

love God, we cannot, and will not, keep His commandments. True obedience to God is based upon a loving relationship with Him.

Jesus said, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets” (Matthew 22:37-40).

If we love God with all our heart, we will not have any other gods before Him. We will not worship any graven image, break the Sabbath, or take His name in vain (first four Commandments). If we love our neighbors as ourselves, we won’t murder, steal from them, bear false witness against them, covet their goods, commit adultery, or dishonor our parents (last six Commandments). For this reason Paul could say with certainty, these words: “Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law... Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law” (Romans 13:8-10).

John wrote, “We love Him, because He first loved us” (1 John 4:19). The reason given for man loving God is “because He first loved us.” Understanding and appreciating God’s love for us is a result of Him drawing us to Himself by His Spirit (John 6:44). “...the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us” (Romans 5:5). As we yield to God’s leading in showing us His love, He will reveal more and more until our hearts are filled with love for God and for those around us. Our love for God will be in proportion to how much we understand and appreciate His love for us. If you see that God loves you a little bit, then your love for Him will be very little. If you see that God loves you even enough to yield up that which was most precious to Him, His only-begotten Son, then your love for Him will be great.

How Can We Know God’s Love?

The Bible says, “In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him” (1 John 4:9). God has revealed His great love by yielding up His only-begotten Son.

“And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in

love dwelleth in God, and God in him. Herein is our love made perfect” (1 John 4:16, 17). Our love for God is made perfect by knowing, believing, and dwelling in His love for us, as expressed in the gift of His only-begotten Son. In order to believe that God loves us, and to dwell upon that fact, we must first know it; this is the first step towards loving Him in return. To know God’s love for us we must look at how He gave His Son to lay down His life for us.

The Sufferings of Christ

Mark wrote about the night before Christ’s death: “And they came to a place which was named Gethsemane: and He saith to His disciples, Sit ye here, while I shall pray. And He taketh with Him Peter and James and John, and began to be sore amazed, and to be very heavy; And saith unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful unto death: tarry ye here, and watch [give strict attention to]. And He went forward a little, and fell on the ground, and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him” (Mark 14:32-35). Jesus asked His disciples to watch what was going on because He wanted them to see everything—including His agony as He prayed, so that their love for God might become perfected.

Let’s take a look at what happened in the garden of Gethsemane. The Greek word *εκθαμβεω*, which was translated “sore amazed,” means “to be struck with terror” (*Thayer’s Greek Lexicon*). Something happened to Jesus that caused Him to be terrified so much that He prayed three times that the hour might pass from Him (Matthew 26:39-44).

The next word used to describe the condition of Jesus is the Greek word *αδημονεω*, which was translated “very heavy,” and means “to be in distress (of mind); (to be sated to loathing)” (*Strong’s Greek Dictionary*). Sated to loathing means “to satisfy totally (the appetite or a desire), so fully as to cause a sudden violent hostility or disgust of feelings, to the point of abhorring them” (*Grolier’s, New Webster’s Dictionary*). Something was happening to Jesus that caused Him to be disgusted with His feelings, and those feelings terrified Him. What were those feelings?

Isaiah prophesied, “The Lord laid on Him the iniquity [along with guilt] of us all” (Isaiah 53:6). Jesus experienced the shame that we feel when we sin, only magnified millions of times. This caused a separation between God and Himself (Isaiah 59:2).

God truly loves us enough to give up His only-begotten Son, and He wants us to behold, or to dwell upon, that precious truth. “For the love of Christ constraineth [compels or preoccupies] us” (2 Corinthians 5:14). We are to be preoccupied with the wonderful truth that God so loved the world that He allowed His only-begotten Son to experience our guilt and death.

Isaiah wrote, “Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee” (Isaiah 26:3). God knows that if we dwell upon the wonderful love that He has for us it will mold and shape us like nothing else can, and it will give us confident trust. If we allow God’s Spirit to constantly give us a realization of the love God has for us, and appreciate that love, it will draw us into a deep, personal relationship with Him. Christ in us will direct our hearts into the love of God so fully that we will finally be so disgusted with sin that we will hate it (Hebrews 1:8).

Faith Works by Love

The Bible tells us that the only thing that really counts is “...faith which worketh by love” (Galatians 5:6). Paul prayed for us that God, “...would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God. Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us” (Ephesians 3:16-20).

Christ is able to live in our hearts by faith, which will give us a deep understanding of the greatness of God’s love for us, which, in turn, will allow us to be filled with all the fullness of God, giving us the strength we need to live in cooperation with His kingdom. This will prepare us to live with Him for all eternity. Notice how love and faith are connected here. By faith we receive Christ into our hearts and He leads us into a deeper appreciation of God’s love, fortifying our relationship with God.

“For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the

world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?" (1 John 5:4, 5). There is something about believing that Jesus is the Son of God that gives us the key to overcome the world, which is to overcome sin (see 1 John 2:15-17). This victory is given to us by faith in God's love. If you are convinced that God loves you unconditionally, you can trust Him with every decision in your life.

Since believing that Jesus is the Son of God enables us to overcome sin, do you think Satan would try to distort the fact that Jesus is the Son of God? He certainly would! If we expect to overcome the world we must believe that Jesus really is the only-begotten (born) Son of God, and that God gave Him up for us.

"He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God hath made Him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of His Son" (1 John 5:10). God said, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye Him" (Matthew 17:5). God said that Jesus Christ is His only-born Son; don't let anyone tell you differently. Satan is so dedicated to hide God's love that he convinced most of the translators of the newer Bible translations to delete "begotten" from John 3:16. Our ability to appreciate God's love is directly connected to how we understand the identity of Jesus Christ.

God's Gift of His Son

Jesus, speaking of Himself, said, "When there were no depths, I was brought forth [born]; when there were no fountains abounding with water. Before the mountains were settled, before the hills was I brought forth" (Proverbs 8:24, 25). The Hebrew word that was translated here as "brought forth" means "to be born" (*Gesenius' Hebrew Lexicon*). Jesus is the literal Son of God, born in heaven before the world was.

It is only by knowing and believing that God so loved the world that He actually gave up His only-born Son, that we can truly have our love for God perfected. Therefore, only by knowing and believing that God sent His only-begotten Son into the world, can we keep His commandments.

There will be a group of people in the last days who will love God with all their heart. They will know the love of God that passes knowledge. They will un-

derstand that God loves us so much that He gave up His only-begotten Son. This group of people is known as the 144,000. They are the ones who receive the seal of God (see Revelation 7:1-4). They will be without fault. "And I looked, and, lo, a Lamb stood on the mount Sion, and with him an hundred forty and four thousand, having his Father's name written in their foreheads. ... And in their mouth was found no guile: for they are without fault before the throne of God" (Revelation 14:1, 5). They will not submit to the mark of the beast, and will be saved from all the plagues that come upon the earth.

These people will understand God's love to such a degree that they will not sin. "The remnant of Israel shall not do iniquity, nor speak lies; neither shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth: for they shall feed and lie down, and none shall make them afraid" (Zephaniah 3:13). These are a testimony for God that He can fully transform fallen man into His image. I want to be part of that number.

Friends, "The Lord is... not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). God is pursuing a relationship with you because He loves you and wants to live with you forever. He loves you so much that He sent His Son "...to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). Do not despair if you think you are too filthy for the Lord to accept. The filthier you are, the more confident you can be that you are the one Jesus came to save. He loves you with an "everlasting love" (Jeremiah 31:3). Please accept His free gift of life. "And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life" (1 John 5:11, 12). Invite and accept Jesus to live in your heart, and you will have eternal life, then He will change you into His image.

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The Incredible Love of God

"Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us" (1 John 3:1). God calls us to behold how completely He loves us. God is aggressively pursuing a relationship with you. He is filled with love and compassion for you, regardless of what you have done. God says, "For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil..." (Jeremiah 29:11). The focus of the entire Bible is on how much God loves us. He sent His Son to remove all doubt about how much He cares for us.

Any healthy relationship is based upon trust and appreciation. Distrusting God and doubting His love hinders our relationship with Him. It was a disbelief of God's great love that started Satan on his downward path (see Ezekiel 28:14-17). It was a disbelief of God's great love that convinced Eve to sin (see Genesis 3:1-6). It is a disbelief of God's great love that keeps us in sin today. It is only through an understanding of God's infinite love that we can be brought into a loving relationship with Him.

It has been Satan's goal to deceive men regarding the true character of God. Satan would have us believe that God is not as loving as He claims to be, and he knows that if he can convince us on this issue we will never love God with all our heart. It is only by receiving a true picture of God's love that we can ever love Him enough to fulfill the commandment Jesus called "the first and great commandment," which is to love God with all our heart (see Matthew 22:37, 38).



The Fulfillment of the Law

Jesus said, "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15). The same thought is expressed in verse 23. "If a man love me, he will keep my words" (John 14:23). These verses are a statement about a cause and effect relationship, rather than a command. Jesus said that if we love Him, the natural result of that love is that we will keep His commandments. If we do not