

OUR LOVE FOR CHRIST
John 14:21-24

Concl: During our Lord's ministry He was constantly faced with His enemies who tried to trick Him and trap Him into saying something for which He could be condemned, and perhaps put to death. On one of these occasions He had been with the Sadducees, and had silenced them, but the Pharisees came and they tried to tempt the Lord. This is what Matthew gives us in his account of that event:

35 Then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked him a question, tempting him, and saying,

36 Master, which is the great commandment in the law?

37 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.

38 This is the first and great commandment.

39 And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

40 On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets (Matt. 22:35-40).

We don't know what the lawyer wanted the Lord to say, but we can be sure that he expected the Lord to choose one of the ten commandments. Instead, the Lord took the first commandment from Deut. 6:5, and the second commandment from Lev. 19:18.

The lawyer's question meant this: What is the most important commandment in all of the Law? And since he was a Jewish Pharisee, I would assume that "law" here means, the Mosaic Law, the law given by God to Moses--the first five books of the OT.

I. THE GREATEST COMMANDMENT IN THE LAW.

The Lord responded immediately by saying, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind" (Matt. 22:37). And then the Lord added, "This is the first and great commandment" (Matt. 22:38). This meant that there was nothing that the Lord told His people to do in those early days than this. They were to love the Lord their God with all their heart and soul and mind. And you will notice that the Lord used the word "all" in each case. (Repeat.)

This is the commandment of God. There is nothing greater, nothing more important, and I might say, no continuing thing that the Lord looks for from His people than this. More than anything else He wants our love. He wants our devotion.

It is interesting to me that the Lord did not say that the most important thing in the Law was that people believe it, and believe in Him. That must be assumed because before a person would love God, he must believe God, trust in God, come into a saving relationship with Him. To talk to an unbeliever about loving God doesn't really make sense to them.

It is also interesting to me that the Lord did not say that the greatest commandment is that men would know Him. This also is assumed, because you have to know the Lord before you can really love Him. We trust in Him. Then we grow in our knowledge of Him. And this is how we come to the place where we love Him.

But we have to realize that there are many people who have believed in the Lord for salvation who don't really know Him very well. Their knowledge of the Lord is sometimes very deficient, and this always leads to a great misunderstanding not only of the Lord but also of the truth. And then who could deny that there are many who know the Lord, but they really haven't come to the place in their lives where they really love Him—love Him in the depths of their hearts, and souls, and minds. This is the great need of every believer. Not only to begin loving the Lord, but to continue loving the Lord, and to love Him so much, so completely, that it is evident in the way we live, the way we talk, the way we think.

From our knowledge of the NT, both the Gospels and the epistles, it would seem that since the giving of the Law God has never given a commandment that surpassed that commandment.

Just this morning I, probably like many of you, read Revelation 2. This chapter gives our Lord's letters to the first four churches of Asia: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, and Thyatira. In his letter to the church at Ephesus the Lord had many commendatory things to say about their lives, their works, their orthodoxy, and so on, but there was something which was missing at that time in the Ephesian church that had been there before: "Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love" (Rev. 2:4).

I like the paraphrase which renders this verse something like this: "Nevertheless, I have somewhat against you because you don't love me as you used to love me."

Then the Lord called on them to repent. And He told them that they had fallen, and asked them to notice how far they had fallen. And He told them that this had affected their works, and that if they did not repent their candlestick would be removed. This meant the loss of their testimony.

All of this should be very interesting to us. The Lord was indicating to them that even being orthodox they could love their testimony if their love for Him continued to be at the low level that it was then. We can lose our testimony by departing from the truth, but that was not the problem in Ephesus, and that probably is not the problem in most places where services are still being held, but there is no power, no fruit, no real blessing such as a fervent love for the Lord always brings.

It behooves each one of us to ask ourselves if there has ever been a time in our lives when we really loved the Lord more than we do now--when we thought about Him more, when we looked forward more to the time when we would see Him, when we delighted more even in hearing His Name. Our doctrine can be straight. We can be doing all of the right things in our services. But the Lord looks into our hearts, and He is primarily concerned about our love for Him. If we love the Lord, really love Him, then everything else in our lives will soon be in its right place as far as the Lord is concerned.

But this brings us to a very important question:

II. HOW DOES THE LORD MEASURE OUR LOVE?

We can say that we love the Lord, and we ought to say it. I am sure that it pleases the Lord when we do say it, especially if it is really true. But loving the Lord has to be expressed in more than just words.

In John 14:21 the Lord, with His disciples in the Upper Room, told them how He measured their love. And it was so important to Him that He did what He frequently does in Scripture, He repeated Himself in verse 23 because He did not want any of them to miss it. (Read both verses.)

When the Lord spoke these words 1500 years had gone by since Moses wrote the books of the Law--Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. Think of the books that followed--all of them, with the possible exception of Job. The books of history, the books of poetry, the books of prophecy. And the Lord was just completing His rich ministry on earth in which He actually intensified many things that had been given by God in the OT. And there was more to follow: the Gospels, Acts, the epistles, and the book of the Revelation. And scattered all through these books there are many, many things that the Lord has given by way of commandments. He called them "my commandments."

When Lucille and I were younger we came under the ministry of the Navigators, and they had a great influence in our lives.

We first were drawn to these verses under Dawson Trotman's ministry, and also in the early days of Young Life. Daws Trotman pointed out to us that there are no less than 500 commandments in the New Testament alone which have to do with our lives--things the Lord wants us to do, things that the Lord doesn't want us to do, and many commandments which tell us what the Lord wants us to be!

We have them! We have them in our Bibles. But it falls to every one of us to search the Scriptures day after day to find out what they are. The Lord said, "He that hath my commandments."

But then He said, "And keepeth them." This means being obedient to them, not just once in a while, but continuously. You talk about perseverance. The Lord was talking about perseverance when He said these words. And this is how He measures our love. It is by our obedience to His Word, to His commandments.

However, we know that we cannot obey Him in our own strength, and so the Lord went on in the following chapter to talk about our relationship to Him as branches are related to the vine. It is the life of our Lord Jesus flowing out into our lives through the Word of God that makes it possible for us to live daily in obedience to the Word of God.

But now let us look at the last part of these two verses. Here we have:

III. THE REWARD, THE EFFECT, THE BLESSING OF AN OBEDIENT LIFE.

Let me read these words slowly, thoughtfully, so that we can take them into our hearts. These verses are like the commandments of the Lord; they are usually followed by some great and precious promise as an incentive for us to do the will of God.

What is the chief result of seeking to be obedient to the greatest commandment that was every given?

Look at the last part of verse 21. (Read.)

Now look at the last part of verse 23. (Read.)

You can see that the Lord said the same thing twice, and these both add up to fellowship, personal fellowship, with the Lord, with the indication that it can be better and better as we walk day by day with the Lord.

Does it mean that the Lord won't love us unless we are obedient to Him? No, nothing can ever change the Lord's love for us. But it means that we are going to be made more conscious of His love. His love will mean more to us, will have a greater effect upon us. And, as verse 21 indicates, the life of obedience to the Word of God will result in a greater, more intimate knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Concl: The Lord said these things as He was going to die, and shortly after His resurrection, would leave them. And yet He was indicating that their fellowship with Him after His departure could actually be greater than it was when He was present with them IF they paid attention to His Word, and sought to live obediently to that Word day by day.

There are many things that God told His people to do in OT times which we are not asked to do today--to offer sacrifices, to observe certain days, and so on. But we need to read our Bibles with our eyes open to see everything that comes as a commandment from the Lord. Perhaps in a day's reading you will come to a particular verse, a particular command, which exposes a need in your life. Take it for the day. Think about it. See how you are to obey it. Ask the Lord to help you to please Him. And notice the difference that it will make in your life, by the blessing of the Lord.

You can see from Scripture that there is something about obedience to the Lord that has a permanent, transforming effect in our lives. Holiness comes through obedience. By God's grace we become what He wants us to be by doing what He wants us to do.

And the more obedient we are, the more we seek to please the Lord by doing His will, the greater will be our fellowship with Him, and the greater will be our joy in Him, and, if it pleases the Lord, the greater fruit we will be able to bear to the glory of God.