

## STUDY UNIT 5

Mt. 16:24 / Rom. 12:1-2 / Rom. 6:13-20 / John 12:24-26

### THE FIRST AND FOREMOST COMMANDMENT

Why do we live for others as Christians? Why do we live our lives, not for ourselves, but for others in self-denial? Because God has commanded us to do this.

*“This commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also.”*  
*1 John 4:21*

But, unless we are choosing to live our life for God, we will not be choosing to give our precious life to others. Unless we are choosing to love our God with all of our heart, we will not be choosing to do what He asks of us. This is why Jesus spoke of the greatest commandment from God – and then the second:

*“And one of the scribes came and...asked Him, ‘What commandment is the foremost of all?’ Jesus answered, ‘**The foremost is, ...you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.**’*  
*“The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’”*      *Mark 12:28-31*

The OTHERS we are to love, the ones that God has chosen for us to give our life to (John 15:16), are the subject of the study units that follow (6 thru 10). But before we address these, let us ask...

### HOW DO WE PRACTICALLY LOVE GOD?

with all of our heart, and with all of our soul,  
and with all of our mind, and with all of our strength?

Fallen men cannot do this—they live for themselves. Christians can do this—but they need to “put to death” the desires of their “old man” nature on an ongoing basis and then, led and empowered by the Holy Spirit, they can. We can do all the things God asks of us through Him who strengthens us (Phil. 4:13).

No Christian does this 100% of the time, and many Christians remain as “babies” in Christ. Like most of the Corinthian church, they are not “spiritual” in their walk. They mostly or often “walk in the flesh” like an unsaved man does and not “in the Spirit” when the going gets tough.

So, even though we may correctly understand the theology of these truths, how do we **PRACTICALLY** keep this foremost commandment to love God? What are we instructed to do?

There are **three things we must do, three things that self-denying love for God will do.**

# 1. WE MUST UNCONDITIONALLY SURRENDER OUR LIFE AND WILL TO GOD

Christ is our perfect example of this, in His coming, His life, and His death:

*"For **I have come** down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me."* John 6:38

*"**I can do nothing on My own initiative.** As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is just, because I do not seek My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me."* John 5:30

*"And He went a little beyond them, and fell on His face and prayed, saying, "**My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as Thou wilt.**"* Matt. 26:39

After Our Lord perfectly illustrated all that man should be and do, we find that this total surrender of life and will is what He called us to do:

*"Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, **let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.** For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it; but **whoever loses his life for My sake shall find it.**"* Matt. 16:24-25

*"I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to **present your bodies a living and consecrated sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service of worship.**"* Rom. 12:1

The surrender of our life and will to God is an **ongoing, growing, and tested** aspect of our relationship with Him. As a Christian begins to learn God's opinions and instructions, he is regularly faced with changing the way he lives. Enemies are to be forgiven and loved. Wedding vows are to be honored. Others are to become increasingly more important than ourselves, which is the primary focus of these studies. Observe the ongoing nature of surrendering our will to God in the following statements and commands:

*"For you were formerly darkness, but now you are light in the Lord; walk as children of light, for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth, trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord."* Eph. 5:8-10

*"If we (who are saved) confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."* 1 John 1:9

*"Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing."* James 1:2-4

## Why Is Unconditional Surrender of Our Life to God Essential?

- It is the prerequisite to receiving God's plans for your life. (see James 1:5-8)
- Without it we are conformed to the world and grow useless. (see Heb. 12:1-16)
- It is required for the spiritual power to do what God asks of us. (see 2 Cor. 12:7-10)
- Without it we will not proceed onward to give our lives to others, because this is what God asks of those who surrender their lives to Him. (see 1 John 4:20-21)

Is your all on the altar of sacrifice laid?  
Your heart does the Spirit control?  
You can only be blest,  
And have peace and sweet rest,  
As you yield Him your body and soul.

Would you walk with the Lord,  
In the light of His word,  
And have peace and contentment always?  
You must do His sweet will,  
To be free from all ill,  
On the altar your all you must lay.

Oh, we never can know  
What the Lord will bestow  
Of the blessings for which we have prayed,  
Till our body and soul  
He doth fully control,  
And our all on the altar is laid.

Elisha Hoffman

## 2. WE MUST LEARN TO THINK AND LIVE BIBLICALLY

Biblical thinking is to view life from God's perspective (Col. 2:6-8). It is to know what God thinks about a subject, an issue, or a decision we face (2 Tim. 2:15). It changes the decisions we make in life (1 Cor. 5:1-7), and determines our usefulness, effectiveness, and fruitfulness for the Lord (2 Tim. 2:21, Heb. 12:1, John 15:7-8).

*"The one who says, "I have come to know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; but **whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected.** By this we know that we are in Him."* 1 John 2:4-5

## Why Is It Essential for a Christian to Think and Live Biblically?

- **Only biblical thinking and living enables us to love God.** We cannot worship God in spirit and in truth unless we have learned the truths of His word.

*"He who has My commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves Me; and he who loves Me shall be loved by My Father."* John 14:21

- **Only biblical thinking and living enables us to grow spiritually.**

*"Like newborn babes, long for the pure milk of the word, that by it you may grow in respect to salvation."* 1 Pet. 2:2

- **Only biblical thinking transforms us.** Making the principles of His Word absolute transforms our decisions, our relationships, our circumstances, and our soul.

*"And do not be conformed to this world, but **be transformed by the renewing of your mind**, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect."* Rom. 12:2

- **Only biblical thinking and living makes us useful to God.**

*"Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth...Therefore, **if a man cleanses himself from these things, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work.**"* 2 Tim. 2:15-21

- **Only applying biblical truths** accomplishes these things. We must be willing to change our associations, our activities, and overcome our laziness and indifference. If you love God you will...

See to it! (Col. 2:8)

Guard! (2 Tim. 1:14)

Set your mind! (Col. 3:2)

Persevere! (1 Tim. 4:16)

Be steadfast and immovable! (1 Cor. 15:58)

Press on! (Phil. 3:12-14)

Run with endurance! (Heb. 12:1)

### 3. WE MUST ASSUME RESPONSIBILITY FOR OTHERS AND GIVE OUR LIFE TO THEM

The third thing that self-denying love for God will do, because He has commanded this of us, is to Assume Responsibility for Others—those that God has prepared for us to give our life to. Christ Himself is our example of course. The Father gave Him a detailed list of those He wanted Him to assume responsibility for and He fulfilled this task, giving His life to them, because He loved the Father.

*"I glorified Thee on the earth, having accomplished the work which Thou hast given Me to do. And now, glorify Thou Me together with Thyself, Father, with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was.*

*I manifested Thy name **to the men whom Thou gavest Me** out of the world; Thine they were, and Thou gavest them to Me, and they have kept Thy word... "While I was with them, I was keeping them in Thy name which Thou hast given Me; and **I guarded them**, and not one of them perished but the son of perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled... And the glory which Thou hast given Me **I have given to them**; that they may be one, just as We are one; I in them, and Thou in Me, **that they may be perfected in unity**, that the world may know that Thou didst send Me, and didst love them, even as Thou didst love Me." John 17:4-23*

#### What Are the Primary Aspects of Assuming Responsibility for Others?

- God wants us to ACCEPT OTHERS – just as He has accepted us.

*"Wherefore, **accept one another**, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God."*  
Rom. 15:7

*"Now **accept the one who is weak in faith.**"* Rom. 14:1

One of the wonderful examples of this is when Barnabas was sent to assume responsibility for the spiritual growth of the pagan Gentiles in Antioch.

*"And the news about them reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas off to Antioch. Then when he had come...he... began to encourage them all with resolute heart to remain true to the Lord; for he was a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And considerable numbers were brought to the Lord.*

*And then he left for Tarsus to look for Saul; and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. And it came about that for an entire year they met with the church, and taught considerable numbers."* Acts 11:22-26

- God wants us to SERVE OTHERS – giving our life to them.

*“But now, I am going to Jerusalem **serv**ing the saints.” Rom. 15:25*

Meeting practical, physical needs is the emphasis of serving. The noun form of this word is translated “deacon”, one who serves the needs of the church in a practical, often physical way. The first deacons assumed responsibility for organizing, preparing, and serving the meals for thousands of new believers remaining in Jerusalem after Pentecost (see Acts 6:2-3). Serving takes many forms, but it has as its motivating force the assumption of responsibility for tasks that meet needs **for others**.

- God wants us to ADMONISH OTHERS – for their good.

*“But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, in order that I may finish my course, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus.... Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock.... Therefore be on the alert, **remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears.**” Acts 20:24-31*

The Greek word we translate “admonish” means “to bring to mind” or “to cause someone to be mindful of something.” Consider the following story:

“Periodically I go to the local grocery or variety store where I often observe all manner of inappropriate behavior, dress, and speech. Almost always I do NOT take the time to admonish these folks about these things they have chosen to do. However, if I should happen to see one of my children or church members so engaged, I would surely speak to them privately, or if they were a child or a woman I would probably speak to their parents or ask my wife how to address the matter. However I would do it, I would be motivated to encourage them to love God and please Him in all that they do.”

Why would I do this for some and not for others? I have assumed responsibility for some and not for others. We have a heart for those we have a sense of responsibility for. Otherwise, we do not make the effort.

- God wants us to BUILD UP OTHERS – blessing them.

*“I **commend** to you our sister Phoebe, who is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrrea; that you receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and that you help her in whatever matter she may have need of you; for she herself has also been a helper of many, and of myself as well.” Rom. 16:1-2*

These verses begin an entire chapter where Paul mentions by name 29 individuals and groups. He is verbalizing his delight in them, their good work for others, and their value to himself and to God. The very act of commendation establishes that they are special, important, and loved. We all need to know we are loved and accepted and valued, that our efforts are pleasing to God, and that our lives matter. Paul assumed responsibility to express these very things to his spiritual children. Who is going to verbally commend, build up, and bless your children today? Your husband or wife? Your friend? Your brother or sister at church? Whose responsibility is it?

## **Review And Summary**

So, how do we practically keep this foremost commandment to love God? What are we instructed to do? The three things we must do, the three things that self-denying love for God will do are:

- 1. WE MUST UNCONDITIONALLY SURRENDER OUR LIFE AND WILL TO GOD**
- 2. WE MUST LEARN TO THINK AND LIVE BIBLICALLY**
- 3. WE MUST ASSUME RESPONSIBILITY FOR OTHERS AND LIVE FOR THEM**

## **UNIT 5 STUDY SESSION #1:**

In preparation for the group study, read and study the above and then complete the following self – evaluation.

### **Evaluating How Well I Am Loving God**

#### **1. The Surrender of My Life and Will to God**

- I begin each day by surrendering my will to God’s will for my life.  
\_\_\_\_\_ Yes      \_\_\_\_\_ No
- During communion I surrender any area the Lord has revealed concerning His will. I confess my willful sins and ask God for His forgiveness.  
\_\_\_\_\_ Yes      \_\_\_\_\_ Communion does not mean this to me.
- The battle for me regarding surrendering to God’s will is \_\_\_\_\_.  
\_\_\_\_\_ I purpose to yield this area. \_\_\_\_\_ Not now      (see 2 Chron. 16:9)

#### **2. How Well I Have Built My Life Around the Principles of His Word**

- I always seek to understand what the Bible says on an issue.  
\_\_\_\_\_ Yes      \_\_\_\_\_ Except when I want to do it my way
- I have daily times in God’s Word.  
\_\_\_\_\_ Yes      \_\_\_\_\_ Often      \_\_\_\_\_ Only really when I need help
- The last extended time I had with God, focused on His mind and will was:  
\_\_\_\_\_

### 3. The Extent to Which I Am Assuming Responsibility for Others

- I believe that the following people are my personal responsibility and I am giving my life to them in self-denial. I am living for them, it is the Lord's will and direction.  
\_\_\_\_\_ my spouse \_\_\_\_\_ my children \_\_\_\_\_ the members of my church  
\_\_\_\_\_ I pray regularly for the following unsaved people \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- I am currently investing myself in discipling the following people:  
\_\_\_\_\_

### **Discussion Questions For Study Session #1**

1. The study proposed that there are three practical "to dos" involved in loving God in self-denial. What are these three? Do you agree that this is what God wants us to do?
2. Which of these three aspects of living life for God do you find the most challenging. Why?
3. What has loving God cost you so far?
4. Who assumed some responsibility for you spiritually?

### **Prayer Together**



## **UNIT 5 STUDY SESSION #2:**

In preparation for the second study session please choose one of the following projects for the week and come prepared to share what you have learned in the process:

### **Preparation For Session #2: Application Project**

1. Begin each day this week by reading the hymn in the study (Is Your All on The Altar) and then:  

Commit yourself anew to the Lord, then  
Thank Him for the hard things you face, then  
Pray for those He wants you to love and brings to mind, then  
Ask Him to show you what He wants from you today
2. 22 passages of God's Word are quoted in this study. Identify those in your weakest area of the study and, beginning there, memorize as many of these passages as you can this week.
3. God has a plan for your life and work for Him – regarding others (John 15:16, Eph. 2:10, 2 Pet. 1:4-10). Have a planning session with the Lord and:
  - 1) identify the people He is leading you to assume responsibility for in some regard (or continue to), and
  - 2) clarify and write out a plan to begin accomplishing this for the next few months.

### **Discussion Questions**

If you were able to pursue one of the projects can you share how it went?

### **Prayer Together**