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# On Loving God- No. 1

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Lecture I  
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Text.--Matt. 22:37-38: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment."

The connection in which this passage stands is striking. Our Savior was constantly engaged in rebuking the delusions and sophistries of the Sadducees. They were a sect of semi-infidels, embracing in the times of our Savior, many of the rich and honored of the nation. On this occasion, Matthew remarks that when the Pharisees had heard that He had put the Sadducees to silence, they gathered about Him, and one of them being a lawyer (not an attorney in our modern sense of lawyer, but a man who was skilled in the Mosaic law,) asked Him a question, tempting Him. It was this: "Which is the great commandment of the law?"

To this question, Jesus promptly answered as in our text: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."

Mark how comprehensive our Lord makes His exposition of the fundamental law. All the books of Moses and the prophets hang upon it -- are embraced within it. Everything indeed written or unwritten -- the entire preceptive part of religion is here. It covers the whole field of moral obligation to God and to man.

It would require a whole course of lectures to discuss this subject fully. I propose only to touch briefly on some of its main points:

*I. The kind of love here required.*

*II. I must next notice some things implied in this love.*

*III. I must next enquire -- What are the grounds of this obligation to love God?*

*IV. Next let us notice the natural consequences of refusing to render this supreme love and service to God.*

*V. I must next notice some delusions which prevail on this subject.*

### **I. The kind of love here required.**

You will readily see that this is a vital question. How can we hope to obey this first and great commandment, unless we understand what it requires?

- 1. I observe then first that it must be a voluntary thing -- not involuntary, as is shown plainly by the fact that it is required. Nothing but what is voluntary can be properly demanded. The justice of God forbids Him to require and demand on pain of damnation, things that are beyond our power to do -- that lie not within the control of our voluntary powers. This fundamental precept of the law cannot therefore be a thing of such sort that we have no voluntary power to do it. In all reasonable law, every precept requires only voluntary action; otherwise it is absurd.
- 2. It is an essential feature in the character of this love, that it be supreme -- else it cannot be right in kind. The language used by our Lord most fully implies this -- "Thou shalt love with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy mind."
- 3. It must be an abiding love. It must be a state of good-will, as distinguished from transient acts. A state of mind that is continuous must manifestly be implied and required.

### **II. I must next notice some things implied in this love.**

- 1. If this love be good-will -- a perpetual purposing to promote the highest happiness of all, then it must imply a life devoted to this object. The love of the heart naturally and surely controls the life. Supreme love to God must therefore imply supreme devotion of the life to God, and by this I mean, to pleasing God and doing faithfully all His known will. If love be supreme and abiding, it must forever control the life and hold it to perpetual devotion, to the things that please God.

Here some will ask -- "What can we do for God? What should He care what we do?"

Ah, do you assume that God does not care what we do? Did God have no care for it when those two young men shot down a father and mother in the field, and left their children orphans? To suppose this, were to suppose that He is no Father of His creatures at all.

- 2. Again, this law of love implies that we find our highest pleasure in seeking to know and do God's pleasure. If we have this love, it will be most grateful to us to please Him. It will be a richer joy to us to please God than to please ourselves. It will be our supreme pleasure to please God. We shall devote ourselves to pleasing Him and shall both seek and find our chief joy in this.

We sometimes see human beings so devoted to each other that they find their supreme

pleasure in promoting each other's welfare. Such devotion, obedience to this great law implies, towards God.

- 3. Again, the exercise of this love implies a sympathy with whatever pleases God, so that anything that anybody does to please God will surely please us. We shall naturally have a great complacency with anything that pleases God.
- 4. On the same principle, it implies a state of mind that will be pained with anything that displeases God. If we love God supremely, we shall account anything done against God as if it were done against ourselves -- nay, more painful than if done against ourselves merely. It will give us more pain than if done against ourselves only.
- 5. Of course it also implies that we are joyful in the exercise of self-denial for Christ's sake.

It sometimes happens that persons receiving favors from us, express so much gratitude that we are ready to thank them for the privilege of doing anything for them. See that little child sick and faint; she motions for a drink of water. Poor child; she can only lisp out, "Thank you, Ma!" Her mother did not need those uttered thanks. The grateful look sufficed. Nay, she so loved that dear sick one that it was joy enough for her to do anything for her welfare, because of the love she bore. You have felt this. You have felt such love, and such joy in doing any kindness to one you love that you were ready to thank that dear one for the privilege of doing him any good. Your heart has been so set on doing good that you have felt it more blessed to give than to receive.

So God feels. God's love is of this sort -- pure good-willing -- pure love of doing all the good He can safely and wisely, to His children. His children feel so towards Him. If they can do anything for His cause, it is the highest joy of their heart. Suppose the Lord were to say to some of you -- You may do any way you please. Would you not at once reply -- Not so, Lord, but rather anything that pleases Thee? Nothing else can ever please me, but doing what pleases Thee. What do I live for but to please and honor Thee?

- 6. If you find one who cannot deny himself, but chooses his ways to please himself otherwise than in pleasing God, you may know he does not love God.
- 7. If you seek anyone's good with real love, you will certainly avail yourself to every means to learn what will please him. So of loving and pleasing God.
- 8. Of course supreme love implies a greater dread of displeasing God than of displeasing anyone else. Nothing will distress one who loves God, so much as the thought of displeasing Him.

You may each and all, apply every one of these principles warm and fresh, to your own heart in self-examination. Say, does my love to God bear this test?

- 9. Again, if you truly love God, there will always be a spontaneous sorrow if you become conscious of having displeased Him. If you should be overcome by temptation, you would not

need to make a great effort to feel sorry for it. When you have injured any friend whom you love more than any other being, you can easily regret and sorrow over the sad wrong.

- 10. Again, when the heart is supremely engrossed with love to God, the thoughts will turn naturally towards Him. Where our treasure is, there will our heart be also.
- 11. Moreover God will become the object of our complacent affections. The fact that He is infinitely lovely and good, will secure in our hearts an intense complacency in His character, words, and ways.
- 12. We shall find supreme satisfaction in His service. We always find most satisfaction while pursuing the objects on which our affections are concentrated.
- 13. There will be a perpetual reference to God in all we do. Take the case of a man supremely devoted to his family; he will see everything in the light of its bearing on his family. So a father will do for his children if he supremely loves them. So a husband for his wife; every thing will be referred to the question of the happiness of the loved one. Thus real love to any friend begets spontaneous sympathy with him and with all his interests, and equally spontaneous sympathy against all his enemies.

### **III. I must next enquire -- What are the grounds of this obligation to love God?**

It is not that God has commanded it. We do not and cannot love merely out of regard to authority. God does not expect that His mere authority will beget and ensure love. But He bases His claim for our love on His own infinite worthiness, and on the infinite importance of having His creatures obey Him. The obligation to love God must always be equal to the value of God's happiness and glory, and to the good of His creatures as depending on His relations to them. To withhold due love from God is therefore to derogate from His rights and claims, and by consequence, from the rights and claims of the universe He has made and rules over to bless.

### **IV. Next let us notice the natural consequences of refusing to render this supreme love and service to God.**

- 1. First, refusing to love God, you must inevitably lose all true peace of mind. Every rational being is so constituted that he cannot be satisfied unless he gives God his heart's best love. He cannot have peace with God, nor peace with himself. So long as this love is withheld, his soul will be uneasy and jarring because supremely selfish. [sic.]
- 2. Then also there are governmental consequences. God must condemn those who deny to Him the love of their heart and the devotion of their life. He must regard them with holy displeasure. By all the love He bears to the best interest of His creatures, He must disown and be displeased with those who array themselves against Himself and His great family. He is bound to reveal to all His creatures His displeasure against those who hate both Him and them. He ought to make the fact of this displeasure as patent as He possibly can, for the happiness of the universe depends upon His revealing it most fully. He should make the revelations of His heart and of His hand against sin as nearly according to the right and justice of the case as He can.

- 3. Consequently He must make this revelation as enduring as His own government. Both the natural and governmental consequences of sin must be as enduring and as striking as God can make them. Else God cannot do justice to His responsibilities as the Great Moral Father of the universe.

**V. I must next notice some delusions which prevail on this subject.**

- 1. Men get up some other standard of right. By a sort of mutual consent or conventionalism, they frame a code of morals in trade -- morals in social life or in politics, and then take great credit to themselves for having done right.

Now let men devise their own codes and notions as they may, this law of God is forevermore the one great and only standard of right. Nothing is right except it be in accordance with this law. If men talk about doing right, on any rule of right short of this, they egregiously deceive themselves. What do you mean to doing right? Do you mean that your life is a constant offering to God? Do you offer yourself to God as a living sacrifice? If not, why do you talk about pleasing God? Do you say -- I pay all my debts; I live fairly in society; I injure no man?

Suppose it were true that you were doing no wrong to your neighbor, yet how is the case between your own soul and God? If you care nothing for Him, what is this but, as far lies in you, to dethrone God, to deny His right to reign, and to deny His parental love and care over all His creatures?

Place before your mind a band of robbers, outlaws against all human governments. They may have what they are pleased to call excellent rules among themselves; they may treat each other with great kindness; when they have sallied out of their fastness and come down upon some lovely, quiet village; burned down their houses, murdered whoever resists, and plundered them of everything they care for, they go back, and divide this booty perhaps very honorably among each other; they are careful to provide for their sick, and they take great interest in training themselves to adroitness and skill so as to rob and murder with the best success.

Now what of all the good and right things in these bandits? What would you think of them if they were to justify themselves before the bar of mankind, by appealing to their kindness to each other, their justice to each other, and their great diligence in caring for everything that would make them good and successful robbers?

Just so, all sinners are out-laws as to God. They have their own ways and choose none of His; as towards God their whole spirit is transgression, just as the band of robbers subsist on the principle of setting at nought all human governments, and abjuring all obligation to seek or to respect the welfare of their fellow beings, outside of their own pale.

A gang of these outlawed freebooters, if arrested and brought before a court of justice, might be very apt to say, if they dared -- Why, what evil have we done? Naturally, if they

chance to escape, they go back to their comrades and appeal to them -- Have not we done right? Are not we all good fellows? To which the whole band respond -- "First rate; all noble and true, generous fellows!"

A pretty farce this, to play before the face of the civilized world!

Suppose a pirate ship should be fitted up with her black flag and cross bows and her brave buccaneers, and then boast of being the best managed ship on the seas. Nowhere, say they, can you find seamen so experienced, so brave, so faithful to their commander; nowhere else officers so daring and so true.

But what commendations are these to pirates? Do they sanctify the guilty business of piracy?

But the pirate may still ask -- What have I done? Pause and see what. Just what the selfishness and wickedness of your heart has prompted; nothing else; nothing better. Men could do nothing in the pirate's business without these virtues. Those therefore who choose a pirate's life must pay at least so much homage to virtue as to be truthful, kind and generous to each other. And then shall they be blind enough to plead in self-defense that they are very moral pirates -- very kind and true to one another, and very much devoted to their business?

- 2. Like the self-justifying pirate, so the sinner asks -- What have I done? Done? You have waged war against God and all the nations of men. And can you call that, doing right? Will you plead that you are trying to do right?

It is a very simple thing to examine yourself and to know whether you are right as before God and His law. Is it your great aim to please God? Is it the business of your life? What have you done today to learn His will and to do His pleasure? Have you given yourself to prayer and to the faithful study of His word? Have you been seeking in all possible ways to please and honor your Father in heaven? Have you not been pluming yourself to display your beauty? Or is it true that you really bathe yourself in His presence all the day long and deem yourself blest then and then only then when you have the consciousness of pleasing Him?

"Be not deceived; God is not mocked; whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."

## GLOSSARY

of easily misunderstood terms as defined by Mr. Finney himself.

Compiled by Katie Stewart

1. **Complacency, or Esteem:** "Complacency, as a state of will or heart, is only benevolence modified by the consideration or relation of right character in the object of it. God, prophets, apostles, martyrs, and saints, in all ages, are as virtuous in their self-denying and untiring labours to save the wicked, as they are in their complacent love to the saints." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE VII)*. Also, "approbation of the character of its object. Complacency is

due only to the good and holy." *Lectures to Professing Christians (LECTURE XII)*.

2. **Disinterested Benevolence:** "By disinterested benevolence I do not mean, that a person who is disinterested feels no interest in his object of pursuit, but that he seeks the happiness of others for its own sake, and not for the sake of its reaction on himself, in promoting his own happiness. He chooses to do good because he rejoices in the happiness of others, and desires their happiness for its own sake. God is purely and disinterestedly benevolent. He does not make His creatures happy for the sake of thereby promoting His own happiness, but because He loves their happiness and chooses it for its own sake. Not that He does not feel happy in promoting the happiness of His creatures, but that He does not do it for the sake of His own gratification." *Lectures to Professing Christians (LECTURE I)*.
3. **Divine Sovereignty:** "The sovereignty of God consists in the independence of his will, in consulting his own intelligence and discretion, in the selection of his end, and the means of accomplishing it. In other words, the sovereignty of God is nothing else than infinite benevolence directed by infinite knowledge." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LXXVI)*.
4. **Election:** "That all of Adam's race, who are or ever will be saved, were from eternity chosen by God to eternal salvation, through the sanctification of their hearts by faith in Christ. In other words, they are chosen to salvation by means of sanctification. Their salvation is the end- their sanctification is a means. Both the end and the means are elected, appointed, chosen; the means as really as the end, and for the sake of the end." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LXXIV)*.
5. **Entire Sanctification:** "Sanctification may be entire in two senses: (1.) In the sense of present, full obedience, or entire consecration to God; and, (2.) In the sense of continued, abiding consecration or obedience to God. Entire sanctification, when the terms are used in this sense, consists in being established, confirmed, preserved, continued in a state of sanctification or of entire consecration to God." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LVIII)*.
6. **Moral Agency:** "Moral agency is universally a condition of moral obligation. The attributes of moral agency are intellect, sensibility, and free will." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE III)*.
7. **Moral Depravity:** "Moral depravity is the depravity of free-will, not of the faculty itself, but of its free action. It consists in a violation of moral law. Depravity of the will, as a faculty, is, or would be, physical, and not moral depravity. It would be depravity of substance, and not of free, responsible choice. Moral depravity is depravity of choice. It is a choice at variance with moral law, moral right. It is synonymous with sin or sinfulness. It is moral depravity, because it consists in a violation of moral law, and because it has moral character." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE XXXVIII)*.
8. **Human Reason:** "the intuitive faculty or function of the intellect... it is the faculty that intuits moral relations and affirms moral obligation to act in conformity with perceived moral relations." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE III)*.
9. **Retributive Justice:** "Retributive justice consists in treating every subject of government

according to his character. It respects the intrinsic merit or demerit of each individual, and deals with him accordingly." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE XXXIV)*.

10. **Total Depravity:** "Moral depravity of the unregenerate is without any mixture of moral goodness or virtue, that while they remain unregenerate, they never in any instance, nor in any degree, exercise true love to God and to man." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE XXXVIII)*.
11. **Unbelief:** "the soul's withholding confidence from truth and the God of truth. The heart's rejection of evidence, and refusal to be influenced by it. The will in the attitude of opposition to truth perceived, or evidence presented." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LV)*.