

## "LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD"

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The March 2014 Spiritual Reflection considered when to fear God and when to love Him. Here we reflect on learning to love God, beginning with the well-known instruction by the Lord Jesus to a Pharisee:

**Matthew 22:35–38** *One of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, <sup>36</sup>"Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" <sup>37</sup>And He said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. <sup>38</sup>This is the great and foremost commandment." [NASB]*

Here we must note that Jesus said that the commandment of the law is to love God. This is not "to have reverence for God," although we should revere Him; it is not "to pray to God," although we should pray; neither it is "to fear God," although we must fear Him: for that is the beginning of wisdom.

Rather, Jesus summarized the law in that the very first "order of business," the first and most important commandment of the law, is to love God.

Do we love God? Do I love God?

Surely, I did not start that way, because:

**John 14:15** *"If you love Me, you will keep My commandments." [NASB]*

Since I have not kept His commandments, rather I have sinned, I did not love Him: I can say — and I can claim — that I love Him, but the truth is that I do not; for — if I did — I would have kept His commandments.

However, we all can grow into loving Him; we shall consider here a few things to help us.

The first is to recognize His love for us:

**1 John 4:19** *We love him, because He first loved us. [KJV]*

He did it first. Before love can be in us, we must recognize that He loved us and that He did so, before we even knew that He did. Many are the things that testify of His love for us. The most important one is the all-important one:

**Romans 5:8** *But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. [NASB]*

In the midst of our being disobedient to the Lord, He came to earth, was crucified and resurrected that we may have eternal life.

**1 John 4:9** *By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. [NASB]*

This is another way of saying that He made a way for us to be forgiven of sin, not in exchange for something good we did for God: we could not, since we were still disobedient sinners.

Rather, He did it only because of His unlimited gracious love for us. There is no other explanation.

Next, we may consider how the prophets taught the children of Israel to love the Lord.

They did it by reminding them of all of God's provisions through the years, through the centuries — through joys and sorrows.

For example, this is how Moses encouraged them to love God:

**Deuteronomy 32:7, 10–11** *"Remember the days of long ago; think about the generations past. Ask your father, and he will inform you. Inquire of your elders, and they will tell you. .... <sup>10</sup>He found them in a desert land, in an empty, howling wasteland. He surrounded them and watched over them; he guarded them as he would guard his own eyes. <sup>11</sup>Like an eagle that rouses her chicks and hovers over her young, so He spread his wings to take them up and carried them safely on his wings." [NLT]*

The important thing of which Moses reminded them was that all this much good that came their way, came from the Lord their God and from nowhere else:

**Deuteronomy 32:12–14** *"The Lord alone guided them; they followed no foreign gods. <sup>13</sup>He let them ride over the highlands and feast on the crops of the fields. He nourished them with honey from the rock and olive oil from the stony ground. <sup>14</sup>He fed them yogurt from the herd and milk from the flock, together with the fat of lambs. He gave them choice rams from Bashan, and goats, together with the choicest wheat. You drank the finest wine, made from the juice of grapes." [NLT]*

We ourselves may learn to love Him more as, day-by-day, we become aware of the many provisions that He makes for each one of us.

At the beginning of our Christian walk, we think that much of what happens in our lives may just be random events.

As we grow, we recognize that nothing is random; rather that all things that happen are God's plan and provision:

**Romans 8:28** ..... we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. [NASB]

All things work together for good, but at the time, not all things may feel good to us. Sometimes we are being disciplined by God: that is because His purpose is not to make us feel good, rather it is to make us good.

**Hebrews 12:11** All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness. [NASB]

In sum: one important way for us to learn to love God and to increase our faith in Him is to recognize His love for us.

Next is to practice obedience. Worldly authorities often require obedience, but Jesus does not demand obedience: Jesus invites. For example:

**Revelation 3:20** Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me. [NASB]

He knocks, but He won't break down the door: it is up to me to open it.

The obedience I practice toward the Lord is that which I offer willingly, not as a result of an obligation or fear of punishment; rather as a manifestation of my love for Him. I obey, because I have come to realize that obedience is what the Lord loves and also it is what yields the best for me.

**John 14:15** "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments." [NASB]

Obedience increases faith and knowledge of Him. If I love Him, I want to please Him; to please Him the first thing is to trust Him.

The overwhelming importance, which God places on obedience, was declared by the prophet Samuel to Saul, the king, who had disobeyed:

**1 Samuel 15:22** Samuel said, "Has the Lord as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, And to heed than the fat of rams." [NASB]

In fact, obedience is so fundamental for God that:

**Hebrews 5:8-9** Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered. <sup>9</sup>And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation, [NASB]

First, although Jesus was the Son of God, He had to learn obedience through suffering and second, it was through obedience that He was made perfect.

Through obedience two things happen:

- 1] We also are made perfect and
- 2] Our love for God grows and we demonstrate our love of Him, by keeping His commandments.

**1 John 5:3** For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome. [NASB]

The love for God consists of obeying Him: everything else is deception.

When I obey, I show that I am abandoning myself to the Lord and forgo my trust in my judgment, which was the original sin of Adam and Eve. Furthermore, and perhaps most surprising, the more I obey the easier it becomes (*His commandments are not burdensome*).

So I now may do two things to see the love for God grow in our heart.

I may recognize His love in the many ways He demonstrates it, beginning with the sacrifice on the Cross that gives eternal life (rather than eternal damnation) to all those who believe in Him and acknowledging His care for me in the events of every day.

And — not because of fear of punishment — but because of love, I can be obedient to His will, as He makes it known to me every time I turn my heart to Him in prayer and in the reading of the gospels.