

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

Volume 19, Number 46

November 14, 2004



How Should I Love God?

Then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked him a question, tempting him, and saying, Master, which is the great commandment in the law? 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. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets. (Matthew 22:35-40)

Although the man who asked this question had an ulterior motive, "tempting him," he asked a probing question. We do not know the precise context of his temptation. Perhaps the man wanted to "bait" Jesus into showing favoritism toward one or the other of God's laws. Then he could find fault with Jesus for failing to respect all the law. If the man had succeeded, he would have gotten Jesus to view the law of God microscopically. Tear it apart and look at minute segments of it, preferring one segment over the other. Jesus responded with a telescopic view of the law. Although we have multiple aspects of the law that God gave to Moses, the fundamental moral code is summarized in ten broad precepts, the Ten Commandments. Jesus diverts the man from a microscopic view of the law to the basic ten moral concepts contained in the law. Then he further condenses the ten major moral principles to only two. We should learn from Jesus' teaching in this lesson. All too often we try to complicate God's commandments so hopelessly that we could never comply with them. We divide and subdivide God's moral instructions to us until we are hopelessly confused and overwhelmed. We are champions at microscopic viewpoints.

If you read the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20), you will notice an obvious division. The first four commandments instruct our relationship with God. The remaining six direct our relationship with people. In our lesson Jesus summarized the first four commandments into one principle, to love God with all your being. Then He summarized the final six commandments into another single principle, loving your neighbor as yourself.

What does it mean to love God with all your heart, soul, and mind? At one time I thought of this passage as affirming the three-part nature of man, but I rather doubt that point. Most likely

Jesus intended to direct the lawyer, not to mention us as well, to love God with all our being. Since our Western culture has redefined love as a sentimental or "feeling" kind of thing, we might view Jesus' words here quite differently than He intended them. We define "heart" as the seat of our emotions, and stop short of discovering a functional meaning for the terms "soul" and "mind." The Jews may have shared this idea, but more likely they viewed the heart as the seat of conscience. If you look up the most common word for "love" in the New Testament in Strong's or any other basic New Testament Greek dictionary, you will observe that the word refers to love in a "social or moral sense," not to love in an emotional or sentimental sense.

"The terms "heart," "soul," and "mind" are not completely distinct, watertight categories. They overlap somewhat and together cover the whole person. Taken together the meaning is that we should love God preeminently and unreservedly.

"Jesus loves God with his whole heart, for he is blameless in his fealty to God (4:1-11). Jesus loves God with his whole soul, for he is prepared to surrender his life should God so will (26:36-46). And Jesus loves God with his whole mind, for he lays claim for himself neither to the prerogatives of worldly power [cf. 20:25, 28; 21:5] nor to the security of family, home, and possessions (8:20; 12:50)."⁸²³

"The "and" in verse 38 is explicative. The one command is great because it is primary.

823 823. Kingsbury, *Matthew as . . .*, p. 12.

“The second greatest command is similar to the first in character and quality (v. 39). It also deals with love. We should love our fellowman unselfishly (cf. 1 John 3:17–18).

“22:40 The rest of the Old Testament hangs from or flows out of these two commandments. All the other laws deal with specific applications of one or the other of these commands. The prophets consistently stressed the importance of heart reality with God and genuine love for one’s neighbor. Without these two commandments the Old Testament lacks unifying summaries. These are the most important commandments, but they are not the only ones.”¹

I doubt that we need another lesson on sentimental love. We’ve been flooded with this teaching. What does it mean to love God with your conscience? We think of conscience as our internal moral compass. It points us to what is right and away from what is wrong. Sentimental love can come and go, turn on and turn off at the drop of a hat. Nor should we think of the heart’s love for God in terms of our fallen and sinful nature (example; Jeremiah 17:9). However to think of loving God with our conscience, though it stretches our concept of love, points us in a positive direction. The God-kind of Biblical love has moral and ethical implications. The man or woman who merely loves his/her marriage partner with a sentimental love may easily fall into the ever-present temptation toward infidelity without moral consideration. It seems that the dominant view of moral misconduct in our time has to do with discovery. If you can indulge in immoral activities and keep it secret, you are highly regarded. Society considers it wrong only if you got caught, and even then it looks for any available rationalization to justify the sin. A person who builds his/her marriage on Biblical love regards the spouse with a healthy measure of sentimental affection. They should be best friends. However they also build their marriage on a moral-ethical foundation that considers it wrong—sin to be sure—to violate their oath of exclusive faithfulness to each other. Thus the idea of love

¹Tom Constable. (2003; 2003). *Tom Constable’s Expository Notes on the Bible* (Mt 22:37-40). Galaxie Software.

with moral implications is not altogether alien to our thinking. We simply need to expand its scope in our regard for God and our faith in Him.

“Soul” and “spirit” are difficult words in our study of Scripture. At times, particularly in the Old Testament, “soul” seems to refer to the whole person. In other passages it seems to refer to a distinct component of man’s basic nature. Although the moral implications take on material and observable actions, the whole concept of loving God is inherently immaterial. You can’t “see” love or put it in a box with a ribbon wrapped around it. Underlying this premise is the Biblical idea that the dominant theme of every person’s life begins in the mind, in the immaterial and thinking processes. What dominates our thinking will work its way into actions. So this passage drives the obligation to love God into the taproot of human conduct. Love God morally, beginning in the immaterial processes that eventually control our conduct.

Mind, though no less challenging in some aspects, is a bit easier for us to grasp. Dr. J. P. Moreland has written a delightful and challenging book, *Love your God with all your Mind*. He takes us to task for habitually checking our minds in the vestibule of the church auditorium on Sunday morning. We enter the auditorium in a semi-conscious and distinctly unthinking frame of mind. We enter the worship hour essentially expecting to be entertained, but seldom urged to give serious thought to what we hear. If we take Jesus’ words seriously, we will condition our minds to be at their sharpest and most alert when we prepare to hear a sermon. Most preachers struggled with members of their audience who semi-sleep through the Sunday sermon because they thought they simply had to sit up late on Saturday night for a late television show. Saturday activities, especially Saturday evenings, should be planned specifically with priority to our mental alertness on Sunday morning. If any particular activity might dim our mental alertness on Sunday morning, curb it or schedule it for another time of the week. Can we truly convince ourselves, much less anyone else, that we love God supremely with all our being, and do anything less?

Little Zion Primitive Baptist Church
16434 Woodruff
Bellflower, California

Worship service each Sunday 10:30 A. M.
Joseph R. Holder Pastor