

CGYG/LIFE Retreat 2010: The Greatest Commandment

Study 2: Loving God with all our heart and soul, mind and strength

We looked last night at the depth to which Jesus commanded us to love God. To love God with any less than all our heart, soul, mind, strength means that we do not truly love Him.

1. **Heart:** The world views love primarily as a feeling, an instinct of sorts. Questions like “was it love at first sight?” conjures up “butterflies-in-the-stomach” types of superficial feelings. Our culture celebrates infatuation and physical attraction, rather than true, committed love.

In contrast to this, what does the Bible tell us about loving God with all our heart (Joshua 22:5; John 5:39-43, 2 Thessalonians 3:3-5)?

- Joshua 22:5 → loving God with all our heart means serving and obeying Him
- John 5:39-43 → the Pharisees had not the love of God in their hearts, because they did not accept Christ; to love God with all our hearts is to love and accept the One whom He sent, Jesus Christ
- 2 Thessalonians 3:3-5 → in the context of Paul’s letter to the church and Christ’s commands he passes on: love for God from their hearts meant that this church would continue to do Christ’s commands

What further emphasis does the Bible give about the importance of having a right heart before God, and making love for God its sole focus (Proverbs 4:23; Matthew 15:18-20)?

- Proverbs 4:23 → “Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.”
- Matthew 15:18-20 → A defiled heart results in a defiled person

Loving God with all your heart means loving out of choice rather than loving begrudgingly or because “you have to”. To obey and to serve God, and to accept Jesus Christ are choices that we each have to make. Loving God is not primarily a ‘feeling’ (though true love for God undoubtedly produces not just happiness, but overflowing joy, e.g. 1 Peter 1:8) but conviction of the heart that the object of our love is fully worthy to commit ourselves to, no matter the cost.

2. **Soul:** The heart and the soul in Scripture are often found in the same passage as similar, yet distinct elements, e.g. Deuteronomy 10:12.

What common themes about the soul do we see from these passages (1 Samuel 1:10,15; Psalm 6:2-3, 35:9, 42:1-5)? What does this then tell us about what it means to love the Lord “with all your soul”?

- 1 Samuel 1:10,15 → in the context of Hannah not being able to bear a child, Hannah pouring out her soul before the Lord in distress (v.15)
- Psalm 6:2-3 → “My soul is greatly troubled...”, “anguished”
- Psalm 35:9 → soul rejoices & delights in the Lord and His salvation
- Psalm 42:1-5 → a soul that is downcast, but panting & thirsting for God
- The soul related more to the emotions, deep-seated affection & longing for Him, so that we delight in Him and rejoice in Him; there is nothing we desire more than Him

3. **Mind:** Loving God with all our heart and soul, based on what we just read, begins to paint for us a clearer picture of what loving God means. What does it mean to love another person with your mind? What does this require?

- Means that you're probably thinking about that person constantly, with thoughts of adoration and admiration
- Would require that you actually know something about that person... and that you would like to know more – as much as you can – about them
- How you'd know them is by talking to them, spending time with them, reading letters and emails they send to you, spending time writing them back, etc.
- If you knew what made them happy, you'd find ways to doing these things
- When you love someone, you'll pretty much choose with your mind to whatever it is that they ask of you

What about loving God with all our mind? How does this relate back to loving God with all our heart?

- Similar to loving God with all hearts, loving God with all our mind requires that we obey His commands, because we cannot obey without first hearing, understanding and then choosing to accept or reject His Word
- Look at the thoughts you shared about loving someone... they apply equally to loving God, infinitely. If you love Him, you will choose to do whatever He asks of you or commands you

In light of this, how ought we handle God's Word and why should we do so? (Psalm 119:127, 119:167-168; Psalm 1:1-2)

- Psalm 119:127 → we love and treasure God's Word, even more than something as precious as fine gold
- Psalm 119:167-168 → we need to not just hear, read and meditate on God's Word, but we must be diligent to obey, letting it shape our minds and hearts
- Psalm 1:1-2 → we ought to love His Word because that's where He has revealed to us; we are to meditate on His Word day and night

Beyond understanding, loving God with our minds also means that as with our heart and our soul, we need to submit our minds entirely to Him. We lay all our thoughts bare before Him to shape and to mould according to His pleasure, so that we are able to worship Him with understanding, according to His Word. Practically speaking, what does this mean? (Romans 12:1-2; 2 Corinthians 10:5, Colossians 3:2-3, 5, 16)

- Romans 12:1-2 → "...be transformed by the renewal of your mind..."
- 2 Corinthians 10:5 → we are to destroy "arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God"; rather, we are to "take every thought captive to obey Christ..."
- Colossians 3:2-3, 5, 16 → we are to i) Set our minds on things above (eternal things, spiritual promises), ii) recognize that we have died and our lives now belong to Christ, iii) put to death sin, iv) let God's Word dwell richly in us, teaching and admonishing each other

4. **Strength:** As we saw earlier, to love God means to accept, follow and obey Jesus Christ, the One whom He sent. What do you think loving God and pursuing Christ with all of your strength means? If you were to summarize one or two common characteristics of the examples found in these following passages, what would they be? (2 Corinthians 11:23-28; Colossians 1:28-29; 2 Timothy 4:1-7)?
- 2 Corinthians 11:23-28 → For the sake of Christ and preaching the gospel, Paul suffered in almost every way possible, and put in danger in almost every possible situation; he subjected himself to physical suffering for the sake of the gospel
 - Colossians 1:28-29 → Paul 'toils' and 'struggles with all Christ's energy' for the sake of the gospel, that non-believers might be saved, and believers mature in Christ
 - 2 Timothy 4:1-7 → Paul reminded Timothy to continue giving all his energy to preaching the gospel – to correct, rebuke and encourage with patience and instruction; v.5 → "endure hardship"; Paul himself has 'fought the good fight' and 'finished the race'
 - To summarize loving God with all our strength: Giving it everything you've got
 - This is in reference not just to our bodies or to physical strength, but more so to the intensity, energy, and fervor with which we love God
5. The choice to love someone always comes at a cost – to love your wife or husband, for example, will 'cost' you time, energy, perhaps money and even some grey hairs (!). Scripture tells us that the cost of loving and following Christ, who demands everything we've got without exception, is far greater. What do these passages tell us about what we must be ready to surrender (Matthew 16:24-25; Mark 10:17-22; Luke 9:57-62)?
- Matthew 16:24-25 → the call to deny yourself of your own fleshly desires, taking up your cross (being ready to be persecuted for your love for God, just as Christ was) even possibly to the point of death
 - Mark 10:17-22 → to be willing to give up all of our riches, all of our possessions
 - Luke 9:57-62 → to give up our creature comforts, and to give up all that distracts us from Him, including our families if need be

Ultimately, to truly and wholly love the Lord requires that we relinquish every part of our being to Him. We must intensely and fervently seek to obey and glorify Him in all that we think, say and do. This type of love is costly, even to the point of forsaking or losing your life. The world hates the notion of God or of a Saviour because it requires them to admit their sin and to repent of it. They also hate those who seek to love God and pursue Christ. Jesus warned in the Bible that those who hated Christ and betrayed Him would also hate and betray those who followed Him (Luke 21:16-17).

Closely examine your life. Do you love God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind and with all your strength? In what areas are you holding back from God that negate your true love for God – the intense, fervent, full-force pursuit of Him, His commands, and the One He sent to save us, Jesus Christ? If there are things you need to repent of and change, do so today. Do not delay, so that you can say at the end of your life like Paul that "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith." (2 Timothy 4:7)