

# Loving God

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD *is* one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. Deut 6:4-7

Jesus answered him, 'The first of all the commandments *is*: 'Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength'. This *is* the first commandment. Mk 12:29-30

Moses commanded the children of Israel to love the Lord your God. He explained that this was above all commandments and the one to be constantly taught to your children at every opportunity. Jesus also stated that the first of all commandments is to love the one true God.

And yet in the list of the Ten Commandments given earlier to Moses at Sinai, the first commandment was,

**I *am* the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before Me. Ex 20:2-3**

We could also mention that Jesus affirmed that the second commandment was to love your neighbour (Mk 12:31); Jews also understood this to be the case (Lk 10:27). Yet the second of the Ten Commandments is 'You shall not make for yourself a carved image ...' (Ex 20:4).

The point is that we must understand the thrust of divine revelation, which is clearly that the first commandment is to love the one true God above all else. The first of the Ten Commandments is not opposed to this and its statement, 'You shall have no other gods before Me', undergirds the fact that we must love God above all else. In a similar way, loving your neighbour as yourself encompasses the other commandments. The person who loves his neighbour does not kill him, steal from him or take his wife, etc. Thus, as the first tablet of the Ten Commandments was focused upon loving God, so the second tablet was centred upon loving your neighbour.

The Ten Commandments are simply a more detailed way of saying that the summary of God's commandments is first to love God supremely and then to love others as you love yourself.

So in the OT God affirms, and in the NT the Lord Jesus affirms, that we must love God above all.

The fact that both occasions mention that we must love God with: 'all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength',<sup>1</sup> indicates a supreme law for all believers. This cannot be ignored. All Christians must love God with all their being.

This then begs two questions:

1. Are all Christians doing this?
2. How do we do this properly?

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<sup>1</sup> Deuteronomy omits 'mind', but that is encompassed in the word 'soul'.

I have no doubt in my mind that all Christians are not doing this. Far too many distractions occupy the minds of believers constantly and loving God is relegated to short parts of the day and Sunday mornings. This is a separate matter to my concerns here, but one that ought to be considered.

My chief concern here is to examine what it means to properly love God.

There are very few solid works that deal with this question. Certainly there are a number of devotional books and articles that attempt to, but often these are superficial and overly emotional, or even sentimental. Loving God is not chiefly an emotional matter (though it does involve emotions) but an act of will, of choice.

Just as the love of God to us is an act of sacrificial commitment, so also our love to God must be the same.

The verb *agapao* used in Mark 12:30 means (as I'm sure you are aware): *'love as based on evaluation and choice, a matter of will and action'* (Friberg Lexicon); *'to have love for someone or something, based on sincere appreciation and high regard'* (Louw-Nida Lexicon).

ASIDE: It is wrong to say, as many do, that *phileo* = human love and *agape* (noun) = divine love. In fact there is much interchange between the two words and both have very similar meanings. However, only *agape* is used in terms of a commandment for Christians to love and this is probably because it has a slightly bigger emphasis upon love as an act of will.

God's love for the elect was illustrated in sending the Son to die for the sin of rebels; it was an act of choice and sacrifice. The love of the Christian to God is equally an act of choice and involves the sacrifice of all the soul, mind, heart and strength.

The central thing in loving God is that he must take first place. A believer can justifiably love many things, such as children and a wife, but all must take second place to the love one has for God. Love without sacrifice is trivial and superficial.

So, what does it mean in practice to really love God with all your heart, mind, soul and strength?

## Obedience

The first evidence of loving God is that you will obey all his commandments. If you love God and he tells you to do something, then you will do it without question. Lovers of God are law-abiders. Lovers of Christ keep his commandments.

God's own word tells us this fact on a number of occasions.

Therefore you shall love the LORD your God, and keep His charge, His statutes, His judgments, and His commandments always. Deut 11:1

I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments, His statutes, and His judgments. Deut 30:16

Take careful heed to do the commandment and the law which Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you, to love the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways, to keep His commandments, to hold fast to Him, and to serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul. Jos 22:5

**O Lord, great and awesome God, who keeps His covenant and mercy with those who love Him, and with those who keep His commandments. Dan 9:4**

**If you love Me, keep My commandments. Jn 14:15**

**If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. Jn 15:10**

**We love God and keep His commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome. 1 Jn 5:2-3**

If a father commands a son to do a certain reasonable chore, and the son refuses to obey; does that son love his father? Certainly not. It is common sense that a loving son will obey his father; even the world understands this.

This is such a simple matter that it needs little comment. And yet what do we see in the churches? We see rampant disobedience of God by supposed Christians left, right and centre.<sup>2</sup>

Excuse after excuse is made by Christians to not obey a commandment of God. Some even dare to say that God no longer gives those in the New Covenant any commandments or laws at all (antinomianism). The texts above prove that this position is false.<sup>3</sup>

Who is it that the devil fights against at the end? Who are the servants of God and those with the testimony of Jesus? It is those who keep the commandments of God:

**The dragon [the devil] was enraged with the woman [OT church], and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring [NT church], who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ. Rev 12:17**

The New Covenant people are those who obey God's laws by the Spirit and in action.

It is impossible to claim to love God and yet refuse to obey his commandments.

**He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. Jn 14:21**

## **Hearing God**

**Diligently heed the voice of the LORD your God and do what is right in His sight, give ear to His commandments and keep all His statutes. Ex 15:26**

It is also impossible for a son to claim to love a father and yet refuse to listen to what he says. A loving son will eagerly listen to all that his father tells him.

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<sup>2</sup> Do we need to give examples? Have I not written paper after paper explaining this? I will give but one: church leadership must not copy the world (Mk 10:42-43). In fact, the first are last and serve all (Mk 9:35). Yet virtually all churches have a system whereby one, or many, leaders act in an authoritarian manner just like the world. Many churches even have a pyramidal leadership hierarchy that copies the demonic systems of the world. Leaders, of all sorts, even get paid salaries and given great gifts, such as new cars, when nothing like this happened in the apostolic church. In some circles church leaders have become very rich off the backs of the saints – when Jesus condemned the rich (Matt 19:23). In the NT only a very few itinerant leaders lived by faith and were supported ad hoc. If even the leaders of the modern church cannot obey God's word, what of everyone else?

<sup>3</sup> The New Covenant is not run by blind legalism (mere fleshly adherence to written laws) but it does have commandments that are applied by the Spirit to the inner man, which God expects us to obey.

Note that we need to ‘**diligently heed the voice of the Lord**’. To be diligent means to show care and conscientiousness in one's work or duties, to be punctilious or painstaking, to be very careful. Sadly this quality of listening to God's words is lacking in today's churches.

It is lacking when Charismatic preachers neglect God's proven written words and instead issue supposed prophecies. Why would Christians listen to these with authority when they could rather listen to God's authoritative written word instead. These prophecies could be fleshly manipulation. They could be emotional over-enthusiasm. They could be demonic deception. They could be well-meaning, sincere but empty words. They could be misinterpretation. They could just be plain lies. No supposed ‘prophet’ can assure you and prove that their words are genuine. I have seen all these false forms of prophecy in the church many times. When people lean upon the supposed ‘prophecies’ of men rather than God's word they become deceived and go from bad to worse.

Diligence to heed the voice of the Lord is lacking when leaders teach superficialities and agendas. They do this when they preach out of their own head, perhaps starting with a small Biblical text, and then musing and ranting for 45 minutes to push a prior agenda or speak from their empty hearts. Some do this using humour, some with controversy, others do this with passion, but the result is always the same – nothing! There is no spiritual power and no edification when people preach emptiness, no matter how sincere they are.

It is also lacking when God's people fail to study their Bible daily. God calls us to learn diligently, not to just read a Bible passage as a duty and fail to consider it and fail to be edified by it.

It is lacking when people don't actually read their Bible at all but instead read some blessed Bible thoughts of some man in some daily portion. There is nothing wrong with reading a daily exposition on top of your own Bible reading, but not instead of your Bible reading. Christians must dig for their own gems and learn from their own Bible discoveries. Only these remain and do you good.

It is lacking when people make decisions about the course of their lives without getting proper leave of the Lord. Important life choices need to be discussed with the Lord and the options laid before him. They need to be prayed over. They need to be shared with wiser brethren and properly considered. Motivations need to be questioned. Whenever you make a life change based upon pragmatics or needs rather than the direction of God, then there is likely to be a bad fall-out later.

Note the following:

**Therefore you shall keep the commandment, the statutes, and the judgments which I command you today, to observe them. Then it shall come to pass, because you listen to these judgments, and keep and do them, that the LORD your God will keep with you the covenant and the mercy which He swore to your fathers. And He will love you and bless you and multiply you; He will also bless the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your land, your grain and your new wine and your oil, the increase of your cattle and the offspring of your flock, in the land of which He swore to your fathers to give you. You shall be blessed above all peoples; there shall not be a male or female barren among you or among your livestock. And the LORD will take away from you all sickness, and will afflict you with none of the terrible diseases of Egypt which you have known, but will lay *them* on all those who hate you. And you shall destroy all the peoples whom the LORD your God delivers over to you; your eye shall have no pity on them; nor shall you serve their gods, for that *will be* a snare to you. Deut 7:11-16**

If we interpret this passage according to New Covenant principles, we see the following. Those who listen to God and obey his word will:

- ‘The LORD your God will keep with you the covenant and the mercy.’ A Christian will have assurance of salvation and mercy from God. He will be kept and will persevere to the end.
- ‘He will love you and bless you and multiply you; He will also bless the fruit of your womb.’ A Christian will bear fruit for God. He will bring people to the Lord and manifest Christ in his life.
- ‘You shall be blessed.’ God will be your joy and make you happy.
- ‘The LORD will take away from you all sickness.’ God will take away the sickness of sin (1 Pt 2:24, ‘[Christ] Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness -- by whose stripes you were healed.’).
- ‘[The Lord] will afflict you with none of the terrible diseases of Egypt.’ God will keep the Christian from condemnation in the Day of Judgment.
- ‘You shall destroy all the peoples whom the LORD your God delivers over to you; your eye shall have no pity on them.’ A Christian will have spiritual power to stand against the enemies of God.

There is huge blessing from diligently listening to God; why would any believer fail to do this? However, listening to God is a characteristic of those that love him. True lovers of God will heed his words.

## Prayer and worship

Those who hear God will be those who also speak to God. Speaking to God is called prayer. However, this is really a restricted form of communication.

The word ‘prayer’ implies wanting something out of it. The origin of the English word is from the Middle English word based upon an Old French word *preiere*, itself based on Latin *precarius* meaning: ‘obtained by entreaty’. So prayer really means an entreaty, or a petition. The simplest prayer of petition is ‘help’.

But talking to God must become much more than asking for things every day, even though this is necessary (as shown in the Lord’s Prayer). Thankfulness ought to dominate our communication with God and this is not a petition. Worship should dominate our communication with God, and this is not asking for something it is giving something – our submission.

Those who love God will certainly pray, but they will also give thanks and worship. How much time do you spend doing these things? What is the proportion of your thankfulness to your asking for things?

The importance of worship is neglected these days because Christians have identified worship with music and outward corporate expressions of emotionalism – due to the influence of Charismatic thinking and practice. This is a bad thing.

Many examples of true worship in the Old Testament involved no emotionalism, no music and no corporate expression. They were occasions when a man, on his own, gave unbridled submission and thanks to God, lifting God up as great and humbling oneself in his presence. It often took years of divine training in a man for him to come to this understanding of worship. Look at the example of Jacob for instance (Gen 47:31; Heb 11:21<sup>4</sup>). Jacob (before he became Israel) could not do this,<sup>5</sup> nor could he bless kings.

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<sup>4</sup> ‘Staff’ comes from the apostle using the LXX translation. The Hebrew uses ‘bed’ or ‘couch’.

As a nation of worshippers, we need to learn to worship God at all times, in all places, in all circumstances without any emotionalism but with utter conviction that God is God.

So, the person who loves God will be the one who not only prays, but also constantly communicates with God in all circumstances and worships God with reverent devotion.

## Making sacrifices

When a young couple marry and move in together, it is inevitable that both will have to make some sacrifices in order to live in peace. Because they are in love they make such sacrifices willingly.

Under the Old Covenant believers needed to give all sorts of offerings, bloody and unbloody, in order to maintain their relationship of mercy with God. These did not obtain God's mercy but were expressions of faith for those that truly believed God. They were evidences of faith when performed by the elect.

Now these sacrifices cost something. When you sacrificed the best sheep that you had or the best bull, that cost a lot of money. They sacrificed something that had real value. Because Solomon had such great wealth, the sacrifices at the commissioning of the temple would have cost millions.

**And Solomon offered a sacrifice of peace offerings, which he offered to the LORD, twenty-two thousand bulls and one hundred and twenty thousand sheep. So the king and all the children of Israel dedicated the house of the LORD. 1 Kg 8:63**

Somebody tell me what 22,000 bulls and 120,000 sheep cost today? Of course the symbolic necessity was to convey the image that the death of the Lord Jesus (which the animal sacrifices prefigured) was of immense, incalculable value. But someone had to actually pay for this – Solomon.

Of course God is considerate and animal sacrifices were geared to wealth, so that poor people only had to find (or go and catch) a cheap sacrifice. The poverty of Jesus' parents is shown in that they offered the cheapest of sacrifices, two young pigeons (Lk 2:24). Thus God never expects you to sacrifice something that you cannot do.

So the people that loved God were a people that offered sacrifices. Today, those that love God will also make sacrifices.

Obviously the first thing is the sacrifice of praise. Those that love God will praise God and openly testify to him in public. This is not just something done hidden away from the world in a church worship time, it is praising God as a characteristic of life. Just one small example is that a lover of God will give thanks for a formal meal in any situation. This does not have to be ostentatious, but it must be with the heart. Hebrews commands this:

**Let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of *our* lips, giving thanks to His name. Heb 13:15**

The sacrifice of praise involves giving thanks and it should be done continually, not just on Sunday. Each day has many things to be thankful for, even if it is just air, water and food.

Above this God may call us to make all sorts of sacrifices in our life, and we need to hear from him very carefully.

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<sup>5</sup> Even when the unbroken Jacob experienced the presence of God his response was merely ritualised, followed by doing a deal with God for his own welfare (Gen 28:16-22).

These sacrifices vary from person to person and the sacrifices that one is called to make may not be required of another. We do not copy people but honour God.

For example, a person who was a dedicated musician, steeped in the world's entertainment industry, may be required by God, upon their conversion, to give that world up; especially if it were a source of temptation to them. Yet another musician may not be called to do that.

A person whose work as an unbeliever was in a business considered by God to be sinful (such as working in a casino, betting office, strip club, lap-dancing club, or a seedy night-club) will likely be called by God to change their job. If this is necessary, God will provide the means to get a better job and will not make you unemployed (unless he has a reason to do that).

Sacrifices continue throughout life if we are prepared to follow God properly. For instance, it is sadly common that when you are prepared to hold to the truth of God's word you will eventually find yourself losing friends. Most people just want to compromise and thus those who refuse to compromise on the truth are a threat and an embarrassment; it is easier for such people to ditch friends. This happened to Jesus many times and it happens to consistent disciples today. Are you prepared to lose friends and relatives for your stand on the truth?

Those who truly love God will make sacrifices.

## Caring for God's own

A son in a family cares for all those within his family. He looks out for his siblings and nurses his ageing parents. When a person marries into a family they develop a love for that family also and commit themselves to serve the people in that family.

Such is also the case in the household of God. When you are saved you are brought into a family, the church, and a characteristic of those that love the head of the family also love the people in that family.

This is a key component of eternal life and failure in this, according to the Bible, is a characteristic of those who are not truly saved. This is a very serious matter today when a lack of love (and worse) is being demonstrated in the church.

**Finally, brethren, farewell. Become complete. Be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you. 2 Cor 13:11**

**For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not *use* liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, *even* in this: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself'. Gal 5:13-14**

**Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart. 1 Pt 1:22**

**He who says he is in the light, and hates his brother, is in darkness until now. He who loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him. But he who hates his brother is in darkness and walks in darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes. 1 Jn 2:9-11**

**We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love *his* brother abides in death. Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. By this we know love, because He laid down His life for**

us. And we also ought to lay down *our* lives for the brethren. But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? 1 Jn 3:14-17

If someone says, 'I love God', and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God *must* love his brother also. 1 Jn 4:20-21

Loving the brethren is not just a proof of loving God, it is an active command from God. Those that do not love the brethren cannot love God.

Yet we see proof of unloving behaviour in the church all the time; in fact we see evidence of the most pernicious acts of vile hatred. I don't know where to start to give examples of this, they are so common.

When supposed Christian preachers call their Christian detractors vile names, yet offer no defence against the criticisms, they prove that they cannot be genuine believers. There are some very famous names that have done this repeatedly. How can their followers not see through this? The answer is because they are deceived. Some preachers have even publicly wished death upon their critics. The Internet is full of vile name calling of brethren.

[For the sake of balance it needs to be pointed out that identifying a heretic as a heretic is not unloving behaviour, it is an act of loving the body by pointing out a serious threat. The same is true of pointing out false prophets and unrighteous leaders. The church must be protected from dangerous people that are wolves in the sheepfold. Strong words can be used (as per Jesus against the Pharisees and Paul against the Jewish enemies of the Gospel) but everything must be true. This is not slander or gossip.]

When supposed believers slander a Christian then that unloving behaviour proves that the slanderer cannot be of God. Again this has been commonplace in the church, and again very famous names have committed this sin of being a false witness (worthy of death in the Old Testament; e.g. Ps 101:5). Gossiping and backbiting about a believer is a sin that is very close behind slander (Lev 19:16).

Members of the family of God are obligated to each other. This is only limited by geographical and social restraints and your abilities. We cannot fully support people miles away but we can help those brethren that we know need help locally. This is especially the case of brethren within your own church.

When Christians, and especially leaders, fail to meet the urgent material needs of the saints, there is a serious problem. If this is done knowingly and wilfully, then one has to question whether those leaders are really saved at all. Yet I have seen this repeatedly in churches. Failing to help a needy brother, when you have the resources to do so, is a very serious sin.

Schism is an even bigger sin. This is when a supposed Christian separates from others without good reason or through sin. Now there are very good reasons to separate as a last resort. For example, if a church teaches heresy and practises unrighteousness, then it is not only OK to leave but it is a duty to leave. God commands this. However, if there is no reason to leave then that is schism.

It is also schism of the body to separate from another believer, and especially a friend, unless there is a very good reason. Almost anything can be tolerated in Christian relationships as love covers sin, which is why separation from friends must only be a last



resort based on Biblical principles. Yet people in the church separate all the time, often for quite trivial reasons. I have known the case where supposed Christians have even separated from a friend in order to cover up sin, sometimes when that sin had been admonished. This is evidence of no spiritual life. Such people cannot love God because they did not love God's children.

It is sad to say that I have seen first-hand examples of all these things. In my life I have seen things that I would not have believed were possible in the church when I first got saved.

God's word is crystal clear; if you do not show love to your brother, then you cannot know God at all. Selfishness, pride, pique, slander and unrighteous behaviour towards a brother is proof that the sinner cannot be a Christian at all.

Those who truly love God will be those who truly love God's children.

## **Doing good to others outside God's family**

God's own word tells us to love others outside of the church community.

Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith. Gal 6:10

See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good both for yourselves and for all. 1 Thess 5:15

In the days of the Old Covenant, this command was expressed in being kind to the traveller and alien in the country.

You shall not oppress a stranger, for you know the heart of a stranger, because you were strangers in the land of Egypt. Ex 23:9

You shall not oppress a hired servant *who is* poor and needy, *whether* one of your brethren or one of the aliens who *is* in your land within your gates. Deut 24:14

Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the alien or the poor. Let none of you plan evil in his heart. Zech 7:10

For us today we represent God being doing good to the poor, the needy, the sick, the orphaned, the widowed and all who are in trouble.

As it is written: 'He has dispersed abroad, He has given to the poor; His righteousness endures forever'. 2 Cor 9:9

*They desired* only that we should remember the poor, the very thing which I also was eager to do. Gal 2:10

Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble. Jm 1:27

Our duty to do good to all is to extend even to our enemies and those who persecute us. The Christian can never represent God by being violent.

But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. Matt 5:44-45

So, we love God when we fulfil his command to show his goodness to those outside by doing good works to the needy. Jesus came to earth to manifest God and do the works of his Father, and he went about doing good to all, especially to the poor. Throughout history the true church has always performed good works in the community, by building hospitals, schools; through poor relief charities; through aiding the homeless, and so on. Such works glorify God. By doing such things we show our love to God. Such works please him.

## Bearing the testimony

The believer shows his love for God by being a testimony to him. Thus a believer will fully represent God in this world as an ambassador represents his nation to a foreign country. We are all ambassadors for God.

What is vital is to properly represent God. This first necessitates knowing God properly and understanding his attributes. If you do not understand God's character, how can you represent him? The sad fact is that many supposed Christians know very little about God.

For example, many modern Christians tell the world that God loves everybody and that he has a wonderful plan for their life. This is not only utterly unbiblical, it contradicts God's word about his character. Such a statement implies that God is not angry with sinners; that he tolerates unrighteousness and lawlessness; that he does not condemn wickedness; all of which are lies. In fact, God's own word shows that his plan for many sinners (and many nations) is hell.

Do we need to prove this? How about:

God is angry *with the wicked* every day. Ps 7:11

The wicked shall be turned into hell, *and* all the nations that forget God. Ps 9:17

The soul who sins shall die. Ezek 18:4

The wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself. Ezek 18:20

The wages of sin *is* death. Rm 6:23

Cursed *is* everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them. Gal 3:10

To suggest that God loves everyone is a gross misrepresentation of his character and an illustration that the person knows nothing about God's plan or even his Gospel. It clearly misrepresents God's own word, which says:

You hate all workers of iniquity. Ps 5:5

The LORD abhors the bloodthirsty and deceitful man. Ps 5:6

The LORD tests the righteous, but the wicked and the one who loves violence His soul **hates**. Ps 11:5

These six *things* the LORD hates, Yes, seven *are* an abomination to Him: A proud look, A lying tongue, Hands that shed innocent blood, A heart that devises wicked plans, Feet that are swift in running to evil, A false witness *who* speaks lies, And one who sows discord among brethren. Prov 6:16-19

All their wickedness *is* in Gilgal, For there I hated them. Because of the evil of their deeds I will drive them from My house; I will love them no more. All their princes *are* rebellious. Hosea 9:15

I dismissed the three shepherds in one month. My soul loathed them. Zech 11:8

Esau I have hated. Mal 1:3

Esau I have hated. Rm 9:13

Then I will declare to them [professing Christians at the end], 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!' Matt 7:23

If God's own word states emphatically, from cover to cover, that he hates sinners, then it is just sheer lies to affirm that he loves everybody. How can any Gospel presentation begin with an outright lie about God's character?

I once knew a very godly, but poorly taught, old Pentecostal lady. Faced with a book about Idi Amin at the height of his wicked power, I expressed concern; to which she responded, 'God loves him'. Being less experienced and young I felt humbled and wondered why I could not feel the same. In fact, her declaration was utterly wrong and a poor testimony. The idea that God loved a man who tortured thousands and killed millions of his own people to aggrandise wealth and power, is sickening; 'The LORD abhors the bloodthirsty man'. 'Abhor' is stronger than 'hate' and means, to loathe as abominable.<sup>6</sup>

This is but one example of the necessity to know God's own testimony in his word before we can represent our witness to him in the world. We cannot manifest God through lies.

Therefore, our great need today is to get to know God better and better through a proper study of his own word. When we understand God's character through his revealed word, then we can begin to represent him in our character.

Those who truly love God will know him and represent him accurately.

## **Examples where Christians think they are loving God - but they are mistaken**

There are huge numbers of supposed Christian today that presume they are loving God when they do certain things, but in fact they are not at all. They cannot be when the action is erroneous, unbiblical and disobedient to God's word.

Jesus gives us a serious warning regarding such people:

Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!' Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man. Matt 7:21-24

This passage is set within a series of warnings about false prophets (v15-20). The implication is that the people under view here are those who have followed the teachings of false prophets. This brings us to our first point.

### **Loving the things you have done for God when they were false**

Notice first that Jesus said that 'many' fell into this category. That should wake us up.

'That day' refers to the Last Day, the Day of Judgment when the sheep will be separated from the goats.

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<sup>6</sup> *Ta`ab*: to abhor, be abominable, be detested, regard as an abomination.

These people were outwardly servants of Jesus. They claimed him as their saviour and did notable works in his name: 'Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' You could say that these people were Charismatics; they prophesied, performed signs and cast out demons. Yet they were cast into hell and never knew Jesus at all; they could not have loved God.

Nothing you do guarantees that you are saved; nothing!

Your faith does not save you. Your knowledge does not save you. Your church attendance does not save you. Your theology does not save you. Your creed does not save you. Your spiritual experiences do not save you. Your good works do not save you. Not even miracles performed by you can prove that you are saved.

The only things that count are genuine knowledge of God, genuine submission to Christ, a genuine work of the Spirit and a Biblical repentance and faith that arise from true regeneration. Those that know these things have received Christ and have called on his name truly. All of these are gifts of God that are not the works of man; thus salvation is all of grace.

Now it is clear to me (and many others) that there are huge numbers of professing 'Christians' in the church today that think they love God because they go to church, believe Christ is God,<sup>7</sup> have had some experience, and so on. Yet they are not regenerated and do not know God. Thus they cannot love him.

This is why Paul urges converts to test themselves to see whether they are really in the faith:

Examine yourselves *as to* whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. 2 Cor 13:5

This verse is not alone:

Let a man examine himself. 1 Cor 11:28

If we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. 1 Cor 11:31

Let each one examine his own work. Gal 6:4

They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him, being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified. Titus 1:16

Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it. Heb 4:1

Looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God. Heb 12:15

Therefore, unless a person is truly regenerated and saved then no amount of works will enable you to love God. Every spiritual work done by people who only think they are saved when they are not will count for nothing. They cannot love God.

### **Loving your church when it is false**

There are a great many churches in the world today that call themselves 'Christian' and yet have nothing to with Christ at all. This has always been the case.

Indeed, how could all churches be Christian when they believe opposite things? One church believes that man saves himself by looking at the cross as a mere example; another

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<sup>7</sup> Note that even demons believe in God (Jm 2:19).

believes that man works in co-operation with God to be saved; while the truth is that God saves his people without any help from us at all.

One church believes that a single man is head over all churches; another denomination believes that a single man is head over very many churches; yet another believes that a man is head over a local church alone. The truth is that Christ is head over the whole church and men have no say in the matter at all.<sup>8</sup>

Some churches believe that all God's truth comes from the head of that church alone. Only he can set the standard of doctrine for the world. Other churches believe that the head of the denomination hears from God and then passes the information down through various ranks of hierarchy for that denomination. The truth is that God speaks to every man in Christ with the Lord being the only mediator between man and God. Every believer is a priest unto God.

We could continue like this for page after page. There are huge differences between churches so they cannot all be correct. Many must be false. Some supposed 'Christian' churches do not even believe in the Trinity<sup>9</sup> or that Christ is God<sup>10</sup>.

Paul commanded unity of doctrine:

Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and *that* there be no divisions among you, but *that* you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. 1 Cor 1:10

Be of one mind. 2 Cor 13:11

Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus, that you may with one mind *and* one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Rm 15:5-6

Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offences, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. Rm 16:17

*Being of one accord, of one mind.* Phil 2:14

Let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind. Phil 3:16

Many today say that this is impossible and that differences should be tolerated. This is not God's word. How does a young believer know what to believe in such a case?

In a local church, where there is a difference of opinion regarding doctrine, it is the responsibility of the elders to gather the church (not the leaders) to consider all the salient Biblical facts and come to a decision, under God, what the truth is. Variations to this must then be disciplined and purity maintained. It is not difficult. We see an example of this very thing in Acts 15.

So church doctrine can be pure and single.

Church practice arises from church doctrine and thus there need be no aberrations of practice where a church genuinely seeks God's truth about doctrine.

So church practice can also be pure.

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<sup>8</sup> All genuine church leaders are merely under-shepherds; they are not chief shepherds.

<sup>9</sup> Such as Oneness Pentecostals.

<sup>10</sup> Such as Christadelphians or Jehovah's Witnesses.

Thus there is no excuse for churches to be false. Yet we see many churches following clear false doctrine and every heresy under the sun.

Those who love a false church cannot love God who holds such a church in disobedience to his word and condemnation.

How can those who love a false church filled with false doctrine love God whose very words they are disobeying and whose character they are besmirching?

### **Loving your favourite church leader when he is false**

We have established the process of false doctrine and false practices that emerge in the church. This same procedure applies to false church leaders. There are very many that contradict God's word in thought, word and deed.

Examples of these are endless and I see no point in listing them here. There are some very wicked men leading churches today; even men that are hand-in-glove with Satan, including practising Freemasons, convicted fornicators, adulterers, homosexuals, men in allegiance with global elite Luciferians, men following political interests and some that are secret Satanists.

Many of these men have huge followings of supposed 'Christians'. They sell millions of books, DVDs and audio media. They are leading gullible people straight to hell.

You cannot love God if you love a false church leader. Jesus promised that his people will be guided by the Spirit into truth.<sup>11</sup> If you are not being led into truth then you cannot be a true Christian.

**If there arises among you a prophet or a dreamer of dreams, and he gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder comes to pass, of which he spoke to you, saying, 'Let us go after other gods' -- which you have not known -- 'and let us serve them,' you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams, for the LORD your God is testing you to know whether you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul.** Deut 13:1-3

### **Loving a church activity when it is false**

Huge numbers attend churches today because they enjoy the features and facilities that a church provides. They drive past perfectly good small churches in order to attend certain ones that give these features.

For example, many go to radical Charismatic churches simply because they cannot do without the vibrant 'worship' time based upon rock music, loud noise, emotionalism, crowd manipulation and so on. The fact that the NT has no mention of any instrumental music in the local church appears to have passed them by. Also they appear not to realise that the early church had no instrumental music either; in fact it was not widespread for centuries.<sup>12</sup>

Sometimes people attend church for such Charismatic worship even when they know that the messages spoken by the pastor are false. They refuse to attend a local church where the

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<sup>11</sup> Jn 16:13.

<sup>12</sup> Organs became common in the medieval Catholic churches after about 1250. Protestant churches did without instrumental music for a long time after this. Many Reformed churches only began to adopt instrumental music in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Spurgeon, Calvin and Luther had no instrumental music. Luther called instrumental music in church Baal worship.

truth is proclaimed, in order to be excited by a music-based worship time in a Charismatic church that preaches heresy. They even put their childrens' spiritual lives at risk to do this!

Another feature is the social life in the week. Many attend churches because their weekly social life has become the determining factor of their life. Without this they would lose all their friends, social activities and would feel bereft of human experience. Such churches are really glorified social clubs. Such folk relegate hearing the truth way beneath their desire to have a good social life or for their kids to have a good social life.

There are even some (yes I have met such) that focus upon exotic phenomena. They go to church to soak up wild phenomena, such as people falling down. In fact some people go up for ministry and fall down multiple times week by week. These have become addicts for a false church mystical experience.

We could list many more. Healings (or supposed healings) are another factor.

All those who claim to love God but are centred upon a false church practice cannot love God at all. They have been deceived and are centred upon something opposed to God's will.

### **Loving your favourite doctrine when it is false**

Some people develop a love for a certain doctrine, which becomes a shibboleth to them. They can cope with anything except anyone criticising their pet doctrine. Pre-tribulation Dispensationalists are especially guilty of this where the secret rapture becomes a touchstone of orthodoxy, despite it never being mentioned in Scripture.

This problem is not restricted to eschatology but covers all aspects of doctrine. Some Presbyterians, for example, elevate infant baptism to the rule of orthodoxy. The Brethren made a big issue of the closed table, even refusing to let Christians break bread if they hadn't been baptised the way they insisted upon (immersion). In this exclusiveness they broke a command of the Lord (Rm 15:7). Jewish Root teachers constantly do this when they misinterpret OT statements (ignoring the NT interpretation of them) in order to follow a worldly agenda.

When supposed Christians do this they prove that they are elevating a man-made interpretation of Scripture above the actual word of God; the interpretation becomes absolute instead of what God actually says; the doctrinal tribe becomes the formal authority instead of God.

People who are guilty of this do not love God. They cannot love God when they so obviously disobey his word.

## **Conclusion**

You can see that loving God is not a matter of mystical emotionalism<sup>13</sup> or fleshly exuberant experiences.<sup>14</sup> That is the way pagans show their love to their god. Loving God has nothing to do with such expressions of the old nature.

Loving God has a lot to do with obedience and doing what God tells us in his word. Loving God is thus very down to earth in its expression. It is being spiritual in day to day life. Those who love God are seen in their obedience to God, hearing God, worshipping God

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<sup>13</sup> Becoming passive, entering an altered state of consciousness, going into a mystical trance etc.

<sup>14</sup> Such as exotic phenomena i.e.: screaming, shouting, making animal noises, jumping, dancing, falling over, tongues etc.

thanking God, making sacrifices for God, loving God's people, caring to all people, especially the needy, and finally being a testimony to God as his ambassador.

These are all very practical things. Mysticism makes a person useless in society, but a lover of God is a very useful person to have around.

**Oh, love the LORD, all you His saints! For the LORD preserves the faithful. Ps 31:23**

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