

THE FIRST GREAT COMMANDMENT

By Marie Casale
Copyright © 1998

In Mk. 12:28, we read that a scribe asked Jesus, "Which is the first commandment of all?" Jesus answered, "The first of all the commandments is, HEAR O ISRAEL, the Lord our God is one Lord, and thou shalt LOVE the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment." In Mt. 22:36, we also read that, "On these two commandments (that is, the first and second great commandments) hang all the law and the prophets." All the ten commandments, then, are a subset of these two. But to love and serve God is the greatest and primary purpose for our life.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO LOVE GOD?

"How do we go about doing this? Is loving God just a feeling that we must work up on our own?" "First of all, there are two basic Greek words translated love in the New Testament which differ in meaning. As we read the scriptures concerning love, knowing these words will make the meaning of what is said clearer to us. They are the following:

philio: to be a friend to; fond of; have affection for, sentiment or feeling (of the heart)

agape: love, affection, benevolence (social moral sense) embracing the judgment and deliberate assent of the will as a matter of principle, duty, and propriety (of the head)

The word for love in Mk. 12:36 is agape. Therefore, to love God is not like the experience we have of the "chemistry" that takes place between two people who are attracted. It does not just happen. The love of God is something we deliberately set our will and mind and heart to do. We read in 1 Jo. 4:8 that God is love (agape). This means that everything that God has ever done or will do is based on his love. Also it means that God is the source of all love so that if love is lacking in our lives, we must seek the source which is God.

GOD'S LOVE TO US

Part of the way that we can love God is to meditate first on his great love for us. 1 Jo. 4:19 shows, "We love (agape) him because he first loved us." Also 1 Jo. 4:10 shows, "Herein is love (agape), not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his son to be the propitiation for our sins." It is because of our carnal (natural) mind and human nature that we have not loved God, "because the carnal mind is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." (Rom. 8:7) But when God calls us and we repent of our sins and become baptized, he gives us his holy spirit. Then, (Rom. 5:5) shows, "The love (agape) of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the holy spirit which is given to us." Then we can begin, with his love, to love as he requires. Here are some scriptures showing the love of God to us:

* Eph. 2:17 But God who is rich in mercy for his great love (agape) wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins hath quickened us together with Christ...and hath raised us up

together and made us sit together in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.

* 1 Jo. 3:16 Hereby perceive we the love (agape) of God, because he laid down his life for us.

* 1 Jo. 4:9 In this was manifested the love (agape) of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten son into the world that we might live through him.

* Rom. 5:68 For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly, for scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love (agape) toward us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

* 1 Jo. 3:1 Behold what manner of love (agape) the Father hath bestowed upon us that we should be called the sons of God.

* Jo. 3:16 For God so loved (agape) the world that he gave his only begotten son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life.

* Tit. 3:37 For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another. But after that the kindness and love (philo) of God our Savior toward man appeared, Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the holy spirit which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior; that being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

* Rev. 1:5 Unto him that loved (agape) us and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

WITH ALL YOUR HEART

Note the word "all". This shows that our hearts are to be filled with the love of God. Jesus showed his disciples that what is in your heart is more important than outward appearance. See Mt. 15:18. He explained that out of the heart come such things as evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. Pr. 23:7 says, "As a man thinketh in his heart so is he." If we analyze our thoughts in the light of all these things, we find that we have much to clean up. The problem is that as the scripture says, "The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked; who can know it?" (Jer. 17:9) As we live our lives, most of the time we are really not aware of much of the evil which comes from our hearts because we do not think of it as evil. We justify ourselves in many ways. Consider, for example, things that we see on T.V. Adultery is often portrayed as humorous or shown in such a way as to induce sympathy from the audience. Foolishness is portrayed as humorous. Vanity is portrayed as cool. In our conversations we often put down others while subtly exalting ourselves. This is why we must always pray as David did, "Create in me a clean heart, O God and renew a right spirit within me." (Ps. 51:10) It is God who creates in us a clean heart. We cannot do so by ourselves. We cannot see all the things there that God sees, nor can we cast out the evil by our own strength.

The following is a list of attitudes found throughout the scriptures of things we need to be watchful for that come from our hearts...

hardness of heart, weak heart, hate in heart, froward heart, whorish heart, deceived heart, a heart fat as grease, haughty heart, blindness of heart, lustful heart, rash heart, fearful heart, perverse heart, a heart of snares & nets, heart full of imaginations, backsliding heart, subtle of heart, naughtiness of heart, envious heart, unforgiving heart, despiser in heart, rebellious heart, strife in heart, foolish heart, uncircumcised in heart, vengeful heart, not perfect heart, unbelieving heart, impenitent heart, proud heart, spiteful heart, h. a heart waxed gross.

So we love God with all our heart by diligently and continually watching for and putting out all evil that we find there.

* Pr. 4:23 Keep thy heart with all diligence for out of it are the issues of life.

* Luk. 6:45 A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth that which is good; an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth that which is evil, for out of the abundance of his heart his mouth speaks.

* Mt. 6:21 Where your treasure is, there also will your heart be.

* 1 Ti. 1:5 Now the end of the commandment is charity (love) out of a pure heart and of a good conscience and of faith unfeigned.

* Mt. 5:8 Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God.

WITH ALL YOUR SOUL

The Greek word for soul is psuche meaning breath and life, a living soul or being, not an immortal soul on the one hand or merely the vitality of plants on the other. Our soul is our life and breath and includes our body. (See 1 Co. 15:45 and Rev. 16:3) How do we love God with all our soul? Our lives are made up of so much time. We are continually bombarded with a multitude of things competing for our attention. We spend our time, conduct our lives, and use our bodies in ways which glorify God or they are used to serve our own lusts, and the cares and riches and pleasures of this world. 1 Pe. 2:11 says, "...seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the spirit..."

So, as with the heart, we see that loving God with all our soul involves removing the evil (fleshly lusts) from our life and obeying the truth as the way in which we conduct our lives. By making use of our life, our time, our tongue, our hands, our feet, our eyes, etc. (all elements of our soul) as "instruments of righteousness" in practicing good and truth, we will be loving God with our whole soul.

WITH ALL YOUR MIND

The Greek word for mind is dianoia which means exercising deep thought or understanding. How do we love God with all our mind? We use our mind to think, reason and make judgments. This word involves the process of thinking, not just the intellect. In Eph. 2:3 and Col. 1:21, this same word is used, showing that as natural human beings without God's spirit, our whole way of thinking is contrary to God's way. But, Heb. 8:10 shows God's work in us, that he will change the way we think, putting his laws into our mind (dianoia) so that we then use his word as the basis for all the judgments and decisions we make.

The word dianoia is also translated understanding. See 1Jo. 5:20 and Eph. 1:18, 4:18. We love God with all our mind by thinking deeply about his word and learning how to apply it to every situation in our lives.

Prov 21:2 says, "Every way of a man is right in his own eyes." So we may not be aware of beliefs, concepts and ways of thinking that are not in harmony with God's will. There are two things we can do to insure that we do not have false concepts abiding in our minds. One way is to ask God to show us our errors and make all our thinking and beliefs conform to his will. Secondly we should obey 1 Thes 5:21 which says, "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good." Don't just take for granted that everything you are taught is true. But prove it by searching the scriptures. Acts 17:10-11 tells us about the Bereans who searched the scriptures daily as to whether what they were taught was so.'

WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH

The Greek word for strength is ischus meaning forcefulness, ability, might, power. How do we love God with all our strength? We give God reasonable service according to our strength and ability. If we are ill, having no strength, we certainly cannot be up and around performing good works. God does not expect us to give what we do not have, but as we have the opportunity, ability, and strength, we are to do good in every way we can remembering that, "It is God that girdeth us with strength and maketh our way perfect." (Ps. 18:32) Also 1 Pe. 4:11 says, "If any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God gives, that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ..."

LOVE THINGS HE LOVES

One of the ways to draw near to any person and to build a true love relationship is to participate in their life by loving the same things they love. Here are some things God loves and wants from us:

* Isa. 66:2 For all these things (the whole universe) hath mine hand made, ..., but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor, (not having a rich attitude, saying in your heart, I have it all, know it all and don't need anything not even you God) and of a contrite spirit, (repentance) and trembles at my word. (to be afraid to twist, misinterpret, or disobey the word of God)

* Isa. 61:8 I the Lord love judgment.

Note: We can love judgment by: not judging according to outward appearance as Jesus said, not judging to condemnation of others, and also by not calling evil good and good evil; but to do our best in any situation to judge according to God's will and his word.

* Ps. 11:7 The righteous Lord loveth righteousness.

Note: Ps. 119:172 says, "All thy commandments are righteousness." So God loves those who are practicing and keeping his commandments. The more we do this, the more we will become close to God.

* 2 Co. 9:7 The Lord loves a cheerful giver.

Note: The more we practice giving of ourselves, our time, our prayers, our effort and service, our kind deeds, our money to those in need and to those who depend on us, the more we will be abiding in the love of God.

* Mic. 6:8 He hath showed thee O man what is good, and what doth the Lord require of thee but to do justly (practice justice) and to love mercy (forgiveness) and to walk humbly with thy God.

* Jo. 16:27 The Father himself loveth you because ye have loved me and have believed that I came out from God.

Note: God loves those who truly love Jesus Christ and believe in him.

HATE THINGS HE HATES

To really love God, we must come to KNOW God. As well as loving things he loves, we need to know what he hates so that we may avoid those things. Here are some scriptures showing things the Lord hates...

* Ps. 97:10 You that love the Lord, hate evil.

* Pr. 6:16-19 These six things doth the Lord hate; yea, seven are an abomination to him: a proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief, a false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren.

* Zec. 8:17 Let none of you imagine evil in his heart against his neighbor; and love no false oath: for these are things that I hate, saith the Lord.

* Prov. 8:13 The fear of the Lord is to hate evil; pride and arrogancy and the evil way, and the froward (perverse contrary) mouth do I hate.

* Rev. 2:15 So hast them also that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate.

Note: Nico means to subdue, conquer, overcome, prevail, or get victory. Laity means laymen or lay people. Practicing the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes, then, is the oppressing of the brethren of God with a dictatorial rule within his own church. In 3 Jo 1:9-10 a person called Diotrephes was practicing this form of rule in the church.

IF YOU LOVE ME

The apostle John, called the disciple whom Jesus loved, wrote more about love and the love of God than any other man. There are three basic principles which he wrote concerning how we are to love God. They are the following:

Keep My Commandments:

* Jo 14:15 If ye love me, keep my commandments.

* Jo 14:21 He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him.

* Jo 14:23 If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.

* Jo 15:10 If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love.

* 1Jo 5:3 For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous.

* 2Jo 1:6 And this is love, that we walk after his commandments.

Feed My Sheep:

* Jo 21:15 So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, 'Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these?' He saith unto him, 'Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee.' He saith unto him, Feed my lambs.

* Jo 21:16 He saith to him again the second time, 'Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?' He saith unto him, 'Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee.' He saith unto him, 'Feed my sheep.'

* Jo 21:17 He saith unto him the third time, 'Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?' Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, 'Lovest thou me?' And he said unto him, 'Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee.' Jesus saith unto him, 'Feed my sheep.'

Love Your Brother:

* 1Jo 4:20 If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?

* 1Jo 4:21 And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also.

Each of these principles can be magnified to show how we can apply the love of God in our lives.

Loving your brother, for example, might involve expounding the principles of love found in 1 Co. 13.

1Cr 13:4 Charity suffereth long, [and] is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up,

1Cr 13:5 Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil;

1Cr 13:6 Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth;

1Cr 13:7 Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.

1Cr 13:8 Charity never faileth:

Feeding God's sheep might involve not only physical food given to those in need, but also and especially spiritual food, social and emotional food, and educational food. Do you know any who are starving socially? Feed them with some companionship.

Keeping the Lord's commandments ultimately includes the whole Bible. I counted 40 or more commandments just in the first few chapters of the book of Matthew. So our attitude ought to be, "Lord, I don't know everything that is in your word yet, but as I learn your commandments throughout my life, move me to obey them with all my heart."

WARNING

In the book of Revelation, God admonishes one of his churches (Rev. 2:4), "I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love." This first love is the primary love of God, which, unless we repent of losing, we are told, "Repent (verse 5) or else I will come unto thee quickly and will remove thy candlestick (symbol for church) out of his place." Consider that your church - or you as an individual might have all the wonderful things that this church did. The church in Ephesus had many good works, labor for the Lord's name, great patience in

tribulation, avoidance of evil people, not fainting or giving up in adversity, and even were scripturally knowledgeable enough to be able to tell the difference between true and false apostles. But they lost their first love. And the lord warns them that unless they have the love of God, he will take away their candlestick and they will no longer be God's church. This is because God has promised his kingdom TO THOSE WHO LOVE HIM. Ja. 2:5 says: 'Hath not God chosen the poor of this world, rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him?' Therefore, we all need to examine ourselves: Do I love God first and foremost in my life?

May we all repent as we fall short in the love of God, individually, as churches, and as a nation; and may the Lord direct all our hearts into the love of God and into the patient waiting for Christ. (2 Thes. 3:5)