

MEASURING YOUR LOVE FOR GOD

John 21:15-19

By Andy Manning

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The Jewish rabbis counted 613 laws in the Torah. Then they discovered that there were 365 positive commands and 248 negative commands. Then they tried to figure out why. They determined there are 365 commands because there are 365 days in the year. We never take a day off from obeying God's commands. Then they determined that the 248 negative commands coincide with the 248 major bones and organs in the human body. We must obey God with every part of our lives.
2. On one occasion the Jewish rabbis attempted to ask Jesus a trick question. They asked Him which command was most important. Of all commands in the Torah – 613 – which was the most important. No doubt they stood ready to debate His answer and publicly put Him in His place as an inferior teacher. But Jesus' answer silenced them. He said that the greatest command is to love God.
3. Loving God is the greatest commandment because nothing is more important.
4. Loving God is the greatest commandment because it fulfills all the other commandments. If you love God, then you will not worship other gods, or commit idolatry, or take God's name in vain, or dishonor your parents, or murder, or commit adultery, or steal, or lie, or covet. If you love God then you will love your neighbor.
5. Loving God is the definition of spiritual maturity. The goal of the church is to help people become fully-devoted followers of Jesus. What does a fully-devoted follower look like? Loving God and loving others more and more.
6. Today we're going to learn more about loving God from one of the last encounters between Jesus and Peter.

II. CONTEXT

1. Jesus has already risen from the grave and appeared a few times now to the disciples. The previous passage tells of how Jesus cooked breakfast for the disciples on the beach. This next event picks up right after that.

III. TEXT: John 21:15-19

1. 15 When they had eaten breakfast, Jesus asked Simon Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?”
 - i. More than these? It’s not clear what Jesus meant. There are several possibilities.
 1. Do you love me more than the other disciples love me? I don’t see this one.
 2. Do you love me more than fishing?
 3. Do you love me more than you your closest friends?
 - ii. We’ll come back to this in a minute.
2. “Yes, Lord,” he said to him, “you know that I love you.”
3. “Feed my lambs,” he told him.
4. 16 A second time he asked him, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?”
5. “Yes, Lord,” he said to him, “you know that I love you.”
6. “Shepherd my sheep,” he told him.
7. 17 He asked him the third time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?”
8. Peter was grieved that he asked him the third time, “Do you love me?” He said, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.”
9. “Feed my sheep,” Jesus said.
 - i. What was the purpose of this conversation?
 - ii. Jesus was calling Peter to take care of the church. To lead and feed and protect Christ’s people in Christ’s absence.
 - iii. Why did Christ ask the same thing three times? Jesus was restoring Peter. Three times Peter publicly denied Christ. Three times Jesus publicly called Peter back into the ministry of shepherding the church.
 - iv. This is a beautiful reminder of Christ’s grace and mercy and forgiveness. Like Peter, all of us have and will fail Christ. All of us will have our “rooster moments” when we fail our beloved Savior. But with Christ failure is never fatal or final. He never stops loving us. He never stops pursuing us. He never gives up on us or abandons us. There is always redemption. Christ always stands by ready to forgive and restore, if we will only humble ourselves and return to Him.

1. This was Judas Iscariot's ultimate mistake. It's not that he betrayed Christ; we all do that. It's that he thought his sin was too great to be forgiven. He underestimated Christ's ability and willingness to forgive and restore. Christ never gave up on him; he gave up on Christ.
 - v. This is also a reminder that you are never useless to Jesus. No matter what you've done, how bad you've been, how much you've messed up, Christ can and wants to use you. He can still do significant things through your life. It's like heard one time: "You're never useless; you can always serve as a bad example!"
- 10.18 "Truly I tell you, when you were younger, you would tie your belt and walk wherever you wanted. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands and someone else will tie you and carry you where you don't want to go." 19 He said this to indicate by what kind of death Peter would glorify God. After saying this, he told him, "Follow me."

IV. WHAT LOVE FOR CHRIST LOOKS LIKE

1. Priority.

- i. Jesus asked Peter if he loved Him "more than these." More than what? Some suggest Jesus was asking Peter if His love was greater than the other disciples. That doesn't make sense to me. I think Jesus was asking one of two things: First, did Peter love Jesus more than He loved His fellow disciples. Second, did Peter love Jesus more than fishing. Let's take the first one.
- ii. Why would Jesus ask if Peter loved Him more than his fellow disciples?
 1. To illustrate the priority that Christ must have in your life. Peter loved his fellow disciples. They were close. They were the best of friends. But we must love Christ more than our friends. In fact, Jesus specified elsewhere that we must love Him more than our own family. If we aren't careful, then our love for others can interfere with our love for Christ.
 2. Are you willing to lose your family and friends for Jesus? Are you willing to be disowned by those closest to you for Christ? Are you willing to disappoint your parents for

Christ? Are you willing to offend your friends and family for Jesus? Are you willing to lose their disrespect?

3. The book *Seeking Allah, Finding Jesus*, is Nabeel Qreshi's story of coming to faith in Christ. He was raised in America in a deeply devoted Muslim family. In college he joined the debate team and became close friends with a Christian. After years of debating, Nabeel could feel himself being pulled to Christ. His friend was right. He couldn't refute the evidence of Christ's resurrection. On a logical level, he knew he had to admit that Jesus Christ was Lord. But on an emotional level there was one thing holding him back. There was one thing that made him hesitate to convert to Christianity. He knew that following Christ would mean losing his parents and his sister. They would not only be disappointed, they would disown him. He would lose a relationship with them. But in the end, the decision was clear: Either lose his family, or lose his soul. So he accepted Christ and was disowned. That's what love for Christ looks like. Priority. It means placing Jesus before everyone and everything else in your life.
 4. One of the things that I often see as a pastor are marriages that are spiritual mismatches. One of them loves Jesus, but the other does not. And that's okay. The Bible says that if you are married to a non-believer and they are willing to live with you despite your devotion to Christ, then don't seek a divorce. But at the same time, don't let your unbelieving or uncommitted spouse interfere with your devotion to Christ. Don't let them discourage you from going to church; from giving to God's work; from serving in ministry; from living a holy life; from spending time in prayer and Bible study.
- iii. Jesus also could have been asking Peter, "Do you love me more than fishing? Will you put me before your love for fishing? Are you willing to sacrifice fishing for me?"

1. Are you willing to put Jesus before your hobbies? Are you willing to put Jesus before your career? Are you willing to put Jesus before all your hopes, dreams, plans? Are you willing to put Jesus before your love of hunting, fishing, LSU and Saints football?
2. Are you willing to say, “Jesus, this is what I like to do. This is what I want to do. This is what I want to achieve. This is where I want to travel. This is what I want to do with money. But as much as I love all these things, I love You more. You come first. So if you want me to drop any of these things, just say the word.”
3. Just because something isn’t sinful, doesn’t mean that it’s okay to do it. Fishing isn’t sinful. Hunting isn’t sinful. Sports aren’t sinful. Most hobbies aren’t sinful. But when these things interfere with our love for Jesus, then they become sinful.

2. Action.

- i. Jesus asked Peter, “Do you love me?” Peter said, “Yes.” And immediately Jesus said, “Then feed my lambs.” Jesus immediately moved from words to actions. If you love me, then act like it. Show your love by your actions.
- ii. You can say that you love Jesus until you are blue in the face, but still not love Him. True love for Christ is not less than words, but it is much more. True love for Jesus includes telling Him that you love Him; but it is much more than that. True love takes action.
- iii. Some people are really moved by words. If you just say the right words, they melt. You can quote the words to a cheesy love song, or a line from a movie, and they become putty in your hands. All you have to say, “I’ve died every day waiting for you. Darling, don’t be afraid. I have loved you for a thousand years; I’ll love you for a thousand more,” and they will believe it. But that’s not real love. Those are just words.
- iv. One of the things that I get to do as a pastor is to officiate weddings. People say the most romantic things at weddings. “For better or worse, for richer or poorer, through thick and thin, rain

or sunshine, until death do us part.” But those words are not what make a healthy marriage. It is those words put into action. That’s true love.

- v. Peter was big on words. Before Christ’s death, He told the disciples that they would all fall away. Peter said, “Not me. Even if everyone else falls away, I will never fall away.” Jesus said, “Tonight, you will deny me three times before the rooster crows.” Peter replied, “Even if I have to die with you, I will never deny you.” Later that night, just as Jesus predicted, Peter fell away, and he denied Christ three times. Now, Jesus is telling Peter that words are not enough. Words have their place, but love is more than words. It’s action.
- vi. At Church Acadiana I want us to sing with passion on Sunday mornings. I want us to clap and raise our hands and sing at the top of our lungs to Jesus. But true love has to be more than that. It has to translate to action.
- vii. I’ve seen a bumper sticker that says, “Honk if you love Jesus.” In response, someone produced another bumper sticker that says, “Tithe if you love Jesus. Anybody can honk.” True love is more than works. It’s more than praise songs. It’s more than honking. It’s action.
- viii. There’s a song by Janet Jackson called “What Have You Done for Me Lately?” One of the verses goes like this: “Used to go to dinner almost every night; danced until I thought I’d lose my breath; Now it seems your dancing feet are always on my couch; good thing I cook or else we’d starve to death; ain’t that a shame? What have you done for me lately?” You may say that you love Jesus, but what have you done for Him lately?
- ix. **Ralph Waldo Emerson** “Your actions speak so loudly, I can not hear what you are saying.”
- x. Our words of love and praise doing mean anything unless they are backed up by actions of love.
- xi. What kind of actions show love to God? **Matthew 12:30** “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.”

1. Love God with all your heart. In that culture the heart referred to your thoughts, attitudes, motives, and desires. Love God not just with your visible actions, but your mindset, thoughts, attitudes, motives, desires, and daydreams.
2. Love God with all your soul. Your soul refers to your life. Love God with all your life. That is, not just one or two parts of your life, but all your life. Not just your words, but your finances, your sexuality, your relationships, your career, your hobbies, your entertainment, etc. Not just on Sundays, but every day. Not just when people are watching you, but all the time. Not just your hands, but your feet, your eyes, your tongue, your lips, your facial expressions, etc.
3. Love God with your with all your mind. All your understanding. The better you know someone, the better you can love them. Strive to think the right thoughts of God. Study the Bible diligently so that you can know God accurately and deeply.
4. Love God with all your strength. Don't be a lazy Christian; a casual Christian; a half-hearted Christian; a lukewarm Christian. Give your relationship with Jesus all your energy. Put everything you have into loving Christ. Go all out. Be wholehearted. Get on fire for Christ. Love Jesus with zeal, fervor, ardor, passion, intensity, zest.

3. Obedience.

- i. Jesus told Peter, "Do you love me? Then feed my lambs." In other words, if you love me, then do what I say. Obey me. Follow my instructions.
- ii. The Bible is very clear on this. True love for God is translated into obedience. **John 14:15** "If you love me, you will keep my commands."
- iii. By the way, this is a good one to teach your kids. Remind your kids that true love means obedience. If they love you, then they will obey you.

- iv. You can say you love Jesus, but not actually love Him. You can believe the right things about Jesus, but not love Him. You can have all the Bible knowledge in the world but not love Jesus. You can give all the gifts in the world to Jesus, but that's not true love. True love for God means obeying His commands.
- v. Some Christians think they are obedient when they aren't. They don't understand true obedience.
- vi. Three Characteristics of Biblical Obedience (this is also how kids should obey their parents):
 1. Obedience must be immediate.
 - a. Delayed obedience is disobedience.
 - b. We tell our children, "Listen and obey, do it right away."
 - c. **Robert Jeffress** "The longer the gap of time between God's command and our obedience, the greater the opportunity for Satan to gain a victory in our lives."
 2. Obedience must be complete.
 - a. I'm afraid that many Christians treat obedience like a buffet. But we don't get to pick and choose which commands to obey.
 - b. **The Puritan Thomas Brooks** "No man obeys God truly who does not endeavor to obey God fully."
 3. Obedience must be joyful.
 - a. Imagine that you are having a party at the house. You ask your son to take out the trash, but he gripes and complains and throws a fit. How would that make you feel?
 - b. True obedience involves the right behavior with the right attitude.
 - c. The world is watching us. How does it make God look if we complain about following His commands?

4. Service.

- i. When Jesus told Peter to "feed my lambs," He was telling him, "If you love me Peter, then serve me. Become my servant. Join me in my purpose."

- ii. Loving Jesus includes serving Him. It means dedicating your life to His mission.
- iii. What is Christ's mission?
 - 1. It is the Great Commission. Making more and better believers.
 - 2. It is building the church. Making the church healthier and stronger.
- iv. Loving Jesus mean seeing yourself first as a full-time servant of God. You are not an electrician; you are a servant of God who works as an electrician on the side. You are not a nurse; you are a servant of God who works as a nurse on the side. You are not a CPA; you are a servant of God who works as a CPA on the side. Your identity is servant of Christ.
- v. A large percentage of pastors are bi-vocational. Some people have never heard that term. It means that you have two jobs. I am bi-vocational because I work for Church Acadiana and FedEx. When I meet people I tell them that I am a pastor, and FedEx helps to pay the bills. Every Christian should see themselves that way. Our primary calling is missionary. Servant of God. But we also have another job on the side to help pay the bills.
- vi. Even at your job your primary mission is not to pay the bills, but to glorify God. At FedEx, my job is to track down packages that go missing. But my primary job at FedEx is to glorify God. To be God's representative at my workplace.
- vii. If a husband wants to build romance in his marriage and woo his wife, he needs to serve her. Find practical ways to meet her needs. Do the dishes. Help to change diapers, and get the kids dressed, and put them to bed. Clean up after yourself. Work through your honey-do list. In other words, to romance your wife, don't treat her as your servant; treat her like the queen, and you act like her servant.
- viii. The same is true with the Lord. To show love to Jesus, we need to serve Him.
- ix. Every year when Jesus was a boy His family would travel to Jerusalem for the Passover Festival. When he was twelve, they

went to the festival as usual. When they returned, Jesus wasn't with them. But Mary and Joseph didn't know it. They assumed he was with the traveling party. After traveling for a day they realized He was missing. They returned to Jerusalem, and after three days of searching, they found Jesus in the temple talking to the rabbis. His parents asked, "Where have you been?" He answered, "Didn't you know that I must be about my Father's business (Lk 2:40, NKJV)?" This is what it looks like to love Jesus. It means being about your Savior's business.

5. Sacrifice.

- i. After asking Peter to affirm his love for a third time, Jesus told him the death he would die.
- ii. **John 21:18** "18 Truly I tell you, when you were younger, you would tie your belt and walk wherever you wanted. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands and someone else will tie you and carry you where you don't want to go." 19 He said this to indicate by what kind of death Peter would glorify God. After saying this, he told him, "Follow me."
- iii. The phrase "stretch out your hands and someone else will tie you and carry where you don't want to go" refers to crucifixion. In an typical Roman crucifixion, the victims hands arms were stretched out and tied to the crossbeam of the cross (known as the patibulum), and then he would be forced to carry his cross to the site of the crucifixion.
- iv. Jesus was telling Peter that he too would die by crucifixion, just like Christ. And that is what happened, according to tradition. Peter lived three more decades after this, knowing that this was his fate. He was executed at the command of the Beast, Nero Caesar, around AD 67-68. Because Peter did not believe that he was worthy to die in the same manner as Christ, he asked to be crucified upside down.
- v. Jesus was telling Peter, if you love me, then you will sacrifice yourself for me. That's what it looks like to love Jesus.
- vi. There is no love without sacrifice. Love means sacrificing what you want for what they want; it means sacrificing your comfort

for theirs; it means sacrificing your preferences for theirs; it means sacrificing your safety for theirs.

- vii. How did Jesus prove His love for us? By sacrificing His life for ours. And loving Him means the same thing.
- viii. On April 16, 2007, a disturbed young college student had seized and bound entry and exit doors at Virginia Tech University and shot thirty-two students and professors to death, wounding many others. It was one of the largest shooting rampages in American history and the deadliest shooting on any school campus in America... It was the darkest day of the year on the American home front, but it was not without its heroes. Seventy-six year old Liviu Librescu, a Romanian-born citizen of Israel and a Holocaust survivor, had been teaching at Virginia Tech for years. One of the more popular professors, he was holding his mechanics class on April 16 when he heard gunshots down the hall. Several of his students hid behind tables or under their desks, while others leaped from windows. Professor Librescu ran to the door and blocked it shut with his body as he ordered the rest of his class to flee through the windows. Librescu was shot through the door of his classroom, holding off the shooter, giving his life for his students so they would have time to escape. All the students in that room lived because of him." *A Century Turns*, Bill Bennett, 254
- ix. This is what loving Jesus looks like. Sacrifice yourself for Him. This is what He meant in **Luke 9:23** "If anyone wants to follow after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow me." Loving Jesus means denying yourself for Him, even at the cost of your own life.

V. CONCLUSION

1. So, how is your love for Christ? Does it look like this: Priority, action, obedience, service, and sacrifice? If not, would you renew your commitment to Christ today?