

#### IV. LOVE THE LORD

42. Love the Lord... The Greatest Commandment, Read Dt (Deuteronomy) 6:5, Mt 22:34-40, Mk 12:28-34, Lk 10:25-29

I can't think of a way to love God not included here. So love God in every way. How can we be righteous if we don't love God who is the most righteous and the upholder of righteousness. If we were righteous, but owed God nothing else we would love Him for the fact that He is righteous and so working for the very thing we are working for, and for the help He offers to the righteous. Obviously God would be our greatest ally and we would love Him for that.

But, we do owe God something. Believing that He made all there is we owe Him our loyalty because He made us. We also owe Him our loyalty because He provides everything we need to live day to day. Because He made everything He also has the right to decide what is right and wrong. But, God is not arbitrary in His views regarding righteousness.

God stands for and defines what is right for us. If you love Him and try to do what He approves you will have a better idea what to do in those situations where it is otherwise unclear.

Corinthians 13:4-8

4. Love is patient and kind; love does not envy, boast or is proud
5. It does not behave unseemly, seeks not its own, is not easily provoked, thinks no evil;
6. It Rejoices not in wrong doing, but rejoices in the truth;
7. endures all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.
8. Love never fails:

I think it appropriate to try to be patient, humble, trusting, hopeful, respectful and not rude or selfish in our relationship with God. To love God means to respect, honor, and support God, to speak well of God, to avoid disappointing God, to be sensitive of the feelings and values of God, wanting to be with God, wanting to know all about God, wanting to know the thoughts of God. Some of these subjects we will cover in other commands, but some might be best covered now.

In your relationship with God are you respectful? Do you remember that He made you? Do you remember that He does not tolerate evil?

In your relationship with God are you selfish? Do you always think first of what you want Him to do for you? Are you mindful of how well you are doing what He desires when you ask Him to do things for you?

When you talk about God to others do you support, speak well of, and honor Him?

How hard do you avoid disappointing Him? Are you mindful of His values?

Do you want to be with God? Always? Do you want Him to go away so you can do what you want without Him watching?

Do you want to know all about God? Do you want to know what He thinks of everything? Do you read the Bible? Do you believe what it says about Him? Do you believe what He says about Himself?

Is your relationship with God all about you? Is it about what you want, and need, what you suffered, what you know, what justice you should have gotten or should get, etc?

Are you afraid of Him, with fear that goes beyond respect? Do you think He is out to get you? Do you think He has been unfair to you or others close to you? Do you think He is watching you to catch you

the next time you do something wrong, and then you'll get it? Are you waiting for the ax to fall? These are all negative attitudes about God. If you think or feel these things then at heart you think God is not always righteous. You need to admit this and begin to talk it out.

Satan has been lying to us about the righteousness of God from the beginning. And we have believed it. If you have believed that God is anything less than righteous you have believed one of Satan's lies. It is time to get to work disbelieving it.

#### IV.A.RESPECT GOD

43.Take God Seriously. Read Mt 22:1-14

Some made light of the king's invitation. They forgot that he was the king. In our democratic society we take for granted that we are free and need not respect anyone. We don't do anything just because someone has told us to.

Sometimes people forget that the police and courts have authority over us in certain situations. If a policeman tells you to pull over you must pull over. In court if the judge tells you to shut up and sit down you have to shut up and sit down.

In most of the world or for most of history respect had to be shown to those who rule. So most readers of this passage would be amazed to hear that people just ignored the king's invitation. That is why Jesus said this. It is absurd and dangerous to ignore God's invitation.

I remember watching a film called "Shogun". In it a Japanese war lord orders one of his samurai to bring his children and kill them in front of him tomorrow. Now the samurai had the choice of abandoning his loyalty and escaping with his family. In this case the war lord would be rid of a samurai who was unreliable. But this particular samurai was honorable and loyal, as he was sworn to be. So he brought his children to the war lord to kill them. The war lord stopped him from doing this. From that point on both men knew that the samurai could be trusted with anything.

What amazed me was that a man was able to receive such obedience from another man. How can it be that we don't give our 100 % obedience to God? A man may or may not have this right depending on what the other has sworn to do. But, God has this right as the result of no oath, but because He made us. He made us and can unmake us and then remake us just as easily. Surely this means He has complete authority over us. How is it we don't respect and obey Him completely?

In the passage some of His people just went off and did something more interesting and more profitable, in their view. Others, who apparently hated Him, killed His messengers. Those the king had killed. The others He decided not to include. So He fills the banquet hall with whoever else could be found.

Even so a man was there who did not respect the king enough to come properly attired. He was "bound and thrown into the darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth." This phrase is a formula Jesus uses to describe hell.

Respect God. Do things His way. It's His way or the hell way.

44.Do not blaspheme Read Mt 12:24-32, Lk 12:10

So what does this archaic term "blasphemy" mean? In short it means misrepresenting God. When we say something about God that is not true we blaspheme. In Jesus day blasphemers might be stoned to death. In our culture people blaspheme all the time.

Some say God does not exist. God's name for Himself is "I Am". When there was nothing else, or where there was nothing else, for in the eternity in which God exists time does not. Others say terrible

and hateful things about God. Some create a false God in their own image. Imagining that He must think the way they do. "Just a few years ago I was so smart I had to wear diapers. Now I am so smart I must know what God must be like because He is smart, like me." I can't think of a more outrageous presumption. There are many who believe that above all, God must be nice. If righteousness is always nice then God is nice. Even the righteous would not describe righteousness as nice.

In Romans chapter one Paul says that some things about God should be obvious to everyone until they get so caught up in wickedness that they can't think straight.

Let's assume that God is more knowledgeable, intelligent and understanding than we are. I think He understands us better than we do. I think He must certainly understand Himself better than we ever can. Let us simply take what God has said about Himself and believe it. He gave us a book. In it He is described. We may not be able to interpret it well. We may find contradictions that we can't resolve. But let us assume that God has revealed Himself in His book and it is the truth.

Can we accept that it is the truth? Can we accept that God is the way He is and the way He is has nothing to do with the way we would have Him be? Can we accept that what the Bible says about God is the truth? And this is the biggest question, do we really want to know the truth about God?

If we don't want to know the truth about God we had better keep our mouths shut rather than talk about Him or blasphemy is inevitable. If you were God and someone refused to learn the truth about you but instead told lies about you, when the day comes to judge, how would you judge them?

45. Honor Jesus Read Lk 22:14-20, Mt 26:26-28, Mk 14:22-24

This is a huge justice issue. I remember an old hardware store that I used to go to. The owner, at least, was rather conservative politically. Now we need to not overlook the past when the war protesting students took over the street in front of his business. Any way he had a cartoon pinned up showing two hippies walking down the street planning their day. They had to get their food stamps, pick up the children from the government funded day care center and on and on it went describing how they were taking advantage of all these government funded programs. At the end of it all they plan to meet up to "...protest the dirty rotten establishment." The irony and injustice of all this is that they are protesting the very government that provides them with all these free services. Naturally conservatives think this is funnier than liberals do.

Setting aside all that God has done for us, in so far as He made us and placed us in a world that He also made, which would be paradise except that we miserable sinners live here, let's consider Jesus. Jesus died on the cross, to take our punishment on Himself. He took the bullet for the team. He earned all the blessings of the promises of God by living the perfectly righteous life. He earned it but He shared it with us. These blessings are awesome and will last for eternity. The rest of the world, being yet lost, does not owe Jesus anything for the salvation He provides. For they do not accept it. But we who live in hope of passing out of this world into the paradise that Jesus opened up for us certainly do.

So what can we do for Him. Nothing material certainly. We could love Him. that would be good. But justice demands that we remember what He has done for us, and thank Him and honor Him. How much should we honor Him? Our honor for Him should be as great as what He has provided for us. If eternity in heaven is a much greater thing than eternity in hell then that is the measure of the honor that we owe Him.

We can worship Him and praise Him in words and with song. We can stand or we can kneel and by that acknowledge that He is greater than us as well as better than us. We can praise Him and testify to what He has done before the lost whether they bear to hear it or not. We can put Him first in our lives, ahead of everything we and the people around us want. The best we can do is to do everything He tells us to. But, in our heart we should honor Him

On top of all this Jesus asks that we remember Him in the breaking of bread, the holy communion that He established at the last supper. This is a simple recurring opportunity to reflect that He gave His body for us, and that was no metaphor. We might have well have eaten His very body for He had to die to save us and by no other means can we be saved. It is as if we were starving and the only way we could survive was to kill and eat Him and He commanded us to do it. That is a metaphor. We killed Him when we sinned. And the Father sentenced him to die when He said that we would be delivered, no metaphor.

I like it. I have to stop and reflect what am I doing. I'm remembering that Jesus gave His life for me and I took it. That is the bread, remembering. The wine is the blood of the covenant. This is not so much as remembering as renewing our covenant with Him. What Is the covenant? We do what we should that we might continue to belong to Him. In belonging to Him we share in His suffering and in His blessings. At the first Passover the blood of a lamb was spread on the door frame. This meant that those inside belonged to God and the angel of death passed over them. With the wine of holy communion we drink the blood of Jesus, we belong to Him, and the righteous justice of God passes over us.

46. Don't try to control God. Read Mt 16:1-4, Mk 8:10-12, 16:14-20, Lk 11:28-32 Jn 4:46-54, Jn 10:31-39.

These passages all have to do with signs. They may seem contradictory. In Jn 10 Jesus says that if the Jews can't believe in Him then they should believe in the miracles He did. So signs are good. In Jn 4 Jesus says that without signs the people will not believe. Signs are good but it disappoints Jesus that the Jews need them. In Mk 16 Jesus confirms His words spoken by the apostles with signs and wonders so that the whole world might believe. So signs are good. Yet in Mt 16 Jesus condemns the Jews for asking for a sign.

I conclude that signs done by God are good but signs demanded by the Jews are bad. The difference must be the attitude. People struggling to believe receive a sign because of God's mercy. People demanding a sign from God are demanding mercy. Mercy is giving or receiving something better than what we deserve. If the thing is earned then it is not mercy. If the thing is demanded it is not mercy. The Jews were presumptuous. They can't make demands of God. When God is ready to be merciful then He will provide signs to those who He chooses,

Ironically Jesus provides many signs. In fact it almost seems that the gospels were written to communicate the signs Jesus did. See Jn 20:26-31. These particular Jews had not seen the signs or had not believed them. But, they did not ask everyone to provide signs. So they must have heard that Jesus did these things. It is as if they already have the answer yet they continue to ask the question. God considers this disrespect He has provided the answer yet they do not believe Him.

I worked with people who would ask me questions regarding what management was trying to accomplish. I would answer them as best I could for there was nothing to hide. They did not believe what I told them so after a few of these experiences I stopped answering their questions. I said, "If you are not going to believe me then don't ask me."

47. Fear God, Stand with God, Read Lk 12:4-10, 57-59, Mt 10:22-33, Mk 3:28-30

Here is an attitude I see allot in adult men, particularly the middle aged, "Don't tell me what to do." Children usually don't do what you tell them, but at least they will listen and perhaps agree in their hearts that they should do as they are told. Adults won't usually listen. "I'm an adult. I don't have to listen to anybody."

People who will not submit to any authority on Earth are on a collision course with the greatest authority. God has authority over everyone and everything simply because He made it. Even if you

don't think philosophically that God has authority over you because He made you, you will concede that God has authority over you because He alone controls your destiny.

Many people could murder you if they really wanted to. Only God can kill you and then throw you into hell for eternity. Even your enemies know that when you are dead you are irrevocably beyond their reach. They can do nothing more to you. You are never beyond God's reach.

God does not want us to hide from Him in fear that we will do something that will cause His wrath to fall on us. God wants us to live out our lives mindful of the fact that we live in His world, He made us, He has made known what He demands of us, He knows everything we think, feel, do or say. We will have to give an account to Him for all that we have done, and that He will reward and punish us in accordance with what we have done.

if you live out all the details of your life in a manner consistent with the big picture, you will never face God's wrath. But, everyone, the righteous and the evil, must respect God for who He is and the authority He has over us.

48. Stand with God, Read Lk 21:12-19, Mk 13:9-13

In some piece of Russian literature I read, in translation of course, there was related the story of a Russian soldier who lived the wild worldly life. He was captured by the Turks. They told him to renounce Christianity and become a Muslim or be killed. He would not renounce Christianity.

Someone asked him why Christianity was so important to him now but not when he was free to pursue the wild life.

His answer was that when he was living the wild life he never thought about it but now faced with the plain and clear choice he had to choose what he knew to be right.

Some would say the once you are saved you are always, eternally and irrevocably saved. If so then Jesus did not mean what He said when He said we must forgive, we must not blaspheme the Holy Spirit, our righteousness must surpass that of the Pharisees, we must stop doing evil, we must put His words into practice, we must use what God has given us to do His work, we must be prepared, we must watch, we must make every effort to enter the narrow gate, and in this case we must acknowledge Jesus before men. But let us set aside the consequences of disowning Jesus before men if we can't agree on this. Let us agree that we are commanded to acknowledge Him.

But, every time we sin are we not disowning Jesus? Are we not taking something else as our God? Aren't we on the broad and easy path? In a way yes. But, Jesus seems to be saying, like the Russian soldier, that there are events when we come to the final fork in the road and we must choose rightly. I really don't know but I think it has to do with the amount of volition. Our sin is much more grievous when we have carefully considered our choices and have decided to turn our back on Jesus.

My other thought is that the more God has given you, the bigger your sin if you sin. There were many adulterers in Israel but it was David's son who was killed by it. There were many who offered incense "on every high hill and under every spreading tree", but it was the two sons of Aaron who died for it. There were many generations who did not trust in God, but only the one God brought out of Egypt died in the desert for it.

Consider Lk 12:47-48. it makes sense that more is demanded from the one given more, but what greater thing was the Russian soldier given? If anything it was this: he was given the opportunity to affirm Jesus as Lord before the unbelievers, even at the cost of his life, and die as a witness for the truth.

49. Watch and Pray. See Mt 26:36-45, Mk 14:32-41 and Lk 22:39-46

Jesus tells the three that they should watch and pray for the Spirit is willing but the flesh is weak. Did they do it? Did they do it enough? See Mt 26:56, 69-75, Mk 14:50-52, 66-72, Lk 22:54-62.

We must not take it for granted that we will die in peace. Sometimes disaster gets very close before people see it. It may be that we will find ourselves in the position where we must either stand with Jesus and die (on Earth but not forever), or deny Jesus and live (on Earth but not forever). How will we react? Will we pass the test. The only ones who know they will pass the test are those who passed the test before, yet miraculously lived to be tested in this way again.

We should not back away from the concept and put out of our minds the thought that we will be tested in just this way. Instead we should pray that we will pass the test. We should gather around us the verses that we encourage us to stand with Jesus, such as the parable of the grain of wheat, the story of Stephen. It would be good to read the "Book of Martyrs".

We should remember that we will all die someday. Perhaps a progressive terminal illness when we are old will be a long lingering death, and much worse than a few days of torture and a quick execution while we are young. What I think of is the same I thought of when I sought God at the first. I wanted my life to have a purpose and a meaning. Meaning does not come with survival. It comes with a life lived in accordance with that meaning. The end of a long and useless life may seem more tragic than the end of a short meaningful one.

Let us strengthen ourselves against the fear of dying by not giving into the other fears we live with such as: losing our job, going bankrupt, broken relationships etc.

50. Do not put God to the Test, Read Mt 4:1-11 & Luke 4:9-12

It is possible to assume, I suppose, that now that you are a Christian God will keep you from all harm. Being able to throw yourself off a tall building without harm is an extreme example. Most of us will never do this. But some Christians assume they should never have to suffer health problems, wayward children, psychological issues such as depression, or a tragic past etc. Therefore don't be surprised when you face trials. Don't test God by assuming you should live a life free of trials. Jesus suffered much for us so that we might belong to Him. In belonging to Him we share in His glory. We also share in His suffering. It is a package deal. Let's accept what we must and credit it to Jesus as His suffering and contributing to His glory. Perhaps we accept the sufferings we share with Christ He will have mercy on the people around us and allow His strength to be revealed in our weakness and thus draw them to Himself through that revelation.

51. Don't treat what is holy as if it were not holy. Read Mt 7:6

The first seems straight forward. The second not at all. Previously we considered the ancient concept of "holy" as meaning set aside for God and His purposes. Dogs were not regarded as pets.

Dogs were used as watch dogs. They were fed the carcasses of dead animals. They were fed what people were not allowed to eat.

The principle seems clear enough. Some things are to be set aside for God. Don't treat them with contempt. The application to the Christian life is not so certain. What things do we have as Christians that are holy? Our scriptures are holy. They come to us so that we might understand God and conform to His will. How might we treat the scriptures as unholy. We might dispute the source of the scriptures treating them as if they were another kind of ancient writing. We might use a Bible to hold up a coffee cup. We might use stories from the scriptures as material for jokes.

We have the Holy Spirit. Jesus has warned us not to blaspheme the Holy Spirit for we will not be forgiven. The Holy Spirit is active in our lives doing things through us if we submit to His leading. If we treat what He has done as another ordinary thing we treat it as unholy. He is not a source of luck but

blessing. The manifestations of the Holy Spirit in other people are not funny or to be mocked. To honestly doubt that it is the Spirit doing something in someone else is OK. For there are many spirits in the world.

Throwing pearls to pigs is tougher to figure out. All I can think of is we are warned not to try to use the manifestations of the Spirit or other things of God to impress the unbelieving world in an attempt to accomplish some worldly goal rather than a holy one. These unbelievers might turn on you.

Suppose you have the gift of preaching. Using it to impress people with your speaking ability so as to get a job doing something else like selling or whatever, would be wrong. If you want a job selling, fine. But don't invite a prospective employer to church to hear you preach so as to impress him. I am really at a loss to come up with a better example.

51. Don't add rules to God's Law. Read Mt 23:4, 13-15

If God has made a law it is pretty obvious that we must adhere to that law. We need to do what He says to do and not do what He has said not to do. It is not so obvious, but is it not just as true that we must not add laws to God's law? If taking a law away from God's law is wrong is not adding a law to God's law just as wrong?

I remember finding passages like this:

NIV Proverbs 4:27

27. Do not swerve to the right or the left; keep your foot from evil. See also Deuteronomy 5:32, Deuteronomy 28:14, Joshua 1:7, and Joshua 23:6.

I thought if the left means not keeping the law God has given then what does the right mean? It occurred to me that the right would be making laws that God did not give and calling these things God's law which are not God's law.

Anyone can make a law, but when we call the law we made God's law we have lied about God.

The Pharisees created laws that were not God's laws but they treated them as if they were God's laws. They forgot where these things had come from. At first they were trying to create a legal "buffer zone". They would have a rule which kept people from coming near to breaking God's law.

The best example I can think of would be the rule that served as a buffer for God's law regarding flogging. See Deuteronomy 25:1-3. A man was not to be given more than forty lashes. So the rabbis looked at this law and thought, "Someone might miscount. They might count forty when the true count is forty-one. So we will have a law that says no one must be given more than thirty-nine lashes. Now if someone miscounts the guilty man will receive only forty and not more than forty." This makes sense to me. And it is not petty, particularly from the perspective of the man receiving the lashes. This rule they made makes sense, but it is not right to call it God's law, simply because God never said it.

The problem arose from them adding so many laws to God's law and calling them God's law that the people could not obey them all. They made all these laws but they did nothing to help the people keep the laws. That is what Jesus accused them of.

So what is in here for us. Some Churches, church leaders and denominations like to make rules. The problem arises when they treat as sinners people who do not keep their rules. A person sins when they do what is wrong. Who is to decide what is the wrong that makes a person a sinner? God. When we consider our rules to be God's rules, and treat a person like a sinner because they broke our rule, we make ourselves their judge, as well as misrepresenting God. Don't do this.

Remember Jesus cursed the Pharisees seven times. Seven is the number of perfect completion. Jesus

cursed them perfectly and completely. What will He do to us if we treat as sinners people who break our rules, we who broke God's law and accepted Jesus grace, the salvation He offers us?

52. Give God what you owe Him. See Mk 12:13-17, Mt 22:15-22, Lk 20:21-26

Herod was the king of Galilee. Pontius Pilate was the Roman governor of Judea. The Herodians would be the people who supported him. His party as it were.

It was a good trap. They were squeezing Jesus between national and spiritual pride and treason. The patriotic Jews thought they were the people of God and that they should, with God's help, rise up and throw the Romans out of their land. If they expressed this they were subject to being charged

with rebellion, and could count on the Herodians to turn them in. If Jesus said pay the taxes He was a traitor to his people. If He said don't pay the taxes He was a rebel. They had him whatever answer he gave.

God is God of the absolutes. And yet His truth is not always quite that simple. God is righteous above all and then comes justice. Sometimes He gives people what they deserve. That is justice and we don't want it because if we get what we deserve we will die. Sometimes God is merciful. We need this because we need His mercy to live. But we want His mercy for ourselves as we scream that He execute justice on our enemies. The principal behind Jesus' answer is justice. The Pharisees were too busy trying to trap Him to consider what was right. Because of justice, we owe God everything, for He is the source of everything. At the same time He has provided some of His blessings through other agencies. He provided us life through our parents, so we must honor them. Justice demands it. God demands it. But what if our parents contradict God. God has His own relationship with them. He has a way that honors them even as we obey Him. A wife is to obey God and yet honor and obey her father or her husband according to the law of Moses. Everyone was to keep their vows made to God, but if a woman made a vow and her husband, upon hearing of it, says "no" she is released and does not need to keep the vow. See Numbers 30.

We need to honor those through whom God has blessed us: doctors nurses etc. who keep us healthy, teachers who teach us, employers who pay us, firemen and police and military who protect us, the government that serves us in many ways. If we are blessed we must honor the means by which God has blessed us. See Deuteronomy 25:4. See Romans 13:1-8. Sometimes the government and God are in conflict. See Acts 5:27-41. If we put God first we will never be in a trap. He will show us the way out. I have said, "God is crazy about justice." And so He is. If we obey Him we will be just in all our ways.

So we owe God everything, but what did the Jews owe the Romans. The Romans dispensed justice, punishing law breakers. They protected the land of the Jews from foreign invaders. I'll guess they maintained the roads and the Jerusalem water supply. In return for this the Jews owed the Romans taxes. Obedience to the law and occasional labor. Was it a fair arrangement? God will decide. Jesus seems to be more concerned with the Jews obeying God rather than the Romans being just. His answer was in effect, "Yes pay the Romans the taxes you owe for they serve you in a fashion. And repent and obey God in all things for He has provided everything."

Also see Mk 12:1-12. God did everything for the nation of Israel. From promising the land, through the deliverance from Egypt, to David's Empire, to the liberation from Babylon. God did for them

what He has done for no one else. The fact that they rejected His plan for them is a huge injustice.

What about us. What have we received? We have the forgiveness of our sins, the promise of eternal life, the presence of God's Holy Spirit within us. Some of us have received revelations and seen the power of the Spirit. We have received so much we owe God everything. So offer God everything. Mentally give God everything and let Him give back to you what He wants you to keep, and that may



well even be better than it was when you offered it.