

A COMMAND FOR THE HEART! MARK 12:28-34

By Rev. Paul R. Shockley ©

www.prshockley.org

I. INTRODUCTION:

A. I read about a young man who was determined to win the affection of a lady who refused to even talk to him anymore. He decided that the way to her heart was through the mail, so he began writing her love letters. He wrote a love letter every day to this lady. Six, seven times a week she got a love letter from him. When she didn't respond, he increased his output to three notes every twenty-four hours. In all, he wrote her more than seven hundred letters. The upshot is that she wound up marrying the postman.

B. **Consider the following statement from Richard C. Halverson:**

There is nothing you can do to make God love you more!
There is nothing you can do to make God love you less!
His love is Unconditional, Impartial, Everlasting, Infinite, Perfect!

C. J.I. Packer put it this way in his book *Knowing God*:

What matters supremely, therefore, is not, in the last analysis, the fact that I know God, but the larger fact which underlies it—that He knows me. I am en-graven on the palms of his hands. I am never out of His mind. All my knowledge of Him depends on His sustained initiative in knowing me. I know Him because He first knew me, and continues to know me. He knows me as a friend, one who loves me; and there is no moment when His eye is off me, or His attention distracted from me, and no moment, therefore, when His care falters. This is momentous knowledge. There is unspeakable comfort... in knowing that God is constantly taking knowledge of me in love and watching over me for my good. There is tremendous relief in knowing that His love is utterly realistic, based at every point on prior knowledge of the worst about me, so that no discovery now can disillusion Him about me, in the way I am so often disillusioned about myself, and quench his determination to bless me.¹

Transition:

D. Let me repeat the last sentence again: “*There is tremendous relief in knowing that His love is utterly realistic, based at every point on prior knowledge of the worst about me, so that no discovery now can disillusion Him about me, in the way I am so often disillusioned about myself, and quench his determination to bless me.*”²

¹ Charles Swindoll, *Tales from the Tardy Oxcart*, 236.

² *Ibid.*, 236.

With the God of the Bible being that kind of God, in response, don't you want to love Him all the more?

- E. In this series I am going to explore what it means to love God with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our mind, and with all our strength.
- F. This morning we will examine what it means to love God with all your heart (part I). In fact, the title of this message is a "***Command for the heart!***"

Tonight we will consider what it means to love God with all your soul (part II). Wednesday we will seek to understand what it means to love God with all your strength (part III). Next Sunday morning we will take up the task regarding what it means to love God with all your mind (part IV). Then on Sunday night I will ask what does it mean to love your neighbor as yourself (part V). In each of these studies I will not only be asking what does it mean to love God, but is this evident in our lives? If so, to what extent? If not, why? What are we going to do about it? How can we love Him? On this last point I would simply say He doesn't want to be loved on your terms but on His terms? What are those terms?

- G. Other than the teachings I've done on our union and identification with Jesus Christ, I daresay that this is by far the most-important series I've ever considered for the Christian believer because it deals with the most sobering responsibility and desire of God for his adopted sons and daughters: that we sincerely and fervently love Him with every aspect of our lives. While my study and my personal life may have fallen short of the ramifications of this passage, it doesn't take away the magnitude of this charge or the responsibility to fully carry this out-no matter the contextual situation in which we find ourselves.
- H. Since I'm talking to Christians on this matter, for those of you who don't know Jesus Christ, God extends his amazing love to you. By sending his one and only Son, Jesus Christ to earth to die for you, he paid a sin-debt that you could never pay. Whether you want to admit it or not, you, like the rest of us, were born into sin and have sinned before God. You have acted contrary to the perfections of God. Since you are a sinner by both birth and by making decisions that are contrary to God's standards (such as lying), you can't ever be good enough to obtain salvation. The Bible is clear you will not have an opportunity to make a case before Him after you die. But while you have air to breathe, God, who loves you, desires you to receive his love-gift of salvation. All you have to do is receive that love-gift by placing your trust in Jesus Christ, believing that He is God, who died on the cross for your sins, and who rose bodily from the dead. It is a free gift with no conditions attached.
- I. For those of us who have experienced God's amazing love, who have received His love-gift of eternal salvation in the open arms of faith, let's now turn to Mark 12:28-34 and see what it means to love God and how we will live out these truths in the moment-by-moment details of our daily lives.

II. CONTEXT:

²⁸ And one of the scribes came up and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, asked him, “Which commandment is the most important of all?” ²⁹ Jesus answered, “The most important is, ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. ³⁰ And 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.’ ³¹ The second is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.” ³² And the scribe said to him, “You are right, Teacher. You have truly said that he is one, and there is no other besides him. ³³ And to love him with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the strength, and to love one’s neighbor as oneself, is much more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.” ³⁴ And when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” And after that no one dared to ask him any more questions.³

A. (vs. 28): Before we examine the greatest commandment in Scripture in Mark 12:28-31 (and also in Matthew 22:34-40) we need to establish context. In particular, we find this commandment in the midst of a plot by religious leaders who attempt to trap him by asking him a series of questions.

1. The religious leaders were in the process of rejecting the person and work of Jesus Christ and were seeking to find fault with Him in order to discount his ministry and teaching among the Jewish people. In fact, the religious leaders devised a clever plot to trick or ensnare Christ into some statement for which they could accuse Him and bring about his death.⁴ Listen to the words of Alfred Edersheim. He writes, “*The plot, for such it was, was most cunningly concocted. The object was to ‘spy’ out His inmost thoughts, and if possible, ‘entangle’ Him in His talk.*”⁵
2. What we will see is that in this portion of Mark is that Christ avoids the trap of the priests and elders raised through a series of questions. Mark records three of them. The first ensnaring question Mark states is about authority; it is a trap by the Herodians who framed their question politically:
 - a. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar? The answer Christ gave “**Render to Caesar the things that Are Caesar’s and to God the things that are God’s.**”
 - b. The Sadducees then came at him with a theological question concerning the resurrection. The Sadducees, who denied the resurrection, the

³*The Holy Bible : English Standard Version.* (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2001), Mk 12:28-34.

⁴ J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ*, 387.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 387.

immortality of the soul, and even the existence of angels and only accepted the first five books of the O.T. as authoritative, attempted to ensnare Christ by means of discrediting the doctrine of resurrection. Christ's powerful response to them is that they lacked spiritual insight to understand God's purposes. He says in verse ²⁴, "**Are you not therefore mistaken, because you do not know the Scriptures nor the power of God?**" Appealing to the Exodus 3:6 and verse 15, a source they would consider valid [meeting them where they are and taking them where they need to be], he says in verse ²⁶, "**But concerning the dead, that they rise, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the burning bush passage, how God spoke to him, saying, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'?**" ²⁷ **He is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living. You are therefore greatly mistaken."**

Now we come to the third question and this is where our study begins: Turn to Mark 12:28.

3. In the midst of Jewish leaders questioning Jesus a scribe, an expert on the interpretation of the Mosaic Law, enters into the discussion. Evidently impressed with Jesus Christ's answers, he raises a question. "***Which commandment is the most important of all?***" To be sure, the scribe's question does not mean which commandment is first in order, but which one is first in importance.
4. Why this question concerning the law? Well, the Pharisees had codified the law into 248 commandments and 316 prohibitions. The word "*codify*" means to arrange things, especially law, rules, or principles, into an organized system or code. Thus, 613 precepts were imposed by the Pharisees on their followers as *their* obligation with 365 of them being negative commands and 248 being positive commands.⁶
5. J. Dwight Pentecost offers a reasonable explanation for the question by the expert on the interpretation of the Law. Pentecost writes:

When a Jew tried to fulfill the requirements of the law so codified, it sometimes appeared to that person as though one law came into conflict with another law. It was necessary then to determine which of the two took precedence so that if a law had to be violated because of the conflict, one would violate the lesser and not the most important law. There was a constant argument among the Pharisees concerning which commandment took precedence over the other. The Pharisees had not been able to solve the problem or further reduce their codification of the law to assist their disciples in the process. **The Pharisees were testing Christ to see whether He had greater insight into the law than they did.**⁷

⁶ Idem.

⁷ Idem.

6. Jesus' response follows from verses 29-31:

²⁹ Jesus answered, "The most important is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. ³⁰ And 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.' ³¹ The second is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."

7. Consider the scribe's response. ³² **And the scribe said to him, "You are right, Teacher. You have truly said that He is one, and there is no other besides him. ³³ And to love him with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as oneself, is much more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices."** ³⁴

8. The scribe endorses Christ's interpretation of the requirements of the law and even notes that the Christ's answer was based on what the Old Testament itself demanded as evidenced in 1 Samuel 15. Jewish interpreters of the law would be very familiar with the account in 1 Samuel 15 because this is where Saul was rejected as king. In this O.T. account we see obedience to God's commands is more important than offering sacrifices to Him.

Listen to a portion of this account: 1st Samuel 15:10-29:

¹⁰ The word of the LORD came to Samuel: ¹¹ "I regret that I have made Saul king, for he has turned back from following me and has not performed my commandments." And Samuel was angry, and he cried to the LORD all night. ¹² And Samuel rose early to meet Saul in the morning. And it was told Samuel, "Saul came to Carmel, and behold, he set up a monument for himself and turned and passed on and went down to Gilgal." ¹³ And Samuel came to Saul, and Saul said to him, "Blessed be you to the LORD. I have performed the commandment of the LORD." ¹⁴ And Samuel said, "What then is this bleating of the sheep in my ears and the lowing of the oxen that I hear?" ¹⁵ Saul said, "They have brought them from the Amalekites, for the people spared the best of the sheep and of the oxen to sacrifice to the LORD your God, and the rest we have devoted to destruction." ¹⁶ Then Samuel said to Saul, "Stop! I will tell you what the LORD said to me this night." And he said to him, "Speak."

¹⁷ And Samuel said, "Though you are little in your own eyes, are you not the head of the tribes of Israel? The LORD anointed you king over Israel. ¹⁸ And the LORD sent you on a mission and said, 'Go, devote to destruction the sinners, the Amalekites, and fight against them until they are consumed.' ¹⁹ Why then did you not obey the voice of the LORD? Why did you pounce on the spoil and do what was evil in the sight of the LORD?" ²⁰ And Saul said to Samuel, "I have obeyed the voice of the LORD. I have gone on the mission on which the LORD sent me. I have brought Agag the king of Amalek, and I have devoted the Amalekites to destruction. ²¹ But the people took of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the best of the things devoted to destruction, to sacrifice to the LORD your God in Gilgal." ²² And Samuel said,

"Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices,
as in obeying the voice of the LORD?
Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice,
and to listen than the fat of rams.

²³ For rebellion is as the sin of divination,
and presumption is as iniquity and idolatry.

Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, he has also rejected you from being king.”

²⁴ Saul said to Samuel, “I have sinned, for I have transgressed the commandment of the LORD and your words, because I feared the people and obeyed their voice. ²⁵ Now therefore, please pardon my sin and return with me that I may worship the LORD.” ²⁶ And Samuel said to Saul, “I will not return with you. For you have rejected the word of the LORD, and the LORD has rejected you from being king over Israel.” ²⁷ As Samuel turned to go away, Saul seized the skirt of his robe, and it tore. ²⁸ And Samuel said to him, “The LORD has torn the kingdom of Israel from you this day and has given it to a neighbor of yours, who is better than you. ²⁹ And also the Glory of Israel will not lie or have regret, for he is not a man, that he should have regret.” ⁸

Thus, Samuel emphasized that sincerity and obedience were the prerequisites for worship that pleased the Lord.

9. So going back to Mark the Scripture states in verse 34, **“Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” And after that no one dared to ask him any more questions.”**⁹
 - a. When Jesus observed that the Scribe agreed with Jesus’ answer, Jesus states in verse 34, **“You are not far from the kingdom of God”** (vs. 34). His openness to Scriptural revelation and his positive orientation to Jesus, if continued, would bring him to faith in Jesus and ultimately entrance into His kingdom. Moreover, Jesus’ skillful answers discouraged His critics from trying to further ensnare Him. They stopped asking Him questions. But I would also add by stating **“you are not far from the kingdom of God”** perhaps provoked reflection by its hearers. What does it mean that the kingdom of God is not far off?!
 - b. When you look at these accounts we are able to see that Jesus’ derived His authority from God’s Word for all his answers went back to the Old Testament. Since this is the authority all the Jewish leaders claimed to follow, though they did not, they failed to discredit Jesus.¹⁰

III. EXPOSITION OF PASSAGE:

A. Now having understood a bit about the context and historical background, let’s turn to the passage itself and explore these statements more closely.

1. Notice how Jesus begins in verse 29. He doesn’t immediately launch into the commandment to love God with your entire being then love your neighbor as yourself. No, he begins with this statement:

⁸*The Holy Bible : English Standard Version.* (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2001), 1 Sa 15:10-31.

⁹*Idem.*

¹⁰ Expository Notes of Tom Constable on Gospel of Mark.

‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.’

2. **Hear, Israel!** You could translate it this way, “**Be hearing, Israel!**” It is a command that implies continuous hearing and in this connection “hear” signifies a hearing that heeds. And so, this announcement is in the nature of a reminder.
3. And what Israel is to hear is not some abstract idea regarding God. Look closely at this phrase again. “**Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is One.**”
3. Do you notice that the very name used for God is very personal: “**The Lord, our God?**”
4. Moreover, the phrase, “*Is one Lord*” decisively declares the oneness of God; He is the only one, the Absolute, the one absolute Lord God. Now this is important for several reasons:
5. This statement, “**The Lord our God is one Lord**” is originally found in Deuteronomy 6:4. Since the 2nd century B.C. pious Jewish believers would refer to Deuteronomy 6:4, known as the *Shema* (which is the first Hebrew word in Deuteronomy 6:4; it means “hear”), as a prayer and a confession of faith every morning and every evening. This statement immediately reflects a commitment to monotheism. I believe Mark recorded this statement here because his book was primarily written to Gentiles who are participants in a polytheistic culture.
6. In fact, when Moses states it in Deuteronomy He did not simply assert Oneness of God. If he simply asserted that this is their one God, it might imply that each culture or city-state or nation has their own special god. So, God would be the God of the Hebrews just like Athena might be the goddess of Athens or Apollo the special god of Troy. No, when Moses makes the statement, “The Lord our God is one Lord” he asserts the basis of Jewish faith: **The Lord** (Heb., *Yahweh*), namely, **our God**, Israel’s covenant-keeping God, **the Lord is One**, that is, unique (cf. Mark 12:32).¹¹
7. Thus, the way it is constructed boldly asserts that God is Yahweh, and this cannot be said of any other god. While each one of these other gods may be one, none of them is Yahweh; none of them are able to make and to keep an unconditional biblical covenant because they are all non-entities; they are dead figures; they are non-living idols. Israel’s God is the one Yahweh, and there is no other; He is altogether unique.

B. Vs. 30: And you shall love the lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.

1. Notice how the “**and**” separates each phrase. This is important because this conjunction gives equal weight to each phrase. Thus, each statement is equally important.

¹¹John F. Walvoord, Roy B. Zuck and Dallas Theological Seminary, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983-c1985), 2:163.

2. Notice the direction of the statement. Jesus begins with heart, moves to the soul, then to the mind, and finally to strength.

3. Also observe that just prior to each word, heart, soul, mind, and strength, you see the phrase “***With all your***” or depending upon translation it might say, “***out of whole heart, and out of whole soul, and out of whole mind, and out of whole strength.***”
 - a. Why is this important to note? Because the “***with***” denotes origin, the point from which action or motions proceed.

 - b. This makes sense because our love for God flows out of an inner life that is filled and controlled by a faith relationship with God through the knowledge of God and the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

4. Now, by referring to these four aspects, the statement is basically stating that one should love God with one’s entire being. In other words, the extent of your love for God is your whole person.
 - a. The heart emphasizes your affections, your inner desires; it is the control center of your human personality;

 - b. The soul emphasizes self-conscious thought life;

 - c. The mind emphasizes your capacity to think, reason, and make judgments;

 - d. Strength emphasizes your bodily powers.¹²
 - 1). Let me be clear here. I think it would be careless to say that each of these four aspects is clear and distinct from one another. Rather, it seems Jesus is referring to one’s *entire* being. In order to do so, he emphasizes it by referring to one’s heart, soul, mind, and strength. In other words, he is “highlighting” or “emphasizing” aspects of personhood. So, I use “emphasize” very carefully—for how can one really separate heart from mind or soul from heart into clear and distinct categories?

5. Now having summarized this first commandment, I will now spend the remainder of time examining what it means to love God and what it means to do it with your whole heart.

¹² John Grassmick, “Mark” in *Bible Knowledge Commentary*.

IV. HOW SHOULD WE THEN LIVE?

YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART:

Vs. ³⁰ “And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart...”

A. Vs. 30: “You shall love”

1. “You” makes this commandment personal. Literally, verse 30 says, “*you* shall love the Lord *your* God.” This brings out the fact that this commandment is to be taken personally. The “shall” makes it a command. Thus, you shall love! But what kind of love are we to love the Lord our God?
2. “Love” (agape):
 - a. Agape, ladies and gentlemen, is the most basic element in Christlikeness.
 - b. This is a love of intelligence and purpose, of sacrifice and hard decisions. *Agapao* is a “willful love, a determined love that generously chooses for the interests of another.” *Agapao* and *agape*, the noun form, speak of a love that grows out of knowledge. It comes from knowing the true God in all of His greatness and grace. You can’t work up *agape*, by emotional fervor as so many people seek to do, and think by this that they love God.
 - c. This word draws its meaning directly from the revelation of God in Christ. In the life of the Christian, it is not a form of natural affection, but we know from the Apostle Paul’s writing that it is a supernatural fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22).
 - d. To be sure, it is a matter of will rather than feeling. In fact, in Matthew 5:44-48, we see the emphasis of loving being equated with the will when we are told to love even those we dislike.¹³
 - e. At the same time there is not much difference lexically between *agapao* and *phileo*. Both involve a voluntary (I’ve decided to love you) and involuntary (I can’t help but love you) response. Nevertheless, to my knowledge there is **no command** to love in Scripture that ever uses *phileo*.¹⁴

¹³ *Your Father Loves You* by James Packer, Harold Shaw Publishers, 1986, page for March 10.

¹⁴ C. Swindoll, *Growing Strong*, pp. 67-8

3. “And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart...”

a. The word “heart.”¹⁵ In essence, your heart represents the control center of human personality.¹⁶

1. The word “heart” is used more than 800 times in Scripture and only a few times does it refer to the bodily organ.
2. It almost always refers to the inner person, that is, the inner life that controls your thoughts, emotions, and actions.

Let’s take a deeper look at the word “heart” and how it is used.

3. Beginning with unbelievers: the unregenerate person, since he is spiritually “dead in... transgressions and sin” (Eph. 2:1) and controlled by Satan (2:2-3), is described as having “every inclination of the thoughts of his heart... only evil all the time” (Gen. 6:5; see also 8:21). God stated that the “heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure? Who can understand it? (Jer. 17:9).
4. The word “heart” is used of the mind, the seat of knowledge, thoughts, wisdom, and affections. It is capable of discerning good or bad.
5. The heart also refers to the seat of human emotions, both positive and negative. It can experience hatred, pride, despair, fear and terror, grief and sorrow, sadness, resentment, anguish, and stubbornness. It can also experience gladness, generosity, joy, devotion, and cheer.

Now having a better understanding of what “heart” means, let me translate this command so far:
From out of the control center of your inner life you are to completely love the Lord your God.

B. If that is correct, how should we then live? Are we committed to loving God with the control center of our personalities or do our inner desires, affections, thought life, and

¹⁵ **2840** καρδία (*kardia*), ας (*as*), ἡ (*hē*): n.fem.; ≡ DBLHebr 4213, 4222; Str 2588; TDNT 3.605—**1**. LN 26.3 **inner self**, never the literal body part called the “heart,” this is a reference to the areas of the inner self, including: the volition, the mind, the desires, etc., though the facility of the intellect make be slightly more emphasized (Mt 15:19; Lk 6:45 v.r.); **2**. LN 83.14 **inside**, far inside something (Mt 12:40), note: see LN index for a fuller treatment of the lexical units.

Grassmick, John D. "Mark." In *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*, pp. 95-197. Edited by John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck. Wheaton: Scripture Press Publications, Victor Books, 1983.

inner drives betray this command. Said differently, do we find ourselves attempting to serve two masters?

1. Earlier in Mark 7:20, Jesus states, “What comes out of a person is what defiles him. ²¹ For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, ^mmurder, adultery, ²² coveting, wickedness, deceit, ⁿsensuality, ^oenvy, ^pslander, ^qpride, ^rfoolishness. ²³ ^sAll these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.” ¹⁷
 2. If these are characteristics we are exhibiting then if we are honest, we would have to admit that we are not committed to loving God; He does not occupy the seat of our affections.
- C. But if we are pro-actively seeking to cultivate affections for our God that flow from the deepest reaches of our inner lives, I take it that the following three affections or qualities of life will be evident:

Quality # 1: You love without hypocrisy.

1. You love without hypocrisy. Paul explains what he means by loving without hypocrisy in what follows in Romans 12:9-10.
 - a. To love without hypocrisy is to abhor what is evil. In other words, you share God’s sentiments on what is evil. You know what evil is and you strongly reject it. Why? Because that is not where your affections are found! To be sure, abhorrence is not the same as tolerating evil.
 - b. To love without hypocrisy is not only to abhor what is evil but to cling to what is good. You cling or hold tightly to what is noble, true, trustworthy, righteous, and worthy of worship before a holy God.

See, what God seeks in the believer is not so much a single worthy act as it is a continuing quality of life that is characterized with Christ-centered love-which loves without hypocrisy by abhorring what is evil and clinging to what honors God

^m Matt. 5:22, 28; See Ex. 20:13, 14, 17

ⁿ 2 Cor. 12:21; Gal. 5:19; Eph. 4:19; 2 Pet. 2:7; Jude 4

^o See Matt. 6:23 (Gk.)

^p Eph. 4:31; Col. 3:8; 1 Tim. 6:4

^q See Luke 1:51

^r [Eph. 5:17]

^s 1 Cor. 6:9, 10

¹⁷*The Holy Bible : English Standard Version.* (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2001), Mk 7:20-23.

Quality # 2: Your affections for Him dominate your life:

2. Second quality is that you have affections for Christ that dominate your life. There are those who may say that this command to love God with your whole heart is an ideal, rather than a possibility. Granted, few have ever really stepped up to the plate. But those who have been obedient to this command, experience the abundant life and are those who touch lives most deeply; you can't forget who they are and you want to emulate them to some degree. What I'm trying to say is that there are those saints of God who have this unquenchable passion for Him that permeate every aspect of their lives; they breathe it; they live it. Consider three characters from the Bible: David, Paul, and John.¹⁸
 - a. Even though David had some serious faults, he was a man after God's own heart. His holy songs of praise are the expressions and breathings of a man who has a heart that is sold-out to God, his holy affections, his humble and fervent love to God, his admiration of His glorious perfections and wonderful works, his earnest desires, thirstings, and pantings of the soul after God, delight and joy in God, a sweet and melting gratitude to God for His great goodness, a holy exultation and triumph of a soul following hard after God, reveals this type of quality.
 - b. We also see this in the Apostle Paul. Here he is, a chosen vessel unto Christ, to bear His name to the Gentiles, and made as a chief instrument of establishing churches across Asia Minor and Europe and used by God as the instrument to pen most of the New Testament. It appears by all his expressions of himself, that he was in the course of his life, inflamed, actuated, and entirely swallowed up, by a most ardent love to his glorious Lord, esteeming all things as loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Him, and esteeming them but dung, that He might win Him. He is overpowered by this holy affection for Christ; he is compelled by it to go forward irrespective of difficulties and sufferings.
 - c. Lastly, consider John. That beloved disciple, who was nearest and dearest to Jesus, evidenced this same fervent love. John, ever so tender to Jesus, was privileged like no other. From his writings that proclaim this affection to the privilege of leaning on His Master's chest at the Last supper, to the one being allowed to see heaven's throne room before his physical death, and to have lived much longer than all the rest of the apostles set him apart as one whose affections were centered and maximized upon the Lord Jesus Christ.

So, the first quality is that you love without hypocrisy. The second quality is that your affections for Him dominate your life. And the third quality is...

¹⁸ Adapted from Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections*.

Quality # 3: You have Joy in Christ.

1. Though you may have outward sufferings that are grievous, your inward spiritual joys are greater than your sufferings. Your unwavering trust in your sovereign God enables you to endure suffering with an attitude of inner peace and confidence. And when you are hit hard with tragedy you are one of those who can say, like a dear brother said to me just the other day-one who is suffering greatly, *“I’m weak, very weak but God is good.”* .

V. CONCLUSION:

How can I better love God with my innermost being?

1. Refuse to prostitute or give your heart away to something else other than God. I use the word “prostitute” very poignantly. Protect your heart from the corrupting influences that exist around you. Think about it-you are frail. If ever there has been a world-loving culture, it is ours. Every day we are bombarded with a mandate to love things, love money, love pleasure, love yourself, love those things that excite yours senses, and love the world. Besides distraction away from the things of God, loving the world allies us with an entire system that has been opposed to God and under the control of Satan ever since the Fall. To set our affections on the world is to be in love with a system that will ultimately and inevitably express itself in opposition to God and the things of God. We cannot remove ourselves from the world-but we can certainly decide that we will not allow the world’s affections to become ours.

I love how H.A. Ironside summarizes the greatest commandment. He states, “He who loves God supremely will not willingly dishonor Him in anything.”¹⁹

2. Don’t give God your leftovers. Give Him your utmost; give Him your very best. He is asking for your whole heart! It would be too much to ask if it was someone else.
3. Pray to God that you want to want to have pure, undefiled passion for God that is unquenchable. I’ve said this before...but God will honor this request because it is about worshipping Him. He knows that He is the only one worthy of worship.
4. Proactively seek to be in the fellowship with godly people who share your drive to fulfill this command with affections for the Lord that dominate your thoughts, activities, and passions. Don’t be satisfied with superficial relationships. Develop interpersonal relationships with godly people-motivate each other into the things of the Lord.
5. Lastly, don’t merely seek to intellectually know God’s Word. Take ownership of it in how you live.

The bottom line is that your desires and God’s obligations must harmonize together in your life iff you want to live out what God deems most worthy.

¹⁹ Ironside, *Mark*, 187.