

God's Love

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[0:00] What is the greatest sin? We could imagine that violating the greatest commandment is the greatest sin.! That would follow, wouldn't it?! Mark 12, we'll go to Mark 12, we read about the greatest commandment.

And from verse 28, Mark 12, verse 28. And one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, and perceiving that he had answered them well, asked him, which is the first commandment of all?

And Jesus answered him, 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. And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these.

And the scribe said unto him, Well, Master, thou hast said the truth, for there is one God, and there is none other but he.

[1:18] And to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love his neighbour as himself, is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.

And when Jesus saw that he answered discreetly, he said unto him, Thou art not far from the kingdom of God. And no man after that durst ask him any question.

The greatest sin is basically not loving God. And it sounds easy, doesn't it? Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, strength.

Of course, there's a lot to that, which we're going to unpack a little. But God's ideal plan for us is that we love God. That we love God. Love God first. First and foremost.

Has God got that first place in our lives? He calls us to love him with an all-out love. He commands us to love him with our whole heart.

[2:24] All of our heart. Our soul. Our mind. Our strength. Love God with your total being. When we think about God's love, all of our religious works and efforts are only a sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal.

Like a little chiming noise. A little noise. 1 Corinthians 13.1. Just a chiming cymbal or a sounding brass. Now, a preacher, Dave Hunt, said this.

Why isn't love ever found in the course lists of our theological seminaries? Now, you can go to the Bible school and there's a good one on the wall there with some suggested courses.

You can study online by distance education. It's a Bible college we would recommend. But when you go to Bible colleges, they don't have love.

It's one of the subjects. But really, to love God is the first and foremost thing. The first way we are to love God is with our heart. With our heart. And when we think of the heart, it includes the intellect, the feelings, the emotions.

[3:30] Our heart is the core of our being. It means our intelligent thought and our will. And in Jeremiah it reads, the prophet says, as our Lord speaks through him, and you shall seek me and find me when you shall search for me with all your heart.

How's your heart today? Now, you might have heart problems. You might have had some heart operations. We're talking about that spiritual side of your heart, the heart of hearts that is the real you.

God says, search for me, seek me with all of your heart, and you shall find me. God's interested in that love relationship of our heart, a decision of the heart, that we trust Christ with our heart.

With the heart we believe. It reads in Romans 10, verses 9 through 10, Paul says, that if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart, that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.

It's a believing in the heart. It's a believing in the heart. That saves us. To know Christ died, he's risen, he's alive, and it says, for with the heart, man believeth unto righteousness.

[4:39] With the mouth, confession is made unto salvation. That salvation happens as the heart believes, as God ministers to your very heart, as you search for God with all your heart, as you find him with your heart, as you believe with your heart.

The heart is that central core of the real you and me. The Bible talks about how the human heart can be darkened. Our Lord tells of the heart, that out of the heart comes evil thoughts, and murder, and adultery, and fornication, theft, false witness, and slander.

That's Matthew 15, verse 19. Out of the heart comes all these gross things. The Bible says further that the heart is deceitful, is desperately wicked.

Yet the good side is that we can know God with our heart. We can have that love relationship from our heart, expressed through the heart. Loving God with the heart. It's what he wants for us.

It's that heart of us that shapes our being. That wonderful passion be directed to him. From our human heart. That motivating force that is our heart.

[5:46] The Bible talks about how the heart is like a field, that the word of God is sown into like seed. It's sown into the ground, like the word of God is directed at the heart, as the seed is directed at the ground.

And so the heart is fundamental. Without Christ as our Lord and Saviour, we know that our heart is deceitful, desperately wicked. It's rebellious. It's inclined to be proud, hard and astray from God, against God.

Yet the good side is that the heart, your very heart, can be the dwelling place of Almighty God. It tells us how the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us. So your very heart can be the dwelling place of God's Spirit. God's Spirit creates a new heart within us. He puts a new heart, a new affection, a new desire within us.

We see as an example of this heart devotion, the example of Mary. Now, Mary gave that best kind of perfume, called spikenard. It was the very best kind of perfume.

[6:58] And she held it in a lovely alabaster container. Now, this little vessel of the perfume was worth half a year's wages for the common worker.

So this was quite a considerable amount of money in value. And Mary lovingly spent it at the feet of the Master. It had cost Mary a precious sum of money.

Not only did the alabaster box contain rare perfume, it contained a woman's love. Mary had noticed the Lord's unwashed feet and the host Simon had not cared to see that the Master's feet were washed, a courtesy to any guest.

And it tells how Mary washed the Lord's feet with her tears. She dried them with her hair. She broke the seal of that costly alabaster box and her tears freely flowed down her cheeks.

They were tears of love and of gratitude. As she poured the lovely fragrance on the Master's feet. And some present protested at her extravagance. The Saviour accepted Mary's love and commended her for what she had done.

[8:07] God is interested in your heart today, people. Amen. To love the Lord your God with all your heart. It reads in Ephesians 3 that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith, that you being rooted and grounded in love, that we'd be so planted, that we'd be so firmly trusting, that Christ would dwell, He would reside, He'd take up residence there.

He dwells in our hearts by faith. Does God dwell in your heart? Amen. That's the question this morning. Does God dwell in your heart? Does your love for God come from the whole heart?

Secondly, we see that God speaks of our soul, that we love God with our soul.

Now it's interesting, Genesis 2 verse 7, that the Lord God formed man out of the dust of the ground, breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. Man became a living soul.

And so when God breathed his life into him, man became a living soul. I want to tell you that you're worth more than you're a pet dog or cat. You've got a soul. Amen.

You've got a living soul. You've got a spirit. You've got that something special that animals don't have. As much as the greenies would say, you're just as valuable as any other animal.

[9:20] No, you're much more. You're much more precious because you've got a soul. You've got a God part. A part that can be God's part. Amen. And the soul is that emotional energy and willpower of the human being.

The soul, it stands for the whole personality. We've been designed with a soul as a creature that is only fulfilled by having the Lord God in the centre of our lives.

And the soul includes our emotion, our devotion, our whole person. And God's love can dwell even in our soul.

Amy Carmichael, a missionary to India, said, Unlove is deadly. It is cancer. It may kill slowly, but it always kills in the end.

Don't have unlove, have love. Love in your heart. Love in your soul. How is your soul today? Does it love God? It is well. It is well with my soul. There's another song.

[10:18] Also, it says we should love God with our mind. When we are saved, the Holy Spirit affects our mind, our thinking capacity, our decision making. Now, the Bible, on the bad side, it tells how our mind can be evil and vain, corrupted, defiled.

As a person who does not know the Saviour, our minds, it says, can be blinded. Imagine having a blinded mind. You know, that would be worse than having blinded eyes, wouldn't it? To have your mind blinded.

A man can be blinded in his mind. A man can also be double-minded, kind of trying to sit on the fence, not really, trusting. Get off the fence. Don't be double-minded.

Be single-minded. Amen. Our heart, mind and soul, while different, are closely linked as part of our personality and life. The mind is the seat of understanding.

It's the place of knowing, of reasoning. It includes our feelings, our emotions, the thought processes. God's interested in our minds. He doesn't bypass our minds as some cults or even churches would say, turn off your mind.

[11:24] No, God wants you to turn on your mind, apply your mind, to use your mind, to use that thinking, to have a new way of thinking. Our mind can find a new love. What was wasted and barren can become alive and inspired.

We can find reason to apply our mind, to study, to learn, to know him more. It uses our mind. He engages our mind. It tells how our mind can be surrendered to his ways.

It tells in Isaiah 26, verse 3, they will keep him in perfect peace. His mind is stayed on thee because he trusteth in thee. And loving God with all our mind means filling our mind with good thoughts.

As we read in Philippians 4, verse 8, all of those good things, what's true, what's honest, what's pure, what's just, what's lovely, what's of good report, any virtue, any praise. Think on these things. Use that mind in a good way, in a godly way. Love God with your mind. Think on these things, the good things. So, prayerfully, may our Lord protect our minds such that our minds would have some filters about what comes into the ear gate and the eye gate, into that mind, that brain box, that will use our mind for God, that will have right thinking, that will develop such right thinking.

[12:38] Have a mind for God, a mind that loves God. Love God with your mind. Use that intellect, that power of reasoning to love God from your mind. And another way to love God is to love God with all of our strength.

This talks about our human effort and energy, our might. It tells of our resources, of our energy, of our gifts, of our time, of our abilities. God's love translates into our everyday life, into the strength of our life, what we put our energy and our abilities into, what strength we have, what we've got strength.

While we can still do something tangibly, let's use all of our strength to give God the glory, to bless God, that God's love will translate into our everyday life, into our shoes, that will roll the sleeves up and will exercise the muscles, will take the weight, will take the load of another, will care, will reach out, will use practical ways to engage in our love for God, in practical things.

So let's aim for that wholehearted kind of love. Our heart talks about our adoration. What is it that we love from our heart? Our soul, that spiritual side, our devotion, who are we devoted to?

Our mind. Talks about decision, doesn't it? Talks about volition. Talks about making a definite stand to determine using our mind and our strength.

[14:10] Let's put our faith into action. Let's put our love into action that we love God so that he engages all of us, the whole of us, every part.

And as we love God so, he counts us as his friend. Some thoughts about friendship with God for a moment now. Exodus 33, 11 tells how the Lord spake unto Moses face to face as a man speaketh unto his friend.

It tells of a closeness here between Moses and the Lord, a face to face, a heart to heart. That's prayer, isn't it? You that love God, you pray. There's a closeness there.

You speak us as a friend to a friend. There's a relationship there. We can develop relationship with God, friendship with God. Think of it, people today, God wants to become our friend.

He wants to be your friend. And what more trustworthy a friend can we find than our Lord God?

What could be more precious? What greater friendship can we know than to know him?

[15:14] God loves us with an everlasting love. What a friend to have a love like that, a friendship that is forever. And it says he loves us at all times.

We can know God in such a close way. He's not a fickle friend. He's a faithful friend. It tells of him in Song of Solomon as we see pictured here.

He is altogether lovely. This is my beloved. This is my friend. God can be your beloved. That you so love God that you are loved by him and he is your beloved.

That God's love is so huge, so wide, so full. That he loves us even when we don't deserve it. It's faithful love, isn't it? God's so great love. And he's a true friend.

He'll always be there for you. It tells how a man that hath friends must show himself friendly. And there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother.

[16:09] What a friend. To have a friend who's going to stick closer to you than even your own blood relative. Even your own kin. Closer than your kinfolk. It's this God.

He's closer than a brother. That's who it's talking about. And that's how God sticks with us. He's stuck on you. God loves you so. And by faith, we can be his friend. He can be our friend.

And what an awesome, awesome privilege that you can know God as your friend, as Moses did, as Abraham. We read of Abraham in James 2, verse 23.

We see how Abraham knew such a friendship with God. Friends today, you can become a friend of God. You can be his friend. He can be your friend. In James 2, 23, it reads, And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God and it was imputed unto him for righteousness.

So that faith was counted. It was reckoned. It was said, this is going to be in exchange. As you believe, you're going to have righteousness. As you have faith, he's going to credit righteousness to you.

[17:13] As you have faith, he's going to credit salvation to you. It says he was imputed unto him. It was freely granted unto him. God's righteousness. And it says, And he was called the friend of God.

Wow! Wouldn't that be something? If you had that on your CV, I'm a friend of God. You know, all your life's accomplishments, that would be the top of the one, that would be the top thing to have, wouldn't it?

As far as what your life is worth, that you could say, yes, I'm his friend. He's my friend. Abraham had his faults, we know, and yet he was still reckoned a friend of God, God's friend.

Wow! And so can we. Amen? Yes, we can. Believe God and he will save you. It's that simple. Cut to the chase and say, I believe, yes, I believe, I'm a friend of God.

You can be a good friend of God as Abraham, as Moses, believe God and he will save you. Now they accused our Lord of being a friend of sinners and so he is, isn't he, still?

[18:19] He's a friend of those that will trust him, those that will receive, those who are undeserving, yet simply trust him. He's still a friend of sinners, thank God, isn't he?

Don't you believe that? He's a friend of sinners. They used it as a kind of derogatory way of talking about him as if, oh, he's a friend of sinners. No, yes, he is a friend of sinners.

He's my friend. I'm a sinner and he's my friend. He's a friend of sinners and you can know him, we can know him, God as our friend. And what should we learn from our friend today?

His love is the greatest love, isn't it? We read of this one, this friend of sinners, it reads of him in John 15, verse 12, another commandment, another commandment, love God with all your heart, soul, mind, strength, love your neighbour as yourself.

Now he says, this is my commandment, that you love one another, love one another, as I have loved you. We miss that sometimes, don't we? That's the most important bit.

[19:25] As I have loved you. Wow. Yeah, we can love one another. Oh, as I have loved you. Oh, that's a bit much. Greater love have no man than this, that a man lay down, praise him, his life for his friends.

Friends, he's laid down his life, hasn't he? Greater love have no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. Our Lord is the greatest friend. He laid down his life for us.

It's interesting, there's a North American word for friend, literally, it means, one who carries my sorrows on his back. This is what our Lord has done. He is doing.

He's carried my sorrows on his back. God's love, it's Calvary's love. It's God's love took him all the way, all the way to the cross. Can we take an honest look at our relationship with God?

How's it going? How's that love relationship with God? I know mine could be stronger. I'll be honest.

[20:33] How is our love relationship with God? Friends, consider also as God's people, how do we translate his love into action in our own lives?

I like verse John 13, 34, our Lord says, a new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.

By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples if ye have love one to another. God's love should mark how we live, shouldn't it? Sometimes we miss that.

It's very important. Our Lord emphasised it, repeated it here. God's love. You know, thinking of this church camp coming up, I know someone asked me, should we have a theme for the family camp, the church family camp?

I think the church family camp, the theme is family. It's, I was thinking too, maybe Philadelphia.

Philadelphia. We think of that early church referred to in Revelation 3, the church of Philadelphia.

[21:45] And Philadelphia means brotherly love. That's what we want in our church. We want more brotherly love, sisterly love. We want to have family. We want to be family of God in that closeness of fellowship, of love, loving one another.

And God honoured this church, the church of Philadelphia. Philadelphia. They had remained faithful through all kinds of trials and they'd held fast to God's word. God's true believers of the last days we could see reflected in such a church.

Philadelphia, brotherly love. Of course, the other church was the Laodicean. Some have compared how Laodicea and Philadelphia could reflect the church age we're in.

But that's conjecture in a way, really. But we can see the signs of Laodicea, can't we? The fallen, lukewarm church. We see the signs of hopefully the Philadelphia church as in the church with brotherly love.

They didn't have anything said against them. They held fast the word of God. They were commended. And Philadelphia, we should be that kind of a church in these last days, shouldn't we? In the second century, Tertullian, a historian, wrote that even the enemies of Christians said this, look how they love one another.

[23:04] It's something that really stood out as an outsider, an observer of the church said, they love one another, these Christians. So God's word speaks of brotherly love a few times.

It says in Romans 12, 10, be kindly affection one to another with brotherly love in honour preferring one another. But put others before yourself.

We belong to one another as God's family, brothers and sisters from all cultures and backgrounds and types of people that we are. We're all God's family by faith because of the love of God.

And that's why we're here. That's why fellowship matters. That's why it's important. That's why there's a sense of belonging when we come together. That's why fellowship matters. Brotherly love.

Let it continue. Hebrews 13, the writer to the Hebrews verse 1, 13, verse 1, let brotherly love continue. Let it continue.

[24:03] Keep on loving. Keep on loving one another. It's interesting that early church, their communion service was called a love feast. It wasn't a few little crackers and a little drib of drink but it was a smorgasbord of a, we could do that maybe, to be more scriptural would be nice, wouldn't it?

to have a nice big meal together. A love feast and we get around the table together and feast together but more so that the love is there. A love feast. It was brothers and sisters gathered together.

God's people. God's family. God wants us to be brothers and sisters knit together in love. Let brotherly love continue. It's God's kind of love. Unselfish love.

Self-sacrificial love. Our Lord Jesus says, love as I have loved you. We can gloss over that, can't we? Love one another as I have loved you.

Whoa, that's ramping it up a bit, isn't it? That's a different level of love than just everyday love. And our Lord Jesus, He doesn't just give us the model of love, some kind of concept or theory of love.

[25:09] No, He demonstrated His love. He actually put it into action and He brings His love right home to us. He shows His love in total commitment and we're embraced by His love.

He calls us to show this same kind of love for others and He loved us while we were His enemies, didn't He? He loved us when we really didn't deserve His love and He still does love us so.

His love, God's love, is so devoted, so determined, so faithful. In this world, we think of the world as it is. It's full of trouble, of unrest.

We see there's a lack of love. These are the last days, the closing chapters of world history and I put to you that these are loveless days.

Our Lord tells of such a time, Matthew 24, verse 12, because iniquity, sin, shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. Our Lord's saying, sin's going to be abounding, the love of many is going to grow cold.

[26:11] Now sometimes love can be lost, can't it? Between God's people even. Christians can sometimes act thoughtlessly and carelessly towards one another.

It ought not to be so. We ought to show the fruit of the Spirit, the leading one of which is love, love.

So, when we see a world that's lacking in love, people gossiping, backstabbing, criticising, attacking, running people down, our Lord says, don't love like that.

Love like I love you. Love with my love, as I have loved you. And, love is, it's really the sign of a true believer. It should be evident, even in the interactions that are hard, that we'll love beyond our wanting to love, that we'll love like Jesus loves.

Amen? And love is not some sensation or emotion without real relation to how we live or what we do. Love is keenly part of the nitty gritty.

It's in the real life. It's where the rubber hits the road. With the people we actually have to rub shoulders with. With the everyday living that we live. This love should be there, translated into real life.

[27:25] Amen. At least it should be. Because God's love is practical. There's a practical dimension. It's lived out in real life with the real people that are in our lives.

So let's aim to demonstrate, so demonstrate the love of Christ in our relationship with others. So a quick recap here. Where is your first love?

Do you love the Lord your God? Do you put him first with your heart, soul, mind, strength? All your heart, all your soul, all your mind, all your strength? Is God your friend?

How close are you? Has there been a distancing? You can change that. You can close that gap. Draw near to God and he will draw near to you.

How's your love for others? Love your neighbour as yourself? Brotherly love? Let it continue. Do you know that brotherly love that he wants you to know? Do you actually put God's love into action in your own life?

[28:29] Friends, be encouraged this morning, you can know the love of God. If you can say, preacher, I'm a sinner, Jesus is a friend of sinners. He wants to be a friend. You can know the love of God.

You can know God as your true friend, like Abraham, like Moses. And you can see his love, not only receive it, but you can show it. You can let his love flow to all the others around about in your life. Even the ones you find hard to love. Maybe even more so. those. Amen. What is true love? I love how this songwriter put it, and I won't sing it to you, but here's how someone has described God's love.

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

Could we with ink the ocean fill? And where the skies of parchment made? Where every stalk on earth a quill, and every man a scribe by trade to write the love of God above would drain the ocean dry.

[29:40] Nor could the scroll contain the whole, though 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. Let us pray. Lord, we praise you that your love, those cords of love, held you to the cross such that you would take our sin and pay it for us in full.

Lord, that we can be your friends by faith as we believe in our heart. Lord, we see that our heart is changed and made your throne.

Lord, we pray each one can know that you are resident in our heart. you're the one living in the castle of our heart. You're living on the throne of our heart by faith as we trust you.

Lord, we pray that we'll know that love, that we'll know it in our heart, soul, mind and strength, that we'll love you so, that we'll call you our beloved and Lord, that we'll live like it.

[30:41] Lord, help us to love one another. Help us to love one another as you have loved us. Help us, Lord, to sow love that there'll be a brotherly love that is a closeness amongst us that know you, that we can look out for one another and encourage one another.

And we pray if there's any yet to know that love, that they'll simply believe and then they can receive it just as surely as Abraham did too, that his faith was counted, it was reckoned, it was imputed, it was given unto him that righteousness as he trusted, as he had faith, that he received your salvation.

Lord, we thank you for that great gift. Help us, Lord, to be a more loving people in our daily lives, that this will be something we'll take action on today and for our lives ahead.

All to your glory and praise we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Thank you.