in a week. We have been taught that because we love God we are to attend corporate gatherings to worship and love God. Many times these gatherings are referred to as “worship” services. An average “gathering” is about 2 hours. If an individual goes to one corporate gathering seven days a week that is 14 hours to express their worship and love unto the Lord. The average person sleeps for 7 hours a night. That is 49 hours. Putting the two together that makes 63 hours out of the 168 hours that are in the week. What about the rest of the time?

If we go with the concept that is many times preached by our leaders, that attending one or multiple corporate gatherings shows our love for God, than the time spent in loving and worshipping the Lord if we go every day/ seven days a week is only about 12% of our week. You can add in some time of volunteer service and such, as well, to increase the percentage a little. Even so, we sleep more than that. Obviously something has become skewed with our concept of what has become and what we have made “loving the Lord with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your might” into.

Well, I know that many of you are saying that I didn’t include a 40 hour work week. That may be true. But wait a minute. Is it possible to “love God” while at our workplace. As we have been discussing, the scriptures command us to love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul and with all our might. Does that just mean during our times of corporate gatherings of worship? Does it just mean during our private times of prayer and study? No. I believe it is a 24/7 lifestyle that is incorporated in all 168 hours per week. We love our

God by being His witnesses at the workplace or school or where ever. We love Him in everything we do as long as in whatever we are doing we are keeping His commandments.

So what are His commandments? Obviously, we begin with the first two fundamental commandments. Do you know what these two fundamental commandments are? If not, I encourage you to read Matthew 22:37-40. Do you know the Ten Commandments? Can you recite them now? I will give you a hint – read Exodus 20. We should at least know these fundamental commandments. How can we love the Lord our God in the way He desires to be loved by His children if we do not even know how He desires to be loved and what truly pleases Him. Jesus said, *“If you love me, keep my commandments.”*

The problem is that the Body of Christ has become much like Cain. He came and worshipped and tried to love God in the way He thought God should be worshipped regardless of what God established and desired. He brought his beautiful offering from his own hands. He tried to impress God with his “pageantry.” As we know that didn’t work out to well for him. Abel came to God with the sacrifice of blood – representing a sacrificial life of surrender and dying of self desiring to bless the heart of his God. He knew that this is what God delights in. Cain became stiff-necked and got angry at God. I wonder if many of us would have done the same thing and got angry with God because we came with all our pageantry that God really was not looking for. Hmm...

Is God really impressed by our pageantry? Is He really impressed by wonderful music and song? I believe He enjoys these things from His children but I also believe the only thing that truly delights the heart of our God is a broken and contrite heart. It is a heart whose only desire is to bless the heart of their King and love on Him the way our God desires and tells us how to love Him.

This love is an attitude of heart. We love Him because He first loved us. We love Him not out of bondage and fear and doing things to earn His love. He knows our heart better than we do. He desires a lifestyle of surrender and dying to self by following and living His commandments. This is what true love towards the living God is. All of our expressions of worship are wonderful and we should continue to offer them unto the Lord. However, all of these wonderful expressions mean nothing to Him if our lifestyle contradicts this. If we love Him, we keep and live out His commandments as a true expression of love and adoration unto our God.

Who or what do you love? Hey, it is great to love your pastor or your church. It is great to love your worship music and songs. It is great to love your dance, flags and banners. However, we must consider our ways and recognize and be truthful with ourselves - why we are doing what we are doing? Am I doing all these things because I enjoy them and love doing them? Or is it truly all about God and what blesses His heart? All of these things will not matter when we stand before the Lord one day. Styles of worship, great preaching and teaching, buildings and ministries, etc. will all “pass away.” As the Apostle Paul stated, the only thing endures is love. That includes truly loving the Lord our God as He desires to be loved by His children - with all our heart, soul and might – all that is within me.

Jesus loved the Father. He is our role model of loving the Father. I am sure we all can agree and safely say that Jesus kept the commandments of His Father. As Jesus’ disciples we are to now change our lifestyle to the One we are choosing to follow – Jesus. We are to love our God as Jesus loved and taught. You may have noticed that there are not many references to singing, dancing, playing instruments, banners and flags found within the New Testament. The Gospel accounts and the Epistles do not speak much of earthly pageantry when it comes to worshipping and loving God. We do not see Jesus emphasizing these things.

What the New Testament does emphasis is what the lifestyle of the believer and disciple of Jesus must look like. The scriptures are clear, if we say we love the Father, Jesus and the Holy Spirit with all our heart, with all our soul and with all our might, than we are to keep His commandments, His Word all the days of our lives – every moment, every second, in everything we do.