

The Great Commandment to Love God

Pastor Grant van Boeschoten / General

The Great Commandment / God's Love / Mark 12:28–34

Some things that musicians, poets and philosophers have said about love.

Love is a Banana Peel

I look at you and wham, I'm head over heels.

I guess that love is a banana peel.

I feel so bad and yet I'm feeling so well.

I slipped, I stumbled, I fell.

(Ben Weisman and Fred Wise, "I Slipped, I Stumbled, I Fell," sung by Elvis Presley in the film *Wild in the Country*, 1961)

Love is an Open Door

I've never met someone-

Who thinks so much like me!

Jinx! Jinx again!

Our mental synchronization

Can have but one explanation

You And I Were Just Meant to be!

Say goodbye To the pain of the past

We don't have to feel it anymore!

Love is an open door!
(Disney's "Frozen")

Love is A Bull

Happiness is the china shop; love is the bull.
(H.L. Mencken, *A Little Book in C Major*, 1916)

Love is an Ocean

Love is an ocean of emotion entirely surrounded by expenses. (Sir Thomas Robert Dewar)

Love is a smoke

Love is a smoke raised with the fume of sighs;
Being purged, a fire sparkling in lovers' eyes;
Being vexed, a sea nourished with loving tears;
What is it else? a madness most discreet,
A choking gall, and a preserving sweet.
(Romeo in William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, 1597)

What do you say that love is?

God is the author of love. Lets look at how God loves.

What can we learn about God's love from the Bible?

We are not going to do a full survey about what the Bible says about love. But I do want to talk about how God loves. Spoiler alert, its not at all like the poets, musicians and philosophers that I've just quoted. God's love is described in different ways in the Bible. Pastor, Scholar and Theologian Don Carson has done us a favour of classifying these into 5 different ways that God loves.

(book is *The Difficult Doctrine of the Love of God*)

The love of the Father for the Son and of the Son for the Father.

a. The Father is perfect. The Son is perfect. Neither needs redeeming. Neither needs forgiveness. Neither needs to overlook the others imperfections.

John 5:20 HCSB

For the Father loves the Son and shows Him everything He is doing, and He will show Him greater works than these so that you will be amazed.

God's providential love over the entire universe

a. God providentially loves the just and the unjust.

Matthew 5:44-45 HCSB

But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. For He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

Does God only sustain those who are good? No, he providentially sustains the evil and the good.

In fact, we read here in Matthew 5, that those who are children of God will have that same loving characteristic,

i. We don't just love those who love us, we love our enemies as well. We love our neighbours.

God's Yearning, Inviting, Seeking, Saving Love.

John 3:16 HCSB

"For God loved the world in this way: He gave His One and Only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life.

What is the way that God loved the world, he gave his Son so that all who would believe would have everlasting love.

1. This is the type of love that saves. When God loves this way, it is more than just to sustain human life, it is to make salvation possible for humans.

God's Choosing Love

An example of this is God's choosing the nation Israel to love. He didn't choose them because they were better than other nations, or some reason like that. He chose Israel because he loved Israel.

Deuteronomy 10:15 HCSB

Yet the LORD was devoted to your fathers and loved them. He chose their descendants after them—He chose you out of all the peoples, as it is today.

The difference between God's choosing love and God's providential love has to do with distinctions. God's providential love is for all, but his choosing love is by his selection.

Although this love works in concert with other ways that God loves, it is also unique.

God's conditional love

You don't hear about this kind of love very often. Usually we speak of God's unconditional love, which is true. But there is also this way that God loves conditionally.

The condition is faithful obedience on our part.

Exodus 20:6 HCSB

but showing faithful love to a thousand generations of those who love Me and keep My commands.

John 15:10 HCSB

If you keep My commands you will remain in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commands and remain in His love.

We can fall out of this way that God loves us by not keeping his commands. (Although he freely offers forgiveness and restoration through Jesus Christ.)

God loves in these different ways. This is not a list of the way that God loves in an order of importance. It is just a way of looking at the different ways that God's love is described in the Bible.

In every instance of God's loving, we see that he is perfect, holy, right and good. We trust God, because God is love.

Everything that God says and does comes from his love, we trust that to be true as well.

In Mark 12, we see a religious scribe come up to Jesus and ask him a question that was being debated around religious circles. The scribe wanted to know what was the most important command.

In first century Israel context, that meant looking at the law of Moses, and saying what does it all come down to. There were 613 laws, and that's too many to keep in the front of your mind. So, what should a good Jew keep in the front of their mind. What does it all come down to?

In today's context, the questions might be stated a little differently. We might ask, "What is the most important doctrine, or teaching, of the Christian faith."

What would your answer be? What do you think is the most important thing for someone to know about being a Christian. Lets look at Jesus answer to that Scribe's question.

Mark 12:29–31 HCSB

"This is the most important," Jesus answered:

Listen, Israel! The Lord our God, the Lord is One. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.

"The second is: **Love your neighbor as yourself.** There is no other command greater than these."

How can we say we love God and not also love our neighbor?

How can we possibly love our neighbor without first loving God?

God's law shows us how to love God, and how to love each other, and points us to Jesus.

Jesus starts off his answer by quoting a verse that was spoken in

Jewish homes daily. It comes from Deuteronomy 6:4-5.

Deuteronomy 6:4-5 HCSB

“Listen, Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is One. Love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.

In quoting this passage, Jesus adds to it the category of mind. This is what God’s law is all about. This is what living is all about. If we can just learn how to love God with our heart, soul, mind and strength. If we can let that love consume us, and flow to our neighbours. We will be satisfied, we will be everything that God’s law always intended for God’s people to be.

This is not possible without God’s help. But this is the blueprint for how to love, and with the saving power of Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit, we can live this out. Loving God and Loving Neighbour is how it looks to be a Christian.

Heart / Soul / Mind / Strength

Heart - Your Personality

“love for God” is not often included in the way that we describe a person’s personality. But that is what Jesus is saying in the context of 1st century Israel.

We might think today that heart means, feelings, and emotions. But if that is what Jesus was saying, then in his context he would have said, Love the Lord your God with all of your kidneys.”

If you were making valentine cards in that time period, you would not have pictures of hearts on the card. Instead you would have the guts, intestines, kidneys, etc.

Heart, is more about personality. Its who a person is, how they see the world, what their outlook is. That’s heart.

Love God with the way that you see the world. Love God with the way that you see people. Love God with your personality.

Soul - Your Inner Being

Your soul is the immaterial part of you, yet though you can not dissect a person and find a soul, we were all created by God with a soul.

Our soul makes us distinct from the rest of God's creation.

How do you love God with your inner being? I think of living rightly before God.

You can't see your soul, and you also can't see sin. God sees these things, but we don't. But we know the impact of sin on the soul. We know what it is to have a heavy soul. We know how hard it is to love well when we are burdened down with sin.

Our souls are the parts of us that form relationships. Our souls are where we connect with others. Our most important relationship is the one that we have with God.

Love your God with your whole soul. Live in holiness before him.

When temptation comes, you can actively love God by choosing his ways over sins lures and empty promises.

When you stumble and fall, when you find yourself in sin. Show your love for God by repenting. Find his love as he offers you his forgiveness freely and without reservation.

Mind - Your Mind, Your Intellect

This along with your heart, is loving God with your thinking. This is spelled out to us well in the first Psalm.

Psalm 1:2 HCSB

Instead, his delight is in the LORD's instruction,

and he meditates on it day and night.

Why is it love to delight in the Lord's instruction? Why is it love to meditate on God's word day and night?

Get away from thinking about love as feelings to answer the question. Think about love as a choice, love as an action. To choose

to meditate on God's word is saying that you want to learn to love from the author of love.

In meditating on God's word, you act out love and you also become more loving.

If you are not becoming more loving as you read the Bible, then something is wrong.

Remember, God's law shows us how to love God, and how to love our neighbor. By meditating on it, you let that love come into your heart and mind.

What do I mean by meditate? I mean that you take a truth from the Bible, and you think about it. You explore that truth, inserting it into your day and your thought processes.

Here is what I am not saying. I'm not saying to repeat a word or a phrase endlessly until you get lost in it. That's the opposite of using your mind and your heart.

Strength - with intensity

What does it mean to strengthen your grip? It means that you are going to try a little harder, you are going to increase your resolve, you are looking to reinforce.

Love God with all your strength. Love God with intensity.

When you love God with all your strength it is not a passive love. A passive love is one where you have the feelings but not the follow through.

Another way that you can translate this word for strength is capability. Love God with all of your capabilities.

Whatever you have the strength and the capability for, use it to love God.

Heart / Soul / Mind / Strength

Jesus says, that the very most important teaching in the law of God, the most central part of what it means to follow God, is that we love

God with our heart, soul, mind and strength.

How do we do that? The Bible is our guide. We read the Bible to learn how God loves us, and this world. We read our Bible to learn how we love God, and how we can love our neighbor.

We follow through with our heart, soul, mind and strength.

A couple of years ago there was a massive fire that forced all of the people of Fort MacMurray to evacuate. The fire was coming fast and there was very little warning before hand. People could only take with them from their homes what they could fit in their vehicles. They had only a little space, and only a little time. They knew that there was a good chance that their house would burn, along with everything inside.

What would you take from your house if you were in that situation. Maybe you would take pictures, maybe passports or cash. Maybe an important computer or hard drive.

IT would become very clear what was most important to you among your possessions. What are the things that make it into your vehicle as you flee the fire.

Jesus makes it very clear in this passage what we should hold on to and never let go. The most important command is that we would love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our mind and with all our strength.

Don't forget, its a command

Jesus is listing a command here, not a suggestion.

He doesn't give a qualifier, if you have time this week, then you should actively show God your love.

He doesn't say, if you feel like it today, then love GOd.

No, he says that we need to love God with our personality, our intellect, our soul and our strength.

This is an active love, it requires your actions. Don't wait for when you might feel like showing God love, plan ahead.

I think that the best application will come in the simple action of planning to read your Bible using your heart, soul, mind and strength. There you will learn how God loves, and how you should love.

APPLICATIONS

Read your Bible & Plan to Obey

Sing Songs to Praise God

Spend time in Prayer

Live in Right-standing with God & People