



Loving God with All of You_(Part 1)

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No other religion in the world boasts the kind of relationship with the Almighty that is available through Christ. None. It is utterly unique, intimate, and public. There is no secret society enrollment, no special guru training, and no money required to have a friendship with God. Yet, at the same time, it is not simply a bagful of feelings nor a relationship so private that we pick and choose what we want God to be like. The Almighty doesn't change. He is a permanent reality upon which our own existence hangs.

There is one central goal God has given to humanity, that is, to love Him.

Jesus said the greatest commandment that unifies all others is, "Love the Lord your God with all of your heart, your soul, your mind, and your strength" (Mark 12:30). This, coming from the smartest man who ever lived, requires us to stop, ponder, order, and re-order our lives to walk in it. We must update

our view of God, not simply because loving God is a nice thing to do, but because loving God is the sum total of living in harmony with the way the world actually is, no matter who you are.

When Jesus says, "the Lord your God," he is speaking about Yahweh of the Old Testament. He's echoing Deuteronomy that speaks of the same. He is not referring to any boutique religious intuition. He isn't speaking of personal mysticism. He is making reference to something real, an unseen but ever-present Person, the King above all High Kings. And throughout the Gospels, Jesus and those closest to him always give indication that there is more to Jesus than meets the eye. He is identical, in some way, to this High King.

But what kind of relationship to the High King does Jesus have in mind?

All relationship requires an "I, Thou" distinction. There must be at least two persons present in order for a relationship to happen. This is why much eastern religion cannot talk about true relationship with God because there is no "other" to relate to. For the Eastern mystic, everyone and everything is part of God, while at the same time, any indication of

separateness is merely an illusion.

What a contrast this is to the relationship Jesus underscores. A relationship with the God of the Scriptures is nearly analogous to our relationships with each other. We are distinct from our friends, and hence a real "I, Thou" relationship can be made.

But what is this "I, Thou" relationship based on? Jesus says it is based on "love."

The English word for "love" is unclear for a discussion like this one. We can talk about "loving" God, while at the same time talk about "loving" our cars, our spouses, our children, and our books. Each one of these relationships exhibits a different kind of love that is lost in our English usage.

Jesus' use of "love" is "agape." It is a love that is willed, unselfish, and looking for the best good of another. "For God so loved the world." Here the same word for "love" is used: God unselfishly willing the best good of humanity.

Jesus already assumes God's love when he gives the command. But he's putting the responsibility of love upon us. We are capable of it, he implies. We are to

love God the way God loves us. We are to will God's good.

This is probably a new concept to many of us. To will God's good is a different perspective than what we hear much of the time. We hear about obedience. We hear about God's love for us. But when was the last time we heard of willing God's good?

The beginning of the Lord's Prayer starts off fulfilling the commandment to love.

Our Father, who art in heaven,
Hallowed by thy name.
Thy kingdom come
Thy will be done
On earth as it is in heaven.

Why do we want God's kingdom to come? Because that's the reason He made planet earth—to manifest his kingdom here. When we pray this kind of prayer, we are willing God's best. This is why Jesus also says that if you love me, you'll keep my commandments. Obedience to God is the willing of his good. When we obey, we make his name great in the world.

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