

# NOTHING IN LIFE IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN LOVING GOD

Mark 12v30.

Geordie & his best mate went into a pub and said *"Barman; drinks al'roond! We're buying!"* "What's the occasion?" the barman asked. Geordie said *"We've just finished a jigsaw puzzle, and it only tuk us seven months."* "Seven months?" says the barman. *"What's the big deal? It shouldn't take you seven months to do a puzzle."* "O aye?" Geordie answered. *"On the box it said 'two to four years!'"*

Our new Bible series: 'One God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit' is going to occupy us for several months. You may think that is a long time, but believe me this subject could take us a lot longer. But why this subject? I could cite a variety of important reasons:

- We need to be clear about the great doctrines of our faith; and what could be greater than the doctrine of God?
- Those who come among us should know what we believe; guests who are looking into the faith, new Christians and other believers who visit.
- We need to concentrate on great truths & not stray off onto secondary things.

Yet none of these are the primary reason. We are starting this series because nothing in life is more important than loving God. Let me repeat this. **Nothing in life is more important than loving God.** This means that there can be no greater theme to dwell on than God Himself.

Let's explore this together as a way of introducing the new series.

Mark 12v28-30: *"One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?" "The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: `Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.'*

Jesus was quoting part of the Jewish *Shema* which has been recited through the centuries by Jews as a daily creed / prayer. It was the first thing a child learned at his mother's knee. They might also be his final words. Still today this is recited morning and evening in synagogues. *"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength". (Deuteronomy 6v4,5.)*

These words are clearly relevant for us because Jesus embraced them and put them above everything else. What are they saying?

**Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.** Literally four words in the Hebrew: "Yahweh" / "our God" / "Yahweh" / "One". This is a great

statement of truth. There is only One God. There are many idols and false gods, but we worship the One and Only God. This is called Monotheism.

**“Love the Lord your God”**. What God looks for more than anything else is that I love Him. He is not simply asking me to believe in him. Nor has He ever wanted a relationship based on duty or obedience. God is looking for the devotion of my heart; an inner delight in God and outward expression of that delight.

**“Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength”**. We are to love God with every part of our being. This is what is meant by *“heart” and “soul” and “strength”*. It is not necessary to define each word too precisely. Every faculty, every dimension of our life, is to be engaged in loving God; every aspect of body, mind, will, emotions, personality – all that makes us who we are- is to co-operate in loving God. And our love for God is to be total. No half measures. *“Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength”*.

In other words - nothing in life is more important than loving God.

Yet many today don't even believe in the existence of God. They call themselves “atheists”. The very idea of God is infantile. For them there is no God to worship or to love; everything in the universe can be explained in natural terms. For atheists there is no God to believe or trust in, and life is in your own hands.

Others go further and hate the very thought of God. Far from loving God with all their heart, the very thought of God is repugnant to them. They are not just atheists, they are anti-theists. Communism was born with this hatred of God. Lenin said *“Every idea of God is unutterable vileness of the most dangerous kind, contagion of the most abominable sort.”* Lunarski a Soviet Commissar boasted, *“We have done with the kings of the earth: now let us deal with the King of the sky.”* Today we have popular scientists like Prof. Richard Dawkins pouring their energy into attacking the very idea of God in their writings.

Other people are indifferent to God. They give him hardly a thought. They pour their heart and soul and strength into romance, or family, or career, or house, or fashion, or sport, or pets, or travel, or a thousand other things other than God. That is where their love and devotion is.

**But for the Christian nothing in life is more important than loving God.**

So how do we measure up to this? Some Christians give the impression that this is how their life flows every hour of each day; they never give any indication that they fail or struggle. But mere mortals like you and me know how flawed we are. Most of us feel that our love for God is very inadequate; it is weak, shallow, and inconsistent and mixed in its motives.

So how can I love God with all my heart and soul and strength? Is God asking the impossible of me?

## **1. How can I love God with all my heart when I can't see Him?**

I cannot see His face or His glory; I cannot touch Him or feel His hand on my shoulder; I cannot hear the tone of his voice. In his book 'Reaching for the Invisible God' Philip Yancey maintains "*God's invisibility guarantees I will experience times of doubt.*" (Philip Yancey p 208 'Reaching for the Invisible God.' Harper Collins 2000)

When Jesus was on earth God was present in flesh and blood. We might think – "*If only that were so now!*" No wonder then that the disciples reacted when He said He would be leaving them. But then He told them that a new way of knowing and loving Him as God would soon be available to them. He would send the Counsellor, the Holy Spirit.

So today when you come in faith to God through Jesus Christ, the same Holy Spirit causes a stream of love for God to flow in you. The apostle Paul writes (Romans 5v5) "*God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us*". I need God's love to love God as Deuteronomy 6 describes! I cannot do it otherwise. I need the kind of love that sent Jesus to die on the cross for me. That is way beyond me. But it is not beyond the Spirit of Christ. The Holy Spirit is the One who produces genuine love in our hearts. "*The fruit of the Spirit is love.*" (Galatians 5v22)

Father, Son & Spirit work together on our behalf that we might love God with all our heart and soul and strength – until that day when we do see Him face to face. God is not asking the impossible of us.

## **2. How can I love God with all my heart when sometimes my desire for Him is very weak?**

Does this mean that I fall far short? Listen, even the great saints whose biographies are on our bookshelves admit to times of barrenness. So do not allow yourself to feel condemned. When I feel my desire for God is weak Meister Eckhart's words help me: "*The soul must long for God in order to be set aflame by God's love; but if the soul cannot yet feel this longing, then it must long for the longing. To long for the longing is also from God.*" (Quoted by Philip Yancey p 208 'Reaching for the Invisible God.')

I don't keep a journal but I have a large format notebook in which I jot down things that help me. On one page I have written: "I want to desire God like this." Underneath are a series of Scriptures.

- Isaiah 26v9: "My soul yearns for you in the night; in the morning my spirit longs for you."
- Psalm 42v2: "My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?"
- Psalm 63v1: "O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water."

These Scriptures help me, especially if my desire feels weak. Sometimes they help me in my longing for God. At other times, when my heart feels cold they help me to long for longing! So we have the Word of God as well as the Spirit of God to help us love God with all our heart and soul and strength.

In personal worship I often sing Robin Mark's 'In the Beauty of Holiness', with its' chorus: *"So I pause at Your gates once more, as my heart and my spirit soar; and I wish I could love You more, my God and my King."* I suspect we will always feel the inadequacy of our love for God and wish we could love Him more.

So, nothing in life is more important than loving God. But what has this to do with a teaching series on 'One God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit'? Simply this: Because nothing in life is more important than loving God - there can be no greater theme to dwell on than God Himself. In fact this is one of our great aids to loving God.

In Mark's Gospel Jesus speaks of loving God **"with all your mind."** This is so crucial. Your mind needs to be filled with thoughts of God. The world and the culture we live in have no place for God. Our minds are bombarded with the message that God does not exist. So we need to saturate our mind with thoughts of God. As we do so we will find that our love for God increases, we are stirred to worship Him and live for Him.

Our minds need to be renewed and protected and improved and stretched by meditating on the mystery and glory of God. C.H.Spurgeon is quoted in J.I. Packer's "Knowing God". (IVP 1973)

*"The proper study of a Christian is (God. The highest science, the loftiest speculation, the mightiest philosophy which can ever engage the attention of a child of God, is the name, the nature, the person, the work, the doings, and the existence of the great God who he calls his Father.*

*The most excellent study for expanding the soul is Christ and Him crucified and knowledge of the Godhead in the glorious Trinity. Nothing will so enlarge the intellect, nothing so magnify the whole soul of man, as a devout, earnest, continued investigation of the great subject of the Deity."*

On our Sunday mornings together, *"we need to hear God entranced preaching."* (John Piper. 'The Supremacy of God in Preaching'.Kingsway. 1990) Our hearts will be won over and over again. Our spirits will soar in worship. Our passion will be stirred for mission.

This then is why we are starting the new series: We are going to explore and exult in the greatness of 'One God: Father, Son and Spirit', because nothing in life is more important than loving God.

**John Wilthew. October 2006**