

Love the Lord

By David Phillips

In John 14:21 Jesus said, “*He who has My Commandments and keeps them, it is He who loves Me.*” In this passage and in many others we are taught that love for the Lord is one of the most important elements in Christian life. Though this is important, it is easy to misunderstand what it means to love the Lord because the world’s definition of love is very different than God’s. Therefore, if we want to know the love of God and the way He wants to be loved, we must look to the Scriptures for our pattern.

Love for the Lord Defined

Contrary to the world’s understanding of love, it is a command. It is not something that one just falls into. Rather, it can and must be learned (Titus 2:4). The love that is commanded is not emotionalism, though we are told that those who learn to love the Lord are able to rejoice in Him (Ps. 5:11), for when they love Him they find true security, comfort and joy, because they know that the Lord also loves them.

Love is obedience to God’s commands: Therefore, Jesus said in John 14:15, “*If you love me, Keep My Commandments.*” But Jesus wasn’t teaching something new in this passage. When God first gave the Ten Commandments He emphasized the relationship between obedience and love (Ex. 20:6). In Deut. 11:1, the Israelites were taught that the way they were to love the Lord was by keeping His charge, statutes, judgments, and commandments. Similar statements are made throughout the Scriptures. This is not something that God has left to question. Why is obedience so closely linked to loving the Lord? Why is it not enough to just have an emotional longing for the Lord? Why do we have to obey Him?

Those who love the Lord “Walk in His ways”: In Deut. 11:22 God promised blessings upon the people if they loved Him, but in loving Him they were to walk in His ways. The ways of the Lord are righteousness; they are His manner of conduct, the standard by which He walks and the standard by which He instruction mankind to walk (Hos. 14:9). To love the Lord is to love everything about Him: who and what He is, His righteousness, His justice, His mercy, etc. Therefore, it is natural that those who love the Lord and love His ways will seek to be like Him in Character—to make His ways their ways. This is the point Jesus made in the Sermon on the Mount, saying, “*Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect*” (Matt. 5:48). This must be our goal. Those who love the Lord are said to be His children. In Eph. 5:1 we are commanded to “*be imitators of God as dear children.*” We obey God because that is how we walk in His ways—His commands are His character revealed to us. When we understand this, the question we should answer next is, how do we learn to walk in the ways of God?

Those who love the Lord write His law in their hearts: This is something that God has stated many times. See Deut. 6:5-9. This was God’s desires for His people in the Old Testament, but not all of His people were willing to do this. But in Jer. 31:33 and in Heb. 8:10 the Lord prophesied that everyone who entered the new covenant would have His law written on their hearts. In other words, everyone who obeys the gospel does so because they love the Lord and His words. Therefore Paul said in Rom. 6:17, “*But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered.*” When we believe in the gospel and obey it, we do so “from the heart.” We are then delivered to the doctrine of Christ which ought to fill our hearts. From that point on, as the knowledge of God’s

word grows in our hearts, we are transformed by it, proving in our bodies what is the perfect will of God (Rom. 12:2). When this is the case, then our hearts' desire will be for the word of God—to learn it and to do it. As Jesus said in Matt. 4:4, God's word will be our sustenance; it will be the source of true fulfillment in this life. Consider Ps. 119:6-20, 33-37 and the delight that those who love the Lord will take in His law.

When we truly love the Lord we will be drawn His commands and delight in His ways. If this is our attitude, then it is also natural that we will hate that which is contrary to God. Therefore it is written in Ps. 97:10, "*You who love the Lord, hate evil!*" To love God is to be devoted to His ways. Evil is anything that is contrary to God and His righteousness. We know we love God when we abhor anything that is contrary to God, but when we strive to justify things that God does not love then the love of God is not in us.

When we truly love the Lord then we will strive to glorify God with our very being. "*Let all those who seek You rejoice and be glad in You; let such as love Your salvation say continually, 'The LORD be magnified!'*" (Ps. 40:16). More than glorifying God with our lips, we will glorify Him with our bodies as well. "*For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit which are God's*" (1 Cor. 6:20).

Love and the Circumcision Of The Heart

God teaches us that those who truly love Him have circumcised hearts (Deut. 10:14-17). But what does that mean? How can our hearts be circumcised? In order to understand this, we must understand the original purpose for fleshly circumcision. According to Gen. 17:11-13, circumcision of the flesh in the Old Testament was the sign of Israel's covenant relationship with God. The purpose for the covenant was to have special relationship with God—to be His special people, completely devoted to Him. Transversely, the richness of God's blessings would be upon those who had a covenant relationship with Him and when they were obedient to their covenant. Beginning with Abraham, circumcision for the Jews was the sign of their covenant with God; **it was a continual reminder of their relationship with God.**

In Deut. 10:16 the Israelites were shown that, more than fleshly circumcision, God desired that His people have circumcised hearts. This same principle is taught in the New Testament in Rom. 2:29. Just as circumcision of the flesh was the sign of Abraham's covenant with God, circumcision of the heart is the sign of the Christian's relationship with God. As in the Old Testament, we have a continual reminder that we belong to God, but ours is not a fleshly mark. The sign of our covenant with God is a heart that is completely given to Him and that is fully devoted to His service. **Our love for God is our continual reminder of our covenant with Him!** Therefore, the circumcised heart is one that is: 1) Sanctified for service to God—i.e. we obey from the heart, Rom. 6:17. 2) Belongs to Him and no other—i.e. we only serve one master, Luke 16:13. 3) Has a love for the Lord that takes preeminence above all else—even above physical family or our own lives, Matt 10:37-39.

We are shown in Gal 3:26-27; 4:6 that this covenant relationship with God begins when obey the gospel. "*For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ... And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, 'Abba, Father!'*"

The Benefits of Loving the Lord

The command to love the Lord is followed by many great and precious promises. Jesus gives us a glimpse of the tremendous benefits of loving Him in John 14:21-23. In that passage He said that He would manifest Himself to those who love Him. Upon further explanation of that statement, He said that He and the Father would make their home with us. But what does that mean?

Consider that the law of God is the description of His character for man to follow. In the New Testament we are told, “*we have the mind of Christ*” in 1 Cor. 2:16. Those who love the Lord have His law written on their hearts. Therefore, we make the character of God the character of our hearts. When we walk in all the ways of the Lord, then the character of God not only fills our hearts, but our actions as well. It is as if the Lord is living in us. Throughout the New Testament we are shown that this is the natural result of loving the Lord. Paul expressed this point most clearly in Gal. 2:20 where he described His relationship with the Lord, saying, “*I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but **Christ lives in me**; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.*”

Such a relationship is our ultimate purpose in this life. It is the reason we were created (Eccl. 12:13). It stands to reason, therefore, that only when we are striving for this kind of relationship with our God can we find true fulfillment in this life. Sin may provide temporary and passing pleasure that ultimately results in our harm, but loving the Lord is our source of true and eternal joy. Therefore the psalmist wrote in Ps. 5:11, “*Let those who love Your name be joyful in You.*” We may feel like we are able to make it on our own in this life, but our only true source of strength is the Lord. He is our life, our all! “*I will love You, O LORD, my strength. The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. I will call upon the LORD, who is worthy to be praised; so shall I be saved from my enemies.*”

Why is this so true? Because this is the way it was meant to be!

Conclusion

Do you love the Lord? We know whether or not we are loving the Lord by the way we live our lives, for Jesus said, “*He who does not love Me does not keep My words*” (John 14:23). Therefore, understand that loving the Lord involves so much more than just saying the words. It means showing that love in every aspect of our lives. The blood of Christ is able to cleanse and sanctify those who love Him because they, in turn, give themselves to Him. Have you given yourself to the Lord? Do you gladly give yourselves to His service? Are you actively and urgently fleeing the sin that separates you from God? Are you seeking ways to bear fruit unto God so that Jesus Christ can be seen in you? Do not sell yourself short. Draw near to God, love Him with your entire being, and you will find true and eternal joy through Him.

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