

GROWING IN LOVE FOR GOD

2 Peter 1:5-7

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The title of this sermon is “Growing in Love for God.”

The Puritan **Thomas Watson** said, “Love to God is the very heart and spirit of true religion.”¹

If you want to get to the heart of what Christianity and the Christian life is all about, then this is it. Loving God.

Today we’re going to finish up our study of the list of virtues found in 2 Peter 1:5-7. It begins with faith, and it ends with love. We already studied love for others; today we are going to finish up with love for God.

2 Peter 1:5-7 “For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with... love.”

Turn with me to **Mark 12:28-31**.

28 One of the scribes approached. When he heard them debating and saw that Jesus answered them well, he asked him, “Which command is the most important of all?”

29 Jesus answered, “The most important is Listen, O Israel! The Lord our God, the Lord is one. 30 Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. 31 The second is, Love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other command greater than these.”

¹ Thomas Watson, A Divine Coridal

William Barclay said of this passage, “We may well say that here Jesus laid down the complete definition of religion... Religion consists in loving God.”

A Jewish scribe, an expert in Jewish law, asked Jesus what was the greatest commandment.

Now you have to understand. The Jews believed that there were 613 laws in the Torah, or the Old Testament law; 365 positive commands, because of the days of the year; and 248 negative commands, because of bones and major organs in the human body.² So this scribe wanted Jesus to pick the greatest command out of 613.

So Jesus answered by quoting the first part of the Shema, in Deuteronomy 6:4-5.

The word “shema” is the Hebrew word “to hear,” or “to listen,” which is the first word in Deuteronomy 6:4.

The Shema is the most important passage of Scripture to the Jews. Every Jewish service begins with the Shema. It is the first passage that every Jewish child commits to memory.

The full Shema is bigger – consisting of Deuteronomy 6:4-9; Deuteronomy 11:13-21; and Numbers 15:37-41.

The Shema is so important to the Jews that they keep tiny copies it in phylacteries, which are little boxes that they wear on their foreheads and wrists during prayer.

The Shema is also kept inside mezuzahs, which are little cylindrical boxes that are placed on the door frame of every door in Jewish home (Deut 6:8; Mt 23:5).³

And what is the core of the Shema? Loving God. Jesus said that is the greatest commandment.

² Wikipedia.org, “613 commandments”.

³ Ibid.

William Barclay comments on the Great Commandment, “It means that to God we must give a total love, a love which dominates our emotions, a love which directs our thoughts, and a love which is the dynamic of our actions. All religion starts with the love which is total commitment of life to God.”

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO LOVE GOD?

Here’s a **definition** of loving God: Loving God is delighting in Him, desiring Him, and treasuring Him above all else.

Loving God is a **delighting** in Him; to be fully pleased with God; to esteem Him higher than anything else; to adore everything about Him, all of His ways, all of His decisions, all of His commands, all of His attributes. There is nothing about God that you don’t like. You are fully pleased with Him.

Loving God is **desiring** Him more than anything else; to want Him more than anything else; to desire to be close to Him; to know Him more; to be more pleasing to Him; to be more like Him. Without God, nothing else matters. You want God more than food and water. You want God more than wealth, luxury, success, pleasure, fun. You want God more than a nice car, or a nice home. You want God more than season tickets. You want God more than good health. More than freedom. More than life.

Loving God is **treasuring** Him above all else. God is more important to you than anything else. He is your portion; your treasure; your prize; your priority; your center; your life. Everything else in life must fit around God. Nothing interferes with your walk with God. Nothing competes with your relationship with God. God comes first, and there’s no close second.

That’s what love is. How is love expressed? How is it displayed?

HOW TO EXPRESS LOVE FOR GOD

- 1. Love God with all your heart.**

Mark 12:30 “Love the Lord your God with all your heart”

What does it mean to love God with all your heart? Your heart is the inner you.

Your heart includes your **attitude**. Love God with your attitude – gratitude, joyfulness, contentment, faith.

Your heart includes your **thoughts**. Love God with your thoughts – think highly of God – as highly as possible. And keep your thoughts pleasing to God.

Your heart includes your **motives** – your why; why you do what you do. Love God for the right reasons; and serve God for the right reasons.

Your heart includes your **desires** – desire God more than anything else; and only desire things that please God.

Your heart includes your **affections** – what you like and enjoy and are attracted to. Love God with your affections – like Him more than anything else, and don’t like the things that He doesn’t like.

And your heart includes the **private** you – the part of you that nobody knows and sees but you and God. Love God in private – not just in public, not just when people are watching, not just in the light, not just on stage, but when you are all alone.

2. Love God with all your soul.

Mark 12:30 “Love the Lord your God with all your... soul”

Your soul is your life. Love God with every part of your life. Love God with your entire life. With your total life. With your whole life.

Love Him with your words, your actions, your hobbies, your money, your health and fitness, your thoughts, your sexuality, your relationships, your possessions, your career.

Don't compartmentalize your love for God. Love God with every part of your life.

Thomas Watson points out that in the Old Testament law, the high priest could not marry a widow, and he could not marry a prostitute. Why? Not a widow, because he is not her first love. And not a prostitute, because he is not her only love. God wants to be your first love; your only love; He wants every part of you for Himself.

3. Love God with all your mind.

Mark 12:30 "Love the Lord your God with all your... mind"

To love God with all your mind is to esteem God as highly as possible. Every thought that one has is of adoration and admiration. You don't have bad thoughts of God. Angry thoughts of God. You love everything your mind knows about God.

Arthur W. Pink asks, "Does it [your love for God] cause you to entertain good thoughts of God when His dispensations cross your will, moving you to place the best construction on the same and attributing them to His wisdom? For 'love thinks no evil' (1 Corinthians 13:5)!"

In other words, when God allows you to suffer, do you get angry with God; do you curse God in your mind; or do you continue to praise God and to have the highest, most affectionate thoughts of God?

4. Love God with all your strength.

Mark 12:30 "Love the Lord your God with all your... strength"

Make every effort to love God. Do your best to love God. Become a master, an expert, a PhD, a guru at loving God. As you do your best in school, or in sports, or in your career, do your best to love God. Give it your all. Hold nothing back. Go all out.

It is possible to love people too much, and it is possible to love things too much, but it is not possible to love God too much. We can never love God as much as He deserves. God loves us more than we deserve. We can never love Him as much as He deserves. But we must love Him as much as we can.

Thomas Watson wrote, "We must not love God a little, give Him a drop or two of our love; but the main stream must flow to Him."

5. Love God more than anything else.

Matthew 10:37 "The one who loves a father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; the one who loves a son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me."

We must love God more than our immediate family; more than our spouse; more than our parents; more than our kids. We must love God more than our pets, more than our career, more than our hobby, more than our possessions, more than our health, more than life, more than comfort, more than luxury.

We must love God more. Our love for God must be other; special; unique; deeper; higher; wider; stronger; longer.

Thomas Watson, "Though we may love the creature, yet it must be a subordinate love."

Our love for anything and anyone else must be subordinate to our love for God. In other words, we must not let anything in this world to interfere with our love for God.

Arthur W. Pink said, “God is truly loved above all others, when no affection for the creature can draw us deliberately to sin against Him.”

Abraham was willing to sacrifice his son, Isaac, out of love for God (Gen 22). We must be willing to sacrifice everything we have for God.

The great commandment includes not only loving God, but loving others. But loving God comes first. And loving God includes all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, while we are simply to love our neighbor as ourselves.

6. Love God by obeying His commands.

John 14:15 “If you love me, you will keep my commands.”

Love for God means obedience to His commands. The depth of your love is seen in the depth of your obedience. If you love God, then obey Him. If you are disobedient to God, then your love is weak.

How obedient should you be to Christ?

Luke 9:23 “If anyone wants to follow after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow me.” To deny yourself means to do God’s will rather than your will; to be obedient to God. And to take up your cross means to do God’s will, or to be obedient, no matter the cost.

Obey God when it is hard; when it hurts; when it costs; when it is unpleasant; when it is uncomfortable; when it is unpopular.

7. Love God by loving others.

2 John 1:6 “This is love: that we walk according to his commands. This is the command as you have heard it from the beginning: that you walk in love.”

The way to love God is to obey His commands, and His command is to love others.

If you want to love God, then devote yourself to learning to love people well.

Learn how to treat people the way that God wants you to treat them. Learn how to be patient, kind, gentle, forgiving, peaceful, submissive, humble, selfless, considerate, and a servant of all.

8. Love God by loving other believers.

Hebrews 6:10 “For God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you demonstrated for his name by serving the saints—and by continuing to serve them.”

We love God when we love His children – other Christians. Just as we are to show a special love to God, we are also to show a special love to other believers.

We love God by one-anothering – by obeying all of the one-anothers that are commanded to believers in the Bible. Encourage one another; honor one another; live in harmony with one another; build up one another; accept one another; have concern for each other; serve one another; carry one another’s burdens; bear with one another; be kind to one another; be compassionate to one another; forgive one another; submit to one another; teach one another; admonish one another; pray for one another; be hospitable to one another.

9. Love God by loving what God loves.

To show love for God, you need to love what He loves; take delight in what He delights in.

God loves those who obey Him, so show a special love to those who obey God (Deut 30:10).

The Lord loves the righteous, so show a special love to those who have a right relationship with God (Psalm 146:8).

The Lord loves righteous deeds, so love righteous deeds (Ps 11:7).

The Lord loves justice – fairness; when people are given what they deserve, so be a lover of justice (Ps 33:5).

10. Love God by hating what God hates.

Psalm 97:10 “You who love the Lord, hate evil!”

If you love God, then hate what God hates. **Proverbs 6:16-19** “16 The Lord hates six things; in fact, seven are detestable to him: 17 arrogant eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, 18 a heart that plots wicked schemes, feet eager to run to evil, 19 a lying witness who gives false testimony, and one who stirs up trouble among brothers.”

11. Love God by deepening your friendship with Him.

Loving God is not like loving a thing; it is loving a person.

God wants a relationship with you.

He doesn't just want you to walk in obedience; he wants you to walk with Him. Go through life with Him; in a relationship with Him.

Enoch walked with God (Gen 5:22). Noah walked with God (Gen 6:9). And God wants you to walk with Him. **Micah 6:8** “No, O people, the Lord has told you what is good, and this is what he requires of you: to do what is right, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God.”

To deepen your relationship with God means prayer – talking to God. How often should you pray? **1 Thessalonians 5:17** “Pray constantly.”

You need to have times of extended prayer when your total focus is on God.

And you need to pray all day long as you are going about your business. Talk to God while you are driving, and cooking, and cleaning, and bathing, and working, and watching TV, and surfing the internet.

12. Love God by worshiping Him.

Another way to express your love to God is to worship Him. **Deuteronomy 10:12** “And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God ask of you except to fear the Lord your God by walking in all his ways, to love him, and to worship the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul?”

To worship God is to tell Him how much He is worth to you.

Moses worshiped God. **Deuteronomy 32:3-4** “For I will proclaim the Lord’s name. Declare the greatness of our God! The Rock – his work is perfect; all his ways are just. A faithful God, without bias, he is righteous and true.”

King David worshiped God. **Psalms 18:1** “I love you, Lord, my strength.” Isaiah worshiped God. **Isaiah 5:1** “I will sing about the one I love.”

Mary worshiped God. **Luke 1:46-47** “And Mary said: My soul praises the greatness of the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.”

Psalms 5:11 “But let all who take refuge in you rejoice; let them shout for joy forever. May you shelter them, and may those who love your name boast about you.”

Again, to worship God is to tell Him how much He is worth to you. It is simply to declare His goodness and greatness in a spirit of celebration.

13. Love God always.

Deuteronomy 11:1 (CEV) “Moses said to Israel: The Lord is your God, so you must always love him and obey his laws and teachings.”

Hosea 6:4 “What am I going to do with you, Ephraim? What am I going to do with you, Judah? Your love is like the morning mist and like the early dew that vanishes.”

Thomas Watson wrote, “Love to God must be constant. Love must be like the motion of the pulse, which beats as long as there is life”

We must love God all day long; all week long; at work; at home; on vacation; at the gym; in our minds; in our actions; in good times; in bad times; at school; when we are sick; when we are well; when we win; when we lose; when we succeed; when we fail; when we are young; when we are old; when we are busy; when we are not busy.

14. Love God by serving Him.

Another way to express love to God is to serve Him. To devote your life to God’s work. To the cause of justice, and mercy, and building the church, and evangelism, and discipleship, and raising your kids to follow Christ, and world missions, and on and on.

Joshua 22:5 “Only carefully obey the command and instruction that Moses the Lord’s servant gave you: to love the Lord your God, walk in all his ways, keep his commands, be loyal to him, and serve him with all your heart and all your soul.”

1 Thessalonians 1:3 “We recall, in the presence of our God and Father, your work produced by faith, your labor motivated by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Notice what love leads to. Love leads to labor. It is the motivation for labor. The more you love God, the more you labor for Him.

15. Love God by letting Him have complete control over your life.

Esther 2:17 “The king loved Esther more than all the other women. She won more favor and approval from him than did any of the other virgins. He placed the royal crown on her head and made her queen in place of Vashti.”

How did the king express His love to Esther? He placed her in charge of everything he owned.

John 3:35 “The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hands.”

How did the Father love the Son? By giving all things into His hands.

That is how we must love God, by giving Him complete control of everything we are, and everything we have.

16. Love God by accepting Jesus Christ.

John 5:42-43 “42 but I know you—that you have no love for God within you. 43 I have come in my Father’s name, and yet you don’t accept me.”

Jesus said that the way to love God is to accept Christ. You cannot love God if you do not accept Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord; as the Son of God; the Messiah; the only Savior, who died and rose again. You cannot love God if you do not believe in Jesus. You cannot love God if you deny the deity of Christ. You cannot love God if you don’t believe the teachings of Jesus, and if you don’t obey the commands of Jesus.

17. Love God by enduring trials.

James 1:12 “Blessed is the one who endures trials, because when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.”

James equates loving God with enduring trials.

To endure trials means to be willing to suffer for God; to suffer for His will; to suffer for His reputation; to suffer in His service. It means to be willing to do God's will and serve Him even no matter the cost.

And to endure trials means to love God the same even when you are going through a difficult time. Don't just love God in the sunshine, but in the storm.

CONCLUSION

Matthew 6:24 "No one can serve two masters, since either he will hate one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money."

The Bible warns over and over not to love money. Why? Because you cannot love money and God at the same time. Why not? Because the way that unbelievers love money is similar to the way that we must love God.

To understand how to love God, just think about how unbelievers love money: They talk about it constantly. They sing songs about it. They love people who have it. They think of it all the time, and even dream of it. They spend years in school to learn how to acquire it. They read books to learn how to manage it. They depend on it for happiness and security. Having it gives them peace and confidence. They brag about having it. They show it off. They will sacrifice all their relationships for it. They will work day and night for it. They will move across the world for it. They will sacrifice their health for it. They guard it carefully. They monitor it closely. They pay others to help them manage it. They get angry when it is taken or threatened. And they worry and despair when they don't have it. That's what it means to love money, and that's why you can't love money and God. God wants you to treat Him the way that unbelievers treat money.

I hope you'll come back next week, because we're going to talk more about loving God. Next week I want us to look at why we should love God; the signs that a person truly loves God; and how to grow your love for God.