

“Loving God”
Mark 12:28-31

If someone asked you, “What does God want from us more than anything else?” what would you say? If you said He wants moral devotion, a righteous life, or some kind of religious ritual, you’d be wrong. What God wants from you is love. He requires that you love Him; He commands it. Nothing is more important. If you love God, your life will be filled with meaning and purpose. If you don’t, your life is ultimately a tragic failure, because you missed the very reason God created you and put you on this earth in the first place. When I talk to non-Christians and the topic of God comes up, they will often say, “I love God,” as if simply saying those words is really all that’s required of them. We see from our passage that just saying the words is not enough. Loving God involves more, much more. Today we want to look at how it is possible to give to God what He commands from you, your love.

The first point is that there is something that precedes our love of God that our Lord takes for granted. Think about it. God says, “Love me.” That command can spark all kinds of questions. How am I to love God? What kind of love are we talking about? There are many definitions and understandings of love. Is it possible that I could love God with all my heart, mind, soul, and strength and yet love Him with the wrong love? How do I know that my love is acceptable to Him? The problem these questions address is taken care of, because when it comes to love, the Bible doesn’t start with me, it starts with God. As I John 4:19 says, “We love, because He first loved us” and “This is love: not that we loved God, but that He loved us” (1 John 4:10). Loving God is simply not possible for you or for me until we see that first, He has loved us. In loving us first, He has revealed what love is. I John 4 says, “This is how God showed His love among us: He sent His one and only Son into the world...He loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.” The love He’s shown us is love that gives. He gives His own Son by sending Him into the world. That gift is God taking the initiative, reaching out to us for our benefit and blessing. It’s a love that is decisive action; it’s a love that sacrifices, as Jesus gives His very life for those He loves. The responsibility you have is to receive God’s love for your life. When that happens, when you receive God’s love for you in Jesus Christ, that love touches and changes the whole of your life. It transforms your “heart,” that is your will, your decision-making process. His love changes your “soul,” understood in this context to be your emotions. When His love comes into your life it affects your “mind,” that is your intellect, your thought process. And His love impacts your “strength,” which speaks to your physical energy, your actions. This description of God’s love for you and how you receive it is beautifully portrayed in the great hymn, “And Can It Be?” The hymn begins with these questions, “And can it be that I should gain, an interest in the Savior’s blood? Died He for me, who caused His pain? For me, who Him to death pursued?” What’s happening here? My mind is being engaged and challenged by Jesus Christ, by His life and death. Here we have God Himself in human flesh coming to earth, and He suffers, He sheds His blood, He dies for me. He wasn’t a victim in this, He pursued death on my behalf. I must be someone pretty wonderful for Him to do that, right? No. In my sin, I was His enemy, I am the one who caused His pain, His death. This is a truth that just staggers my mind. Then my soul, my feelings are engaged, asking another question with an overwhelming answer, “Amazing love! How can it be, that Thou my God, shouldst die for me?” The second verse contemplates other aspects of God’s death on the cross for me. In the third verse, my heart (my will) is now addressed, “Long my imprisoned spirit lay, fast bound in sin and nature’s night.” My will was spiritually in jail, powerless, helpless and hopeless, in bondage to sin. But then God moved: “Thine eye diffused a quickening ray, I woke, the dungeon flamed with light.” Here is God decisively acting, liberating my will that was enslaved to sin. The result? “My chains fell off, my heart was free.” There is the freeing of my will to act, to respond to God’s love. Finally, the strength of my body is affected by God’s love, as “I rose, went forth and followed Thee.” You see, loving God with all my heart and soul and mind and strength is loving with love He first gives to me!

The second point speaks to how you obey God’s command, how you express your love for God once you’ve received it. From the Bible, you know you can do this in a number of ways. For example, you love God by worshiping Him. Why is that an act of love? I think you’ll agree with me that when you love someone, you focus your attention on your loved one to the exclusion of others, in fact, to the exclusion of all others a lot of the time. It’s almost like you have blinders on, you’re not easily distracted from the one you love. That’s what you’re doing when you come here to worship God. When you worship God, you’re intentionally focusing the

attention of your heart and mind and soul on God, on Who He is, and all that He has done for you in His Son in coming to you, loving you, saving you, giving you new life in which He blesses and provides for and guides you. Psalm 26:8 says, “I love the house where you live, O Lord, the place where your glory dwells.”

Another way to love God is by communicating with Him. In a love relationship, communication is key. When I’m enjoying deep and significant communication with Cindy, our relationship grows, it matures, it becomes richer. If communication stops or becomes superficial, over time our relationship can start to deteriorate. The same is true with God. On the days I have deep, significant communication with Him, I’m closer to Him, our relationship grows. On the days when that doesn’t happen... Here are some of the ways to communicate with God. There’s prayer, a great way to speak to Him and to listen to Him. The opening verses of Psalm 116 say, “I love the Lord for He heard my voice; He heard my cry for mercy. Because He turned His ear to me, I will call on Him as long as I live.” God also communicates to us through His Word. Psalm 19:8 says, “The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes.” God communicates to you through the Spirit of Jesus Christ alive in your life. Romans 8:5 says, “Those who live in accordance with the Spirit” that is, who have the Spirit of Jesus Christ alive in their lives, “have their minds set on what the Spirit desires.” God speaks to you in love as He sovereignly works through your life experiences, especially difficulty. Romans 5:3 declares, “We know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character hope.” Can God communicate with you through the godly counsel of others? Of course! Proverbs 12:15 says, “The way of a fool seems right to him, but a wise man listens to counsel.” You love God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength by communicating with Him.

Publicly committing yourself to Him is a third way to express your love for God. If you think about it, you know that this is what love is all about: commitment. You don’t really love someone unless you’re committed to them. We live in an age characterized by the lack of commitment. The world says, “Be independent, keep your options open, don’t commit to anyone, anything unless you have to.” Here’s the dangerous error in that mindset: nothing significant happens in life without commitment. Strong people are defined by their commitments, weak people, by their circumstances. II Chronicles 16:9 is one of my favorite verses in the Old Testament. It says, “For the eyes of the Lord range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to Him.” A clear demonstration of your love for God, especially in this world that mocks commitment, is to publicly confess Jesus Christ to be your personal Savior and Lord, to become a member and become actively involved in the life of His church. Finally, you express your love for God by giving to Him. As we saw in I John 4, giving is the essence of love. In love, God gave His Son to you, for you. I can claim to love God, but the Bible says there’s a way to test my love. II Corinthians 8:7-8 says, “But just as you excel in everything – in faith, in speech, in knowledge and in complete earnestness and in your love for us – see that you also excel in this grace of giving.” Paul continues, “I am not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love.” The test of whether your love is sincere is your generosity. Over the years, I’ve learned that there are two types of givers. There are cheerful givers and there are fearful givers. You can decide which one is generous. You know which one God loves!

God created you, He put you on this earth for a purpose. Loving Him determines whether you succeed or fail in that purpose. The only way to succeed, the only way you can love God is to first receive into your life His love for you in Jesus Christ. Any other love, all other loves for Him will fail. So let me ask you, have you received God’s love for you in Jesus Christ? In a moment you’ll sing about amazing love. Is that love just words you’ll sing with your mouth, or is that love a gift that has touched and changed your heart, your mind, your soul, your strength? I believe some of you here today need to do more than sing some beautiful words. You need to make this the new song of your life. And you can do that if you receive Jesus as your Savior and Lord today. If you have received God’s love for you in Jesus Christ, let me ask you, do you love your Lord? How? How do you love Him? Is your worship of God today a statement of how much you love Him? Communication is key in a love relationship. How much time do you spend talking to, listening to the God you love? Do you demonstrate your love by publicly committing yourself to Him and His church, by giving generously to Him and the cause of His Son? These are clear, conclusive evidences that you have received His love, and that you do love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your mind, with all your soul and with all your strength!