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By David Servant

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What God Wants

The amalgamation of all that comprises contemporary Christendom sometimes obscures the one thing that is by far the most important. Hidden underneath all the clutter is something that is supposed to be preeminent. Without it, all else that is done under the banner of Christ becomes essentially worthless and meaningless, and even counterproductive.

Yet once the mound of ministries and men, teachings and traditions, programs and personalities, fads and frauds have been scraped from the table, there it is, a golden key. It opens the most important door. It reveals the one thing that is of supreme interest to God. It is the answer to the question, "*What is God after---what does He want---above all else?*"

The answer to that question is this: *God wants people who love Him, and who love Him very, very passionately, with all their hearts.*

There is plenty of evidence in Scripture to support this claim. Take a few minutes and allow the proof that follows to sink in. It could be life-changing.

The foremost proof, of course, is the foremost commandment---that I love God with all my heart, soul, mind and strength (see Mark 12:28-30). If that is the most important commandment (as Jesus says it is), then there is nothing more important to God than that I love Him passionately. That is what He wants from me more than anything else. There is nothing about which any of us should be more concerned. It ought to be emphasized frequently by those of us who minister and teach.

A second scripture that says this same thing in a different way is Luke 14:26. It is a shocking statement from Jesus' lips that reveals to us just *how* passionately God expects us to love Him:

If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple.

No one intelligently thinks that Jesus literally wants us to hate the people whom we naturally love the most. But He obviously meant nothing less than this---that we must love Him supremely, above everyone else, including the people we naturally love the most, if we are to be His disciples. As God, Jesus has the right to expect such love, and we would expect Him to require nothing less.

Jesus' declaration also makes it clear that loving God with all one's heart is not some unobtainable goal that is reserved only for missionaries and martyrs. No, *loving God with all one's heart is the normal, authentic Christian experience*. We were created by God to love Him with all our hearts. Anything else is abnormal, a perversion of God's intention. Unless we love Jesus with all our hearts, we are not His disciples and are good for nothing (see Luke 14:33-34 in its context of 14:25-32). Jesus indicated that we must also love Him even more than our own lives, which means we must love Him so much that we are willing to die for Him. If we don't love Him that much, we are not His disciples. That is what He said.

Those who are lukewarm---who don't love Him with all their hearts---He spits out of his mouth (see Rev. 3:16). Those who have left their first love---who no longer love Him with all their hearts as they previously did---He rebukes and solemnly warns (see Rev. 2:4-5).

Still another verse in the Bible that indicates that God wants, above all else, people who love Him passionately is found in 2 Chronicles 16:9:

For the eyes of the Lord move to and fro throughout the earth that He may strongly support *those whose heart is completely His* (emphasis added).

That is just another way of saying that God is searching for people who love Him with all their hearts. This seems to imply that those whose hearts are completely His are somewhat rare---God must search in order to find them. And this again reveals God's longing for such people. When He finds them, He strongly supports them.

David, for example, was "a man after God's heart" (see Acts 13:22). God had searched for such a man (see 1 Sam. 13:14). David wasn't ashamed to show his love for God by publicly dancing with all his might as the ark of the covenant was brought up to Jerusalem. His undignified behavior brought the rebuke of his wife who despised him for his zeal, but he didn't apologize. Where does that leave people who are ashamed to lift

their hands or kneel in church when they are among believers who will not despise them? I'm not ashamed to tell others how much I love my wife. What does it reveal about my love for God when I'm ashamed to speak of my relationship with Him? This is why Jesus warned,

For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when He comes in His glory, and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels (Luke 9:26).

Therefore everyone who confesses Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven (Matt. 10:32-33).

Jesus was talking about those who don't love Him with all their hearts. And these verses reveal a second vital truth: It is our actions that reveal whether or not we truly love God. That is why three times within the space of a few minutes Jesus said:

If you love Me, you will keep My commandments....He who has my commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me...If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word (John 14:15, 21, 23).

Thus it could be said more specifically that what God wants more than anything else are people who love Him with all their hearts and who prove their love by their obedience to His commandments. "For *this* is the love of God, that we keep His commandments" (1 John 5:3).

I'm sorry to say that in all the times I've ever made an excuse for my sin (or whenever I've ever heard others make an excuse for their sin), I've never said, "My problem is that I just don't love God as much as I should." We make every excuse under the sun for why we don't do what God says, but the root of it all is lack of love for Him. Remember, Jesus said that if we love Him, we will keep His commandments. It is just that simple.
Passionate love for Jesus overcomes sin.

A fourth passage in Scripture that reveals what is most important to God is Deuteronomy 13:1-4, a passage that we considered in last month's E-teaching:

If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder comes true, concerning which he spoke to you, saying, "Let us go after other gods (whom you have not known) and let us serve them," you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams; for the Lord your God is testing you to find out *if you love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul*. You shall follow the Lord your God and fear Him; and you shall keep His commandments, listen to His voice, serve Him, and cling to Him (emphasis added).

Again, notice that God considers that loving Him with all one's heart and soul should be

the norm. And loving Him with all our hearts is so important to Him that He may test our love for Him by means of a miracle-working false spiritual leader. Following a spiritual leader who draws one away from obedience to Christ is an indication that one does not love God with all his heart.

And finally, here a fifth scriptural proof that fits well with the theme of the scripture just considered. Our love for Jesus is being tested every day by God, and one day we will learn the results of our tests:

But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats; and He will put the sheep on His right, and the goats on the left.

Then the King will say to those on His right, "Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me something to drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me." Then the righteous will answer Him, "Lord, when did we see You hungry, and feed You, or thirsty, and give You something to drink? And when did we see You a stranger, and invite You in, or naked, and clothe You? When did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?" The King will answer and say to them, "Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me."

Then He will also say to those on His left, "Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry, and you gave Me nothing to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me nothing to drink; I was a stranger, and you did not invite Me in; naked, and you did not clothe Me; sick, and in prison, and you did not visit Me." Then they themselves also will answer, "Lord, when did we see You hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not take care of You?" Then He will answer them, "Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me." These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.

The sheep are those who prove their love for God---that which is of paramount importance to Him---by means of their loving sacrifices made on behalf of His family. What a simple and sobering truth---my love for Jesus is revealed by my sacrifices for His family. And if I don't make sacrifices on behalf of His family, it proves I don't love Him at all...I'm not really a Christian. "We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death" (1 John 3:14). There is no escaping this truth. Thus we cannot separate the foremost commandment from the second greatest commandment. We show our love for God by showing love for His family.

The essence of following Christ is self-denial (see Luke 9:23). Self-denial is the means whereby we prove our love for Him, because love is manifested in sacrifice. All those things which Jesus said identify the sheep are things that require no special gifts, but all require a sacrifice of time, convenience, or money. Jesus' true disciples are manifested by their love for one another (see John 13:35). This is the most important thing! Our love for Jesus can be measured by our self-denying love for His spiritual family.

The Chief Substitute for Loving God

Had you asked any of the scribes and Pharisees of Jesus' day if they loved God, they would have all answered in the affirmative. They knew that loving God was the most important thing (see Mark 12:28-33). Yet they killed God's Son, and in at least one place in the Gospels we are told that they were actually lovers of money (see Luke 16:14). All this being so, we can safely conclude that they were completely deceived. They who hated God had convinced themselves that they loved Him, and the reason for their deception was because they were religious. Being religious is the chief substitute, and a very deceptive substitute, for genuinely loving God.

What does it mean to be religious? I'm sure there are many good definitions, but one way that religiosity can be defined within a Christian context is this: *Majoring on minors and minoring on majors due to the fact that one does not really love God with all his heart.* The scribes and Pharisees did many biblical things like fasting and tithing (see Luke 18:12). But they neglected the "weightier provisions of the law" such as "justice and mercy and faithfulness" (as Jesus said in Matt. 23:23), and "loving God" (as Jesus said in Luke 11:42). *In short, they neglected the two greatest commandments.*

Religious people are comparable to an employee who ignores his primary job responsibilities yet prides himself that he is a great employee because he fixes the office coffee each morning and sharpens his pencils every afternoon.

And just as the scribes and Pharisees "strained out the gnat and swallowed the camel," many within Christendom fall into the same trap. Within Evangelicalism, it sometimes seems as if the most important aspects of being a Christian are attending Sunday church services, giving to the building fund, and voting pro-life, because those things are emphasized so much. But you can do all those things and never love God with all your heart or love your neighbor as yourself. You can do those things and go to hell. You can do those things and fool yourself that you love God because you do those things. Those things are minor compared to what is most important to God.

There are other ways that religion is manifested within Christendom by majoring on minors. In some circles, worship, prophecy, spiritual warfare or faith have been emphasized to a degree that God must surely consider idolatrous. More "biblically-sound" Christians may pride themselves for not falling for such fads, but they've sometimes made the error of exalting doctrine itself to an idolatrous level, as they endlessly dissect God's Word and then divide with other Christians because of their

unique interpretations. I know of a church that actually split over whether Jesus literally wanted them to wash each other's feet. They couldn't agree on just how God wanted them to love each other, so they bitterly divided. That is an glaring example of what occurs all the time on a more subtle and sophisticated scale due to doctrine within Christendom.

And while folks dabble in their hobby called Christianity, focusing on spiritual fads or honing the finer points of their theology, Jesus lives unprotected from the cold, goes hungry and thirsty, languishes in a prison cell, waits for a visitor to come by His sick bed, and longs for a place to lay His head, incarnated in "the least of these" His brethren. *Jesus is waiting to be loved by people who say they love Him.*

How much do you love Jesus? The answer to that question is found in the answer to this question: How much do you deny yourself for the sake of His suffering family?

I often think of this when I endeavor, for example, to find Christians who will sacrifice a little money every month to support a Christian orphan in a poor country. Some folks claim that their budget won't allow them to support an orphan, yet they can afford dog food. And why can they afford dog food? *Because they love their dogs.* Can it not be said that they love their dogs more than they love Jesus? *They will do for their dogs what they won't do for Him.*

How religious people fool themselves into thinking they love Jesus! The goats in the just-mentioned future judgement will say, "Lord, when did we see You hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not take care of You?" The implication of their question seems to be this: "Lord, if we had seen **You** hungry or thirsty or naked or in prison we would have certainly done something to help **You**---because we love **You**, Lord. We're Christians!" They were completely deceived. Had they actually been born again they would have had a passionate relationship with Jesus, and it would have been reflected by their self-denying love for His family.

The only people who have a true relationship with Jesus are those who have a passionate relationship with Him---expressed through heart-motivated obedience to His greatest commandments and self-denying love for His family (see 1 John 2:3-6; 3:9-10, 14). Anything less is just religion.

God wants people who love Him with all their hearts.

He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of me (Matt. 10:37).