

Love God, Love People

Turn to Gospel of Mark, chapter 12. In this Scripture a man asks Jesus what the most important command of God would be, the most important thing God's people should do.

This time Jesus gave a straight forward answer. The man was asking the right question, and Jesus told him what the most important command was. And then Jesus added a second command. Jesus was not comfortable just giving the most important command.

Jesus knew what the most important command was, and told it, but that one was not enough on its own. So Jesus also told him another command, a second great command.

And then Jesus was satisfied. If a person took those two as the greatest, they'd be going in the right direction. This message is built around those two commands. I intend to give a basic summary of what it means to follow Jesus, based on these two commands.

Mark 12:28-31 - *One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?"*

²⁹ "The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. ³⁰ 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: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these."

In the first half of this message, we'll talk about loving God, actually just one part of loving God, and in the second half we'll talk about loving our neighbour as ourselves.

Love God: Respond to his call to come to him

Romans 8. God loves us first. We didn't invent love, God invented love, and we love him because he first loved us. God calls people to himself, never stops calling, and today the part of our love that we will concentrate on is us answering this call by going to God.

Romans 8:12-16 says two different things about the Spirit. This paragraph has many things in it, but today we'll look at the change of topic about the Holy Spirit.

Romans 8:12-16 - *Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation—but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it. ¹³ For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.*

First, the Spirit does help us put to death the misdeeds of the body. That means, the Spirit helps us stop sinning. Now let's keep reading to find out what else the Spirit does.

¹⁴ For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. ¹⁵ The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." ¹⁶ The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.

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First, in vv12-13, the Spirit helps us in our weakness toward sin. We are not strong enough on our own to stop sinning, but by the Spirit we can put sin to death.

Second, in vv14-16, the Spirit brings us into a father-child relationship with God, so that we call God "Papa, Dad." The Spirit leads us, urges us, to call God "Papa, Dad."

What if Paul has not changed topics at all? The Spirit leads us to fight sin, and the Spirit leads us to call God "Papa, Dad." Verse 14 begins with a "for," that is, vv14-16 are explaining vv12-13.

This is how the Spirit leads us to fight sin: the Spirit leads us to go to God and say, "Dad, help!" This Scripture, about us calling God is not so we'll have a good feeling about being close to God, it is so that we'll go to him without hesitating, for help with sin.

Mark 14:36 is the only place in the Bible that we read of Jesus calling God, "Abba, Papa, Dad." We assume he did this often, but it's only in the NT once. In Mk 14 Jesus is in the garden of Gethsemane, the night before he died, praying desperately for help.

In Romans 8, the Spirit leading people away from sin, and the Spirit leading people to call God "Papa, Dad," are not two separate things. They are two sides of the same coin.

Putting sin to death is important. Question: how will we do that? Answer: run to Dad. The Spirit leads us to walk away from sin, and the Spirit leads us to call God "Dad."

Loving God means obeying that call, responding to the invitation. Go to God, again and again, for help. Show your love by hearing the invitation, and running to God always.

James 4. James has a paragraph that teaches something much the same. James was frustrated, even angry, with the believers he wrote to. They sin cheerfully and think nothing is wrong. James scolds them, and calls them to repent.

Notice in this paragraph in James 4 how even James urges them to come to God, draw near to God, humble yourselves before God, and so on. This is the one aspect of loving God that we're focusing on: he invites sinners to come to him, so let's go to him!

James 4:6-10 - *But he gives us more grace.* [However powerful sin may be, God gives more grace. "Grace" here is help.] *That is why Scripture says:*

"God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."

God helps the humble. What will we do about this? How do we get this?

⁷ *Submit yourselves, then, to God.* [Submit - go to God and say, 'yes, I am a sinner.']

Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. ⁸ *Come near to God and he will come near to you.* [These are the words of Scripture to believers who are careless sinners. What should believers like that do about their sin? How will they fix this? Come near to God.

God will do the same, and come near to these sinning believers. Loving God means going when he invites.

Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. ⁹ *Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom.* ¹⁰ *Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.*

There it is again at the end: humble yourselves before the Lord. Pray to Dad in heaven, and say, "yes, I not doing well, please help."

There is no fighting sin without going directly to God. Help comes straight from God. Love God with all your heart - it is the greatest command, and also our only hope, our only chance. God invites: "come near to me." Loving God means going.

Hebrews 4. This is a kinder Scripture, but it is saying the same thing. Just like Romans 8 and James 4, Hebrews 4 speaks to people struggling with sin, and urges them to go directly to God. All of these promise kind help.

In Romans 8, the kindness was in calling God "Dad" when we ask for help. In James 4 the kindness was in the promise of helping grace to the humble ones, and the promise that if we do what we can to get close to God, on his part he is also coming close to us.

In Hebrews 4 the kindness is the priest, who is Jesus. Hebrews 4:14-16 - *Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess.* ¹⁵ *For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin.* ¹⁶ *Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.*

The words make it sound like the problem is people who are tempted and sinning, just as in our other texts. "Our weaknesses," "tempted in every way," "did not sin," "receive mercy" - these are make it sound like sin is a problem for the people reading Hebrews.

What is the answer of this Scripture to us, when sin is a problem? V16: *Let us then approach the God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.*

What's the answer to struggle with sin? Come to the grace throne with confidence, get mercy, and get helping grace.

When we struggle with sin, we can find it hard to go to God. We are ashamed of ourselves, we feel guilty, disappointed, frustrated, or we just don't care any more, and these stop us from going to God.

And then we are doomed, not because we struggle with sin, but because sin stops us from going to God. Loving God means answering his invitation to come.

Romans 8, James 4, and Hebrews 4 - in different ways every one of this spoke to believers for whom ongoing sin was a problem, which is all of us. Every text urged us in kind terms to go to God for help. Loving God means obeying that call to come for help.

Love your neighbour as yourself

The second is this [Jesus said to the law teacher]: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'

I could not emphasize too strongly how much this summarizes what God calls us to do.

Gal 5:14 - *For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself."* 1 Peter 4:8 - *Above all, love each other deeply.*

Romans 13:9 - *The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not covet," and whatever other command there may be, are summed up in this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself."*

Definition: what does it mean to love our neighbour as ourselves? We naturally take care of ourselves. Don't stop that, but add others to the list. A neighbour is whoever is next to us, whoever we speak to, live with, work with, and so on. The one we are with.

Love means doing for them what we'd do for ourselves, what we'd like others to do for us. Jesus put this command in different words: *In everything, do for others what you would have them do for you, for this is all the law and the prophets* (Matthew 7:12).

Mission - Here is our mission: every day, when we wake up, we have a mission for that day, a task that the Lord has given us: love our neighbour as ourselves, do for others what we'd want them to do for us.

Most of this will happen in familiar places. A lot will happen in our homes, toward our children, our spouses, our parents. If we look good in church, but we mistreat our spouse, we are rough in our words with our children, rude to parents and siblings, if we are short-tempered with these people, or cold and distant, it is a serious failure.

This is common among God's people, including some great ones. This is why Jesus said the first will be last, and the last will be first.

Many who we think are great will be small when the Lord returns, because they didn't love, and many we think are small will be great then, because they loved well.

We all fail and sin in this. We need to confess that sin to each other and to God. Let's just not anyone pretend that it is okay. For God's people, not loving is a big problem.

This is where the first half of this sermon comes in: go to God for help. "Dad in heaven, help me! I don't love well." This is the only way we'll get helping grace.

Our mission is to do good to the one we are with, as we do it for ourselves. We do this every day, to every person. It is not easy, but it is not complicated. There is no substitute for this. The rest of the ways we obey God are all small compared to this.

After loving God, there is no command as great as this one. And 1 John is blunt, that if we do not love the people we're with, we don't love God, either.

Short term mission: we take trips to other places to help those people, love them and serve them. That is good. Don't stop. Keep doing that.

But why would I make a sandwich for someone far away, and feel like I was serving Jesus, and not make a sandwich for my family in my home. Do those in my family not need to eat? Does God open his eyes only when I leave Kleefeld?

I know that short term mission feels different; it feels like I am *really* serving Jesus. Serving at home is boring, worse than boring, it feels like prison. Don't be fooled.

Our feelings are not a very reliable guide to what Jesus really wants. Sometimes they are right on, but other times they are wrong. Jesus' words are always a good guide.

In everything, do for others what you would have them to do for you. Every day, our mission is to do what's good for the ones we're with, because every day, God is with us, forgiving us, and doing for us what is good for us.

Ministry. We talk about "the ministry" as a profession, something people do as their work. This is in the NT, but most of the time in the NT "ministry" is what all the people of the church do.

Love your neighbour as yourself, when we do that for others in the church, is called "ministry." Ministry is one part of loving our neighbour as ourselves.

And this is how God gives his grace to us. When other believers are good to me, it is not just **their** goodness that I receive, it is also God's helping grace.

1 Peter 4:10 - *Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms.*

God's helping grace comes in all kinds of ways, a lot of it through other believers. We go to him and ask for helping grace, God gives grace to the humble, but we don't just get it directly from God.

We get it from each other, by loving each other as we love ourselves. That how God gives us his helping grace, and that's why every believer is "in the ministry." And that is why serving others in the church is so crucial, so important.

Love your neighbour as yourself - to change the world? Is our goal to change the world, to make the world a better place? Do we have the ability to change the world? Are we called to change the world and made it better?

I don't think so. Our call to love includes every person in the world, and some are called specifically to show this love in other parts of the world. But the mission is to love because God loves me, because I am his child, and because Jesus said I should do this.

The three major prophets are Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. Every one of them was called by God to be prophets when they were quite young.

And each of these three young prophets was told that their long, powerful, Spirit-anointed ministries would accomplish nothing. These prophets would call the people all their lives, and the people would not turn.

God would call the people through the prophets, because that's what God is like, but the people would not listen. The only result of these ministries would be to increase the guilt of the disobedient. This God told every one of them when he first called them.

We cannot rule this out for our own lives. We as individuals to some extent have the same call, and so does the church as a whole. In some profound ways Jesus' own ministry was like this. They will hear but not understand, see but not perceive.

We cannot afford to make changing the world our goal. We can make loving the world our goal, but not changing it. It is beyond our ability, and it is not our task.

Love God, and love people. Do that here, and do it everywhere. Leave the results to God. Sometimes people will respond well, and sometimes they won't. It has always been like that.

In everything, do to others as you would have them do to you, for this is all the Law and the Prophets. This is our mission, and our ministry, every one of us. Leave the results to God.

And when we have trouble living like this, go to God for help. Dad in heaven, help! The Spirit urges us to do this. Act on the invitation. James says, "draw near to God, you sinners, and he will draw near to you." Act on the invitation, it's one way to love God. Come boldly to the grace throne, again and again. God always urges us to do this.