

Resolved: To Pursue Life's Highest Priority! (Part 2)

Deuteronomy 6:4-9

January 9, 2011

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As we began this new year, we decided to step away from the book of Ephesians for a couple of weeks and consider what would be the highest priority of life, what should be our resolution, our chief resolution as we begin this new year. And of course, we've turned to Deuteronomy 6 - the Shema, the great commandment. That certainly is life's highest priority.

C.S. Lewis wrote, "A man's spiritual health is exactly proportional to his love for God." A man's spiritual health is exactly proportional to his love for God. This morning, if I could somehow get inside of your heart and examine the true nature of your love for God, I could give you a diagnosis of your spiritual health. And if we're going to love God, which is obviously the great priority, it must be according to His revealed will, and we're going to examine what that is today.

But before we turn to Deuteronomy 6 (and before we consider what it means to love God), I want to look first at what love for God is not because I think, often we have misguided conceptions of what loving God is all about. Let me give you just a short list (and there's a little overlap between these items, but you'll get the idea - a short list) of some things that are not what it means to love God.

First of all, it is not pure sentimentality or emotionalism. There are a lot of people who get a warm feeling and think that means they love God. A warm feeling comes over them when they're singing choruses or singing songs and therefore they love God. A.W. Tozer was right when he wrote this,

The taking over of the romantic ideal into our relation with God has been extremely injurious to our Christian lives. The idea that we should fall in love with God is ignoble, unscriptural, unworthy of us and does no honor to the Most High God. We do not come to love God by a sudden emotional visitation. Love for God results from repentance, amendment of life and a fixed determination to love Him. As God moves more perfectly into the focus of our hearts, our love for

Him may indeed rise and swell within us till like a flood it sweeps everything before it.

Our love can grow and, and certainly includes emotions as we'll talk about, but it is not purely emotion.

Another replacement or substitute for truly loving God is religious ritual. There are a lot of people who think because they show up and go through the motions, because they came to church on a messy Sunday morning that that means they love God. Listen, ritual isn't what it means to love God. Mark 12:33 – Jesus says, "... TO LOVE HIM AND ONE'S NEIGHBOR (speaking of God) "... is ... more than all [the] whole burnt offerings and sacrifices." Jesus affirms that loving God is a higher priority than the rituals for an Old Testament believer of burnt offerings and sacrifices. You can offer a sacrifice - if you lived in the Old Testament era, you could offer a sacrifice to God without a heart of love. And you can perform religious ritual today without genuine love for God.

A third thing that love for God is not is external conformity to God's laws - just living externally like a Christian ought to live. The Pharisees did a very good job at conforming to the Old Testament Law. In fact, in Luke 11:42, Jesus says, "... woe to you Pharisees! For you ... tithe ... mint ... rue and every *kind* of garden herb [under the Old Testament economy, they were supposed to tithe. They tithed their garden herbs. Don't drop any mint or thyme into the offering slots in the next few weeks, and yet, you do that] and *yet* disregard ... the love of God." So you can be fastidious in external conformity and yet not love God.

Another false substitute for true love for God is biblical knowledge. We're in a Bible church. We love to study the Bible. We love to accumulate information. We have a lot of information swimming around our heads. That, in and of itself, is not love for God. You can't love God without knowledge, but the fact that you have knowledge doesn't mean you love Him. In 1 Corinthians 13:2, Paul says, "If I ... know all mysteries and have all knowledge ... but do not have love, I am nothing." Love for God, love for others - knowledge doesn't mean love.

One final replacement for truly loving God is exercising obedience alone. You know, my children obey me most of the time. Sometimes they do it because they love me, but they can

obey me without loving me. And we can obey God without loving Him. In fact, in Revelation 2, you remember the church in Ephesus is told that they were doing everything right. They were holding to the right doctrine, they were practicing the right things, but they had left their first love.

None of those are in and of themselves what it means to love God. They are all deficient understandings and expressions of true love for God. But in Deuteronomy 6, Moses explains what it really means to love God. Let me read it for you again. Deuteronomy 6, and I'll begin this time in verse 4. The great Shema,

“Hear, O Israel! [Yahweh] ... is our God, [Yahweh] ... is one! You shall love [Yahweh] ... your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your sons and you shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.”

Clearly, the theme of this passage is loving God. It's the greatest commandment as our Lord taught us. It is a summary of our entire moral responsibility to God. If you don't want to sort through every command in this Bible, you can reduce every command there to two. One is love God, and the other is love your neighbor as yourself. It is a summary of everything that is due from us to God.

What does it mean to love God? Well here, Moses calls the children of Israel, and he calls us to hear him, to understand him and then to seek to obey this greatest commandment God ever gave. Now, as he explains to these people what God taught him on Mount Sinai, Moses provides us here with four key truths about loving God, four key truths about loving God. Last Sunday, we looked at the first two. And today, we're going to look at the third. And Lord willing, next week we'll look at the fourth.

Last week, we looked at its preeminent claim. Loving God is the most preeminent issue in life. It is the highest priority. It is the greatest commandment – loving God. There is nothing that rises higher. There ought to be nothing on your priority list above loving God.

We also looked last week at a second key truth and that is its personal confession. If you're really going to love God, you have to make a personal confession. That confession is in verse 4. Yahweh, that is the God who has revealed Himself in the Scripture, who Jesus taught us to call Father, Son and Holy Spirit – He is our God and Yahweh is one. He is utterly unique. There is no one else like Him. He alone is God. We must make a personal confession to the uniqueness of the God we claim and worship. And then, we can begin to move toward loving Him.

That brings us today to a third insight about our love for God, and this really is the heart of the passage. Let's call this third insight its precise character, its precise character. Exactly what is love? We're going to learn it in verse 5, the precise character of loving God. Look at verse 5, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might." Now this command to love God is central to this entire book of Deuteronomy. In a very real sense, it's accurate to say that the rest of the book is like a commentary on this command. And in this short verse that I've just read to you, Moses spells out with meticulous precision what it means to love God.

So, let's look at it. Let's look at the precise character of love. I want to start by asking this question. What is love? What is love? It's interesting that if you were to read Genesis through Numbers in one sitting, you would discover that in the first four books Moses wrote, there's no reference to loving God. Instead, it's about fearing God. Deuteronomy is the first to speak of loving Him.

There's only one primary Hebrew word for love. It's the word "ahav". This Hebrew word for love is used for a lot of different things. It's used of God's love, His love for His people, His love for His creation. But it's also used of (that's the highest kind of love). This same word is also used of the lowest kind of love. It's used of those sinful loves of the human heart. It's even used in Proverbs of the carnal love of a lazy glutton who loves his bed and who loves his laziness. This same Hebrew word is used to describe the best of human love – the love of a man for his wife, the love of parents for their children, the love of God's people for one another.

Now as you think about that, that's a little interesting, isn't it? I mean, one Hebrew word for love encompasses all of those different uses - God's infinitely perfect love, the best of human love and the lowest of human loves. Why is that? How can that happen? How can one word describe love in all those different contexts? It's because love, whatever its object, shares certain characteristics or qualities. Whatever it is you love, be it sinful or be it God, or be it God's love for us - wherever there is love, there are certain common denominators, there are certain characteristics or qualities that are always there whether we're talking about your love for a family member; or whether we're talking about God's love for us; or whether we're talking about our love for God.

So, what are those qualities that sort of define love? We're looking at what is love. Here are the qualities that define it. There are three of them. Let me give them to you. Wherever there's true love in any of those forms, these three things will be present.

Number one: exclusive allegiance, exclusive allegiance. Love is, first and foremost, a decision of the will. And the decision, you hear that all the time, but what did we mean by that? It is a decision of the will to be entirely loyal and faithful to the one we love. When it comes to the place they occupy, we will not allow anyone else to supplant them. We'll allow no rivals to the love we have for them and the place they occupy in our lives.

John Frame, in his excellent book *The Doctrine of the Christian Life*, writes this: "In its exclusiveness, this love is closely parallel to marital love so that in Scripture, adultery and idolatry are symbols of one another." In other words, the kind of love we're to have for God is a lot like the kind of love that's supposed to exist between a man and his wife. There is an exclusiveness.

This year, Sheila and I will celebrate our twenty-fifth anniversary. On July 12th, 1986, we stood hand in hand in the presence of God and in the presence of several hundred witnesses, and we made vows to each other. And at the heart of that ceremony was a commitment that we were making to each other, and it was a commitment to exclusive love and devotion. I would allow no one else to rival the love that I had for Sheila, the love that is due a wife. I was saying that she, and she alone, would receive the kind of love that I should give only to my wife. In fact, the

wedding vows sometimes include a line something like this: “keeping from all others” – exclusive allegiance.

And that is very much a part of what it means to love God. And you see that here in Deuteronomy - exclusive allegiance. You’ve gotta decide that you are not going to allow any rivals, that God is going to be alone in occupying that place in your life. In fact, you saw it even here in verses 4 and 5. You have to make this confession that Yahweh is our God, Yahweh is one. But look down in verse 13,

“You shall fear *only* [Yahweh] ... your God; and you shall worship Him and swear by His name. You shall not follow other gods, any of the gods of the peoples who surround you [it needs to be exclusive love. Why? Verse 15, and here you get that picture of marriage], for [Yahweh] ... your God in the midst of you is a jealous God....” [He is jealous for your exclusive allegiance. We must be loyal to Him, committed to Him and Him alone.]

Look over at Deuteronomy 11:1, “You shall therefore love the LORD your God, and always keep His charge, His statutes, His ordinances and His commandments.” Verse 22, “For if you are careful to keep all this commandment which I am commanding you to do, to love the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways [and watch this] and hold fast to Him....” There it is. There’s that exclusive allegiance. You hear the, you hear the wedding ceremony in there? And holding only to him or only to her? It’s exclusive.

By the way, our Lord modeled this. You remember at the temptation, Satan comes, and the temptation is fall down and worship me, and I’ll give you all the kingdoms of the world. How does Jesus respond? He responds with, “No, I love and am devoted to, My allegiance is with God and Him alone, with My Father. I will not do it.” He says in Matthew 4:10, “Go, Satan! For it is written, You shall worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only.” I will not allow, Jesus said, any rivals in My love and devotion to God the Father.

Sadly, that’s not always true of us. What are some of the things that we are tempted to allow to replace wholehearted, exclusive allegiance to God? What are some of the things we love instead?

Well, this isn't a comprehensive list. It's just, I went through the Scripture and just pulled out some samples. Here are the things men are tempted to replace a love of God with.

There's a love of self (2 Timothy 3). There's a love of money (same passage). There's a love of pleasure. Whatever brings me pleasure, that becomes more important to me than God. In Matthew 10, Jesus talks about loving family more than God. You can't even love your family more than you love God. In fact, your love for Jesus Christ has to be so transcendent that it makes your love for your family seem like hate if the two are forced into conflict with each other.

There are people who love approval of men. They live for that. The Pharisees were like that. There are people who love, as Diotrephes in 3 John, to be first. They love to be first, and they'll sacrifice anything else including God to get that position. There are people who love their sin. You remember in John 3, we're told that light came into the world, but men wouldn't go to the light. They preferred the darkness (why?) because they loved the darkness rather than the light. And we can substitute the love of our own life for the love of God. Remember, Jesus said, 'If you're going to come to Me and really love Me, you've got to be willing to hate your own life.'

Listen, if you're going to love God, then you can allow no rivals to Him. You must make a commitment of exclusivity to the true God like that that husbands and wives make on their wedding day. I was reading a book this week, *Fifty Remarkable Sermons* from Charles Haddon Spurgeon, and one of the sermons is about love for God or love for Christ specifically. And he said that Christians of his day [this is back now more than a hundred years ago in the 1800's, Spurgeon said Christians of his day] actually wrote out vows of allegiance to God, to Jesus Christ. Now I'm not sure we need to write them out, but we need to make that same commitment. We must say, "God, I am exclusively devoted to You, and I will not let love of self or money or pleasure or family or approval or the desire to be first or my sin or my own life supplant the exclusive allegiance I give to You." That's what it means to love God. And by the way, once we make that commitment, then we have to be on the alert for the very first signs that anything begins to steal God's place in our hearts because it's so subtle. It happens all the time.

There's a second quality or characteristic of true love – not only exclusive allegiance. Wherever true love is found, wherever love of anything is found, not only will there be exclusive

allegiance, but there will be loving actions, loving actions. You see, love is not only a decision of the will. True love is an action. True love cannot exist without acting. Think about it, “God so loved the world that He gave....” That’s how love acts. Whatever or whomever we love, we serve. It may be sin. It may be a person. But whatever or whomever we love, we serve. We spend time on that person or thing. We spend our money on it. We exhaust our energies in order to meet the needs of that cherished object whatever it may be. That’s what we do for everything that we love.

So, what are our loving actions to God? God doesn’t need anything from us. In fact, He doesn’t have any needs. He gives us absolutely everything. So, how does this loving service manifest itself when we love God? What are the unselfish actions that manifest our love for God? God doesn’t have any needs, but guess what? God has desires. Can I put it that way? And those desires are spelled out for us in His Word. He’s told us what He wants. If we’re going to love God, we must not only be exclusively devoted to Him or loyal to Him, we must serve Him by doing what He wants. This is how we always respond when we love something. We seek to meet the needs of the cherished object.

You see that here in Deuteronomy 6. We’ll look at it more next week, but in Deuteronomy 6:6 - 9, there’s a response to God’s will, to His desires, to His commands. Look over in chapter 10. Deuteronomy 10:12,

“Now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require from you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways and love Him, and to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul [(and in case you missed it), *and* to keep the LORD’s commandments and His statutes which I am commanding you today for your good?”

If you love God, you’re going to respond to God with loving actions. And since God doesn’t need anything, there are no needs we can meet, we respond to His desires and to His commands.

Again, we see this quality of love reflected in our Lord’s love for His Father. When He was here, He showed this love to God. In John 14:31, we read, Jesus says, “I love the Father, (and so) I do exactly as the Father commanded Me.” I love God, and so My love shows itself in loving

actions. I do what He wants. In John 8:28, Jesus says, "... I do nothing on My own initiative ... (verse 29) ... for I always do the things that are pleasing to Him." That's how love acts. It wants to please.

You say, well, what actions do I do to God? How can I express this love? What, what are the loving actions that love for God shows itself in? Well, one of them is worship – individual personal worship. If you love God, you're going to want to worship Him like you do this morning even corporately. It also means keeping His commands as we've seen in several texts. And because you can't get to God personally – God is all around us obviously, but I can't actually interact with Him as I, as I would a physical person that I can touch and see – how do I express, how do I manifest loving actions toward God? Toward His people, toward the things He loves, toward His church, toward the brothers and sisters. Why do you think the Bible so often says if you love God, you're going to love your brothers and sisters in Christ. Why? Because that's how we show our love to God. I can't, I can't do something God needs, but I can show my love for God by doing something for the other people He loves.

Is your life about serving God, about actions, loving actions that please Him – worshiping Him, keeping His commandments, loving and serving His children and His church? If not, then I can promise you this. You don't love God because true love always manifests itself in loving actions. You act on that love.

So, true love for God manifests the quality of exclusive allegiance and loving actions, but those are not enough. That's not, in and of itself, the total package of love. There's a third quality or characteristic that's always present when we truly love anything or when we truly love God. There is a genuine affection, a genuine affection. You see, love is not only a decision that leads to exclusive allegiance, and it's not only loving actions that lead us to selfless service. Love is also an emotion. Love is not solely an emotion as I pointed out at the beginning, but wherever there is true love the heart, in the English sense of heart, will be engaged. There will be genuine feeling and emotion.

In the twenty-five years Sheila and I have been married, imagine that I had demonstrated exclusive allegiance to her, as I have, but also that I had regularly, as much as I wish I had, regularly and consistently as a pattern of life always unselfishly served her needs in a variety of

ways. So she could honestly say those first two are true. But it'd all been cold and calculating and unfeeling. There had been no emotion, no genuine personal affection for her. You tell me. Would that be genuine love? Of course not. Would she think it's genuine love? Of course not.

And our love for God must not be solely emotional, but it cannot be unemotional. God wants your genuine affection. In English terms, He wants your heart. The Old Testament uses this same verb for love in a number of contexts with human pictures. It uses human pictures to sort of portray what love looks like. Pictures of warm affection - for example, the love of a father for his young child. If you're a father, you understand that. You understand the first time you looked at that child. What a miracle, what an amazing thing – the responsibility and the love that welled up in your heart to care for that child. If you're not a father, you've seen it light up the faces of others; you've seen that expression. You know what it's like. It's also described as the love of a mother for her infant. We've seen that and noted that as well. That's the emotional element of love for God.

So how do you develop a personal affection for God? The same way you do in any other personal relationship. It begins with knowledge of the person, knowledge of that person's qualities and attributes and knowledge of what they've done, their work. It's the same with God. It begins by getting into the Word of God and seeing what God is like – how He describes Himself; what His work is; what He does; what's true about Him. And then as you really learn those things, guess what? You begin to admire those qualities just like in other human relationships. You begin to admire those qualities. And pretty soon, you're delighting in Him because of those qualities and those things that are true of Him. And then you begin to enjoy His presence, and you want to spend time together.

It's the same way with God. It's not enough to try to live like, externally like a Christian, to sort of dot all the i's, and cross all of the t's and do everything a Christian's supposed to do so that everybody around you says, "Oh yeah, that person's a Christian." It's not enough without genuine, personal affection for God. He's not satisfied with anything less. And not solely for what He does for us and gives to us – that's not enough.

As one old Puritan put it, "Our love looks to God Himself as the highest good and end because to love God solely for what He does for us would be mercenary." That's put politely. Let Martin

Luther put it a little more down to earth. Luther writes, “Some people love God, but only as lice love a beggar - to devour Him and suck His blood, not in order to seek His best interests.”

Luther’s right. True love for God isn’t leech-like. I love God because look what He gives me. True love for God is the kind of love Jesus manifested in which He was willing to go to the cross saying, “Not My will, but Yours be done.” I love You and I want to do what would advance Your interests. If it’s health, great. If it’s sickness, okay. If it’s prosperity, fine. If it’s poverty, okay. If it’s Southlake, okay. If it’s the heart of some difficult and desperate place, that’s okay as well. This is what it means to love God.

Our primary duty to God is to love Him, to choose to devote ourselves to Him and to do so with an exclusive allegiance, with loving actions and with a pure and intense affection for Him.

So that’s love for God. How are we to love God? Look at verse 5 because he continues: “love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.” Now, the list of human faculties varies every time this verse is quoted. And so it’s not meant to be a study in psychology. It’s not meant to sort of describe the component parts of man. Instead, the focus of this is on “all” - with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your might. We are to love God with the absolute maximum effort, with the totality of our being. But let me see if we can’t discern some nuances and shades of meaning in those expressions.

First of all, the phrase “with all your heart and with all your soul” - that is a common Old Testament expression. Some seventeen times, it occurs in the Old Testament, half of them here in Deuteronomy. The word “heart” in Hebrew is not primarily our emotions. You know, around Valentine’s we pass cards to each other, and everywhere we want to represent that sort of emotional, romantic love, we use hearts, the human heart. That’s a picture of that sort of emotional love. Don’t read the Bible like that.

When you read the Old Testament, and you come across the word “heart”, heart in Hebrew refers to the seat of the intellect, the will and the intentions. Your heart in the Hebrew way of thinking shapes your character, your choices and your decisions. For example, Proverbs 4:23 says, “Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it [out of it] flow the springs of life.” All of the outcomes of life are determined by your heart. Your heart is where you think. Your heart is

where you make moral choices. That's why in the Septuagint as well as in the New Testament, they use the word 'mind', love God with your mind.

Moses adds we're also to love God with "all our soul." This Hebrew word is used most often to express the entire inner self, the true you, who you are – emotions, desires, all those personal characteristics that make you unique from others. This is the totality of who you are. In fact, you see this illustrated in Psalm 103. That's a familiar psalm to many of us. Psalm 103:1 begins, "Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless His holy name." Hebrew poetry is not based on rhyme like English poetry, but on parallelism. The first line makes a statement. The second line defines that statement or expands it, develops it. Well, look at that line again, "Bless the LORD, O my soul." So, what's the parallel in the second line? "All that is within me" – that's your soul. All that is within me – the totality of my being. So to bless God with one's soul is to bless Him with all that is within me. To love God with one soul is to love Him with all that is within me.

So, putting this phrase together, to love God with all your heart and soul is to love Him with your whole self - with your mind, your will, your emotions, your desires, even in your moral choices. To be genuine, your love for God must include all of you.

Moses adds one more word. He finishes verse 5 with "... all your might." Every other time this Hebrew word occurs in the Old Testament, the word "might", it's translated as an adverb – exceedingly or greatly. Here it's used as a noun. The most common English translations I should say are either "might" as it is here or "strength", with all your strength. Literally translated, it says this, "Love God with all your very muchness." It implies consistency, and it implies maximum effort. I love the way Christopher Wright paraphrased this verse, "Love the Lord your God with total commitment with your total self to total excess." That's the idea. That is the greatest and most comprehensive commandment God ever gave to mankind, and it is our greatest priority.

Now how should we apply this great commandment to love God? Well, we don't have to create that on our own because Jesus our Lord quotes this commandment on at least two occasions, and He quotes it to answer two different questions. The first question is in Luke 10 when someone says to Him, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" And Jesus quotes this passage. The second

question is in Matthew 22 and Mark 12 when He's asked, "What is the great commandment? What is the greatest commandment? What is our greatest duty to God?"

So, there in our Lord's usage are the two primary applications of the great commandment, two primary applications. Number one: the great commandment serves as a constant reminder of our need of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Does that surprise you? Why? Because the great commandment sets up an absolutely impossible standard. Later in Deuteronomy in 30:16 - 20, Moses says, "Listen. You want to have life? You want to live? Then obey the command." What?

Turn over to Luke 10 where our Lord uses this. Luke 10:25,

... [An expert in the Mosaic Law] stood up and put Jesus to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do [underscore that word, what shall I do] to inherit eternal life? [What do I have to do to earn eternal life]?" And He said to him, "'What is written in the Law? How does it read to you? [What do you think from the law?]" And ... "this expert" answered, "'YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, WITH ALL YOUR SOUL AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND; AND YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF" [now watch verse 28]. And ... [Jesus] said to him, "You have answered correctly; DO THIS AND YOU WILL LIVE [you will have eternal life]."

Now why did Jesus affirm what this man said? Why did He tell him that if he kept this commandment, he would earn eternal life? Because Jesus knew this man never had kept it and never could.

Think about it for a moment. Let me just use me as an example. I can honestly tell you before the Lord that I have never obeyed what Jesus called the greatest commandment not a single moment of my life. I have never loved God as I described to you with exclusive allegiance, with loving actions and with genuine affection with all of my being and with all of my strength. It's never happened, and neither has it happened for you not even for a moment much less an entire life. Not a single person has ever kept the most important command God ever gave.

Listen carefully. You know what that means? That means when you stand before God to see if by your own efforts, you have earned a way into of heaven, you are righteous by His standards – listen, your eternal destiny will be settled in a moment. It will be settled before God even gets to

the list of things you normally think of as sins. In fact, God gave this commandment to show us just how bad our situation really was. That's why He gave it to this lawyer. "That's right. Go do that and you'll have eternal life." Why? Because he can never do it.

We only have one hope and that is Christ because Christ perfectly fulfilled the commandment to love God. I quoted it earlier, John 14, "He loved the Father." And He didn't just do so for a moment or a few moments scattered throughout His life. He did so every single moment throughout the stages of His life and development. Think about that. Not one second, not one second did Jesus ever fail to perfectly fulfill this command. And then He died. He didn't deserve to die; He kept it. He died in the place of all of those who haven't kept it.

For those who will submit themselves to Christ as Lord and Savior, who will come to Him acknowledging their sin and seek His forgiveness and salvation, His perfect righteousness - including His perfect keeping of the law of love, the great commandment - is credited to our account and now God sees us as if we had lived that life.

Listen. As we've examined God's greatest commandment, if you've been honest with yourself; if you've been honest with your own heart, any hope you still had of standing before God and saying, "I'm good enough. Look at what I've done. Look at how I've lived my life." - if you've been honest with yourself, that should have been utterly demolished. And you only have one hope and that's to run to Jesus Christ as fast as you can because God's standard is absolute, unmitigated, perfect love for God every single moment of life.

There's a second application very quickly. It's for us as Christians. As Christians, this great commandment should become our greatest priority and pursuit in life. We'll never keep it perfectly, but it should become what we drive for. It becomes now the standard of our behavior - not to become right with God, but out of a desire to love God and obey Him. This summary, this command to love God should become the pursuit of our life, the passion of our heart, the end of everything, our obsession.

Because if you could stand before Jesus Christ today, or if He were here in this room and you could ask Him this question: "Lord, what is the most important thing to You? What is the greatest commandment? What is the foundational principle of the Christian life?" This is what

He would say: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might” - loving the Lord your God with exclusive allegiance, with loving actions of service and with genuine affection with your total self to total excess.

So how can we grow in our love for God? How can we manifest our love for Him? Lord willing, we’ll try to answer those questions next week.

Let’s pray together.

Our Father, we can only begin by saying thank You that You sent Christ because, Father, this great commandment, this most important command to You, this summary of all of Your expectation of us leaves us utterly hopeless without Christ. But Father, we thank You that He stood in our place, that He lived life as we should have lived it. And then He died undeservingly because He died in our place.

Father, we thank You and bless You that now we long to love You and to, to express this love that we’ve been studying together not in perfection because we can’t, and only as You enable, but because we have learned to love You in the love You’ve expressed to us in Christ. Lord, help us to grow in our love for You, to manifest that love for You. Use this passage as we begin this new year to set our priorities as a church and as well in each of our individual lives.

And Father, I pray for the person here who doesn’t love You. May this be the day when they truly understand the hopelessness of their situation and they run to Jesus Christ.

For it’s in His name we pray. Amen.