

The Most Important Thing

Mark 12:28-34

Introduction

Here we are at the beginning of another year! This marks the 13th anniversary of my teaching this class!

We are taking a break from our James study today, though our topic flows directly from our last study and we will actually land right back in James 4 for our conclusion. When we met together last time, we started chapter four of James and spent the time discussing the problem of living for pleasure instead of living for God. That set us up perfectly for the topic that God had given me back in October for our annual New Year's lesson, and that I had been thinking about since late 2015.

Lately there has been a lot of talk about "casual Christianity" in church and among our leadership. John talked about it during his anniversary message in December. The more I think about it, the more concerned I am that I and many others are practically living exactly that type of Christian walk, and aren't even aware of it.

My last comments during our last time together were a quote by Dr. Curtis Vaughan:

"When men choose pleasure rather than God as a way of life, the laws of God are disregarded, and the desire for pleasure drives men to do things they never dreamed they were capable of doing." – Vaughan

I remember a quote that an evangelist who used to come to our church in OK would often say: "Sin will take you further than you ever wanted to go, keep you longer than you ever thought you'd stay, and cost you more than you ever wanted to pay."

It is because of this danger that today we're going to compare Jesus' "greatest commandment" and our lives to see if we are living up to His expectation of us – and our commitment to Him.

Mark 12:28–34 – ²⁸One of the scribes came and heard them arguing, and recognizing that He had answered them well, asked Him, "What commandment is the foremost of all?" ²⁹Jesus answered, "The foremost is, 'Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is one Lord; ³⁰and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' ³¹"The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these." ³²The scribe said to Him, "Right, Teacher; You have truly stated that He is One, and there is no one else besides Him; ³³and to love Him with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as himself, is much more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices." ³⁴When Jesus saw that he had answered intelligently, He said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." After that, no one would venture to ask Him any more questions.

The Jewish law had become incredibly complex. There were approximately 613 laws that the rabbis had made up, 248 of them positive and 365 negative. "The ordinary person needs a clear path through this jungle of legislation." – Knowles

"It was usual to believe that the 'greater' were those sanctioned by the severer penalties. But Jesus took another view. The greatest commands were those which explained and carried with them the rest, and he was able to sum up the whole in a pair of sayings." – Robinson

Jesus quotes Deuteronomy 6:5. "That verse was part of the *Shema*, the basic and essential creed of Judaism, the sentence with which every Jewish service still opens, and the first text which every Jewish child commits to memory. **It means that to God we must give a total love, a love which dominates our emotions, a love which directs our thoughts, and a love which is the dynamic of our actions.** All religion starts with the love which is total commitment of life to God." – Barclay

I. Jesus' Expectation

Jesus gave us the four ways that we are to love God:

καὶ ἀγαπήσεις κύριον τὸν θεόν σου and you shall love the Lord your God
ἐξ ὅλης τῆς καρδίας σου καὶ ἐξ ὅλης with all your heart, and with all your
τῆς ψυχῆς σου καὶ ἐξ ὅλης τῆς soul, and with all your mind, and
διανοίας σου καὶ ἐξ ὅλης τῆς ἰσχύος with all your strength | [NASB95](#)
σου. | [NASB95 NT RI](#)

ἀγαπήσεις agapēseis and **you shall love** the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.'

[ἀγαπάω](#) agapaō **love**

[verb](#), [future](#), [active](#), [indicative](#), [second person](#), [singular](#)

Sense: to love (care) – to have a great affection or care for or loyalty towards.

[BDAG](#) cherish, have affection for, love; take pleasure in; prove one's love

[LXGRCANLEX](#) to love; take pleasure in

“What then are we here bound down to do? **One word is made to express it. And what a word!** Had the essence of the divine law consisted in *deeds*, it could not possibly have been expressed in a single word; for no one deed is comprehensive of all others embraced in the law. But as it consists in *an affection of the soul*, one word suffices to express it—but only one. **Fear**, though due to God and enjoined by Him, is *limited* in its sphere and *distant* in character. **Trust, hope**, and the like, though essential features of a right state of heart towards God, are called into action only by *personal necessity*, and so are—in a good sense, it is true, but still are properly—*selfish* affections; that is to say, **they have respect to our own well-being**. But love is an *all-inclusive* affection, embracing not only every other affection proper to its object, but all that is proper to be *done* to its object; for as love spontaneously seeks to please its object, so, in the case of men to God, it is the native well spring of a **voluntary obedience**. It is, besides, the most *personal* of all affections. One may fear an event, one may hope for an *event*, one may rejoice in an *event*; but one can love only a *Person*. It is the *tenderest*, the most *unselfish*, the most *divine* of all affections. Such, then, is the affection in which the essence of the divine law is declared to consist.” – JFB

If we truly *love* God, then we will obey Him!

A. All of Our Heart

ὅλης holēs and you shall love the Lord your God with **all** your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’

ὅλος holos **whole; all**

[adjective, genitive, singular, feminine](#)

Sense: entire – constituting the full quantity or extent; complete.

[BDAG](#) whole, entire, complete; wholly, completely; everything

[LXGRCANLEX](#) whole; completely; complete; wholly

καρδίας kardias and you shall love the Lord your God with all your **heart**, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’

καρδιά kardia **heart**

[noun, genitive, singular, feminine](#)

Sense: self ⇔ heart – the locus of a person’s thoughts (mind), volition, emotions, and knowledge of right from wrong (conscience).

[BDAG](#) heart; interior, center, heart

[LXGRCANLEX](#) heart

Whole-heartedly. Undividedly. Sincerely. With feeling.

What does it look like to love God with all your heart? _____

B. All of Our Soul

ψυχῆς psychēs and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your **soul**, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’

ψυχή psychē **life; soul**

[noun, genitive, singular, feminine](#)

Sense: soul – the immaterial part of a person which is the actuating cause of an individual life; the site of all the psychological faculties (such as the heart, mind, and conscience).

[BDAG](#) (breath of) life, life-principle, soul; earthly life, life; that which possesses life/soul; soul; person

[LXGRCANLEX](#) life, person, soul; soul; life; person

All of your life.

What does it look like to love God with all your soul? _____

C. All of Our Mind

Jesus added this one to the three that were originally stated in the Shema. He could do that.

διανοίας dianoiās and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your **mind**, and with all your strength.’

διάνοια dianoia **mind; disposition**

[noun, genitive, singular, feminine](#)

Sense: mind – that which is responsible for one’s thoughts and feelings; especially the seat of the faculty of reason.

[BDAG](#) understanding, intelligence, mind; disposition, thought, mind; purpose, plan; imagination; sense, impulse

[LXGRCANLEX](#) intelligence, mind; mind; understanding; thought; disposition

Understanding. Intelligence, not blind devotion.

What does it look like to love God with all your mind? _____

D. All of Our Strength

ἰσχύος *ischyos* and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your **strength.**'

[ἰσχύς](#) *ischys* **might; strength**

[noun](#), [genitive](#), [singular](#), [feminine](#)

Sense: capability ⇔ strength – possession of the qualities required to do something or get something done; especially the possession of physical qualities.

[BDAG](#) strength, power, might

[LXGRCANLEX](#) strength, power; strength; might

Your actions. Intense. Energetic.

What does it look like to love God with all your strength? _____

II. How Some Fall Short

What are some examples of what you would call “casual Christianity”? _____

A. In the Spiritual Disciplines

Prayer –

Philippians 4:6 – ⁶Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

Bible reading –

2 Timothy 2:15 – ¹⁵Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth.

Meditating –

Psalms 119:97 – ⁹⁷O how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day.

Worship –

John 4:23 – ²³But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers.

Ephesians 5:18–19 – ¹⁸And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord;

Church attendance –

Hebrews 10:23–25 – ²³Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; ²⁴and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, ²⁵**not forsaking our own assembling together**, as is the habit of some, but encouraging *one another*; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.

Giving –

Proverbs 3:9–10 – ⁹Honor the Lord from your wealth And from the first of all your produce; ¹⁰So your barns will be filled with plenty And your vats will overflow with new wine.

Ministry –

Ephesians 4:11–12 – ¹¹And He gave some *as* apostles, and some *as* prophets, and some *as* evangelists, and some *as* pastors and teachers, ¹²for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ;

We know all of these things, but that doesn't mean we do them.

B. In Our Activities

What kinds of activities can expose our compromised commitment to Christ? ___

TV, books, internet, friends, entertainment,

Quotes from "casual Christians":

"My Christian friends do it."

"It's not that bad."

"I'll stop before it gets out of hand."

"It's just the way I am."

"This is just a season of life."

C. In Our Minds

Proverbs 4:23 – ²³Watch over your heart with all diligence, For from it *flow* the springs of life.

We begin to think (and thus act) like the world.

James 4:4 – ⁴You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

III. How Can We Recover from Our Casual Christianity?

Read James 4:6-10 and see if you can find some answers to that question from James:

James 4:6-10 – ⁶But He gives a greater grace. Therefore *it* says, "God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble." ⁷Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. ⁸Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. ⁹Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to gloom. ¹⁰Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.

Humility

Submission to God – What does that look like?

Resist the devil – How?

Draw close to God – Move in His direction.

Cleanse your hands

Purify your hearts

Repent

Conclusion

How can we turn away from our pleasure-seeking casual Christianity?

Matthew 6:33 – ³³But **seek first His kingdom and His righteousness**, and all these things will be added to you.

Some of us have a way to go to get back to our "first love". God help us!

As the old hymn said, "Lord, send a revival! And let it begin in me!!!"