

Sermon Series: *Jesus Said What?*



Whoever Loves Father or Mother More Than Me Is Not Worthy of Me

We Need the Fullness of the Holy Spirit in Order to Love Jesus

(Matthew 10:37-38 ESV)

³⁷ "Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. ³⁸ And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me."

(John 14:15-17 ESV)

¹⁵ "If you love me, you will keep my commandments. ¹⁶ And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, ¹⁷ even the Spirit of truth...

Introduction

Last week, I concluded the sermon with a plea for you individually and for us as a community to begin again to yearn to be filled afresh with the fullness of God's Holy Spirit.¹ I pleaded with you to begin to earnestly cry out to God for him to once again pour out his Spirit upon us and to empower us to boldly proclaim the good, soul-saving news of the gospels of Jesus Christ.

But there is another reason why I want you to yearn to be filled with the Holy Spirit and that is so that your love for Jesus will grow and deepen. Apart from the work of the Holy Spirit no one will love the Lord as he ought to be loved. There are three premises of this sermon:

1. Jesus demands to be loved above all other persons and things.
2. The love that Jesus demands comes from the inner working of the Holy Spirit.
3. Loving Jesus involves outward obedience that is motivated from a deep, inward affection for him.

Jesus Commands to be Loved Above All

One of the most stunning statements Jesus ever made is found in Matthew 10:37-38.

(Matthew 10:37-38 ESV)

³⁷ "Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. ³⁸ And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me."

What Jesus is demanding here is that **he be loved above all other human relationships**. He is commanding us to love him more than we love all other persons in our lives, including the biological relationships that are the grounding of our lives. He demands that we love him more than we love our parents, more than we love our spouses², more than we love our children, and even more than we love our own lives. Jesus is commanding us to love him more than we love any other person or thing on earth. He commands us to love him above all.

This is a mind-blowing command. We can't help but ask, "Jesus said what?" Jesus commands his disciples to love him to such a degree that it supersedes all other human

¹ Eph. 3:19.

² Lk 14:26.

relationships. He demands that you love him more than your mother who carried you, nursed you, feed you, cleaned you, cooked for you, sat up through the night when you were sick, taught you, trained you, told you how wonderful you were, who affirmed you at every stage of life, and who poured herself out to see that you had all the blessings in life that she never did. Jesus commands you love him more than you love your ever-loving mother.

He commands that you love him more than you love your spouse and even more than you love your children. The command to love him more than you love your spouse is implied in this text, but Luke informs us that Jesus actually said it (Lk. 14:26). Not only does Jesus demand to be loved more than you love your spouse, but also more than you love your children. This is probably the more shocking command.

Given that divorce is so prevalent, the command to love him more than one loves spouse might not be so shocking. Many listening to this command could easily think, "I'm to love Jesus more than I love my louse of a lazy husband? That I can do!." However, to hear Jesus demand to be loved more than you love your kids, that's very different. Spouses are divorced all the time, children are rarely divorced. And yet Jesus commands that our love for him must exceed our love for our children.

God Demands to Be Loved Above All

This command is still even more shocking because of its apparent contradiction with the command to love God above all. Every Jew listening to Jesus would have instantly been reminded of the opening words of Deuteronomy chapter six, which, according to Jesus, contained the first and greatest command.

(Matthew 22:37-38 ESV)

³⁷ "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. ³⁸ This is the great and first commandment."

This command clearly calls for God to be loved with the whole of one's life and being. According to this command, God the Father is to be loved above all. Jesus knows this command and even testifies that it is the first and greatest command of all God's commands. So why then, here in Matthew 10, is he demanding to be loved above all? Why is he making such an outrageous claim? Why is he saying this? Why is he making such a blasphemous command?

He's not. He's not making an outrageous claim or a blasphemous command, because **to love Jesus above all is to love God above all**. Jesus taught that he was so intimately connected to God the Father, that however one treated him, was how one treated God the Father. Jesus told his disciples,

Matthew 10:40 (ESV)

⁴⁰ "...whoever receives me, receives him who sent me."

"Him who sent" him, was God the Father.³ To receive Jesus is to receive the Father. Jesus also told his disciples,

(John 5:23 ESV)

"Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him."

John 10:30 (ESV)

³⁰ *"I and the Father are one."*

John 10:38 (ESV)

³⁸ *"...the Father is in me and I am in the Father."*⁴

(John 14:9 ESV)

"Whoever has seen me has seen the Father."

(John 15:23 ESV)

²³ *"Whoever hates me hates my Father also."*

Jesus is inescapably clear, however one treats Jesus is the way one treats the Father. What one does to Jesus is what one does to the Father. To receive Jesus is to receive the Father. To believe Jesus is to believe the Father.⁵ To reject Jesus is to reject the Father.⁶ To honor Jesus is to honor the Father. *And to love Jesus is to love God the Father.*

Conclusion: there is no contradiction between Jesus' command to love him above all others and the first and greatest commandment to love God above all others. The two are one and the same. So Jesus' command to love him more than all other relationships is a command to obey the first and greatest commandment.

We Can't Obey This Command Without Divine Help

However, we can't keep this commandment apart from divine help. No one can do this. No one can love God whom we cannot see more than we love the people whom we can see; parents, siblings, spouses, and children. Even if we had undeniable evidence of the existence of God, the power of God, and his love for us, we still—on our own—cannot love God more than we love the things of this world. The children of Israel are the best example. They had more reasons to love God than any other nation or people on the planet and yet they failed at keeping this one command. God demonstrated his love for them through incredible miracles, and yet their hearts were unable to love him above all other gods.

³ Jn 5:37; 6:44; 8:16, 18; 12:49.

⁴ See also Jn 14:10.

⁵ Jn 5:24.

⁶ Lk 10:16.

They witnessed God stand up for them and deliver them from the most powerful nation on the planet at the time. They saw God turn the Nile into blood. They witnessed God bring a horde of frogs upon the land of Egypt; a swarm of gnats, then flies; then God took the life of all livestock in Egypt, while not one cow died in the land of Goshen (where the Israelites lived); then God made painful boils appear on all Egyptians while the Israelites had none; then hail destroyed the land of Egypt while Goshen was spared; they saw locusts eat all the green plants in Egypt while Goshen remained green; then darkness filled Egypt for three days while light remained in Goshen; and then finally God took the lives of all the first-born in Egypt while not one person under the blood of the lamb died in Israel. They witnessed Egypt sending them out by giving them gifts of gold and clothes and all the supplies they would need. They saw miracle after miracle after miracle and yet still they did not love the LORD God above all other gods.

They saw the sea open up and they walked through on dry land, and then that same sea destroyed the entire Egyptian army. They saw God's presence in a cloud over them (shielding them from the burning sun) every day and then in a pillar of fire by night. They witnessed manna on the ground every morning, water gushing from rocks, they saw armies defeated, the ground opened up and swallowed those who rebelled against God and Moses. ***They witnessed forty years of miracles and yet even that was not enough to convince them to love Yahweh above all other gods.*** Moses says of them just before his death,

(Deuteronomy 31:27 ESV)

²⁷ For I know how rebellious and stubborn you are. Behold, even today while I am yet alive with you, you have been rebellious against the Lord. How much more after my death!

Loving God Comes From Receiving a New Heart

They didn't fail to love God for lack of evidence. It is not a sufficient amount of evidence that causes a person to love God, it is receiving a new heart. Again Moses says,

(Deuteronomy 29:4 ESV)

⁴ But to this day the Lord has not given you a heart to understand or eyes to see or ears to hear.

We must be given a new heart before we will ever fully love the God above all other persons and things. Moses looked forward to the day when God would change the heart of his people and give them a new heart that would enable them to love God above all other gods.

(Deuteronomy 30:6 ESV)

⁶ And the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.

A God-Loving Heart Comes Only From the Holy Spirit

This change of heart is the work of the Holy Spirit. *Only by God's Holy Spirit can any person ever love God.* Ezekiel prophesied about the coming of this great day.

(Ezekiel 36:26-27 ESV)

²⁶ And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.

This is what happened on the day of Pentecost. God kept his promise to put his Spirit within his people by taking out our hard stony heart and giving us a new tender, heart of flesh. After Jesus ascended to heaven, he poured out his Spirit upon his children and fulfilled this promise.

(Acts 2:33 ESV)

³³ Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing.

This is what happens to every person as they become a believer. When we repent of our sins and cry out to Jesus for salvation and forgiveness of sins, he gives us the gift of his Holy Spirit.⁷ The Holy Spirit then takes out our dead hearts and gives us a new heart. This new heart has new and different desires and yearnings. Suddenly, for the first time in our lives, we begin to love Jesus. Being enabled to love Jesus is work of the Holy Spirit.

(Romans 5:5 ESV)

God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

Only after we receive the Holy Spirit can we begin to love God. Prior to receiving his Spirit we are enemies of God and hostile towards him.⁸ However, after having his love poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, then we can begin to love Jesus as we ought to love him, as God loves him. Without the work of the Holy Spirit we would never love Jesus.

This is why we need to be continually filled with the Holy Spirit⁹, so that we can continually grow in our love of Jesus. It is through the powerful working of the Spirit in our inner person that we are enabled to love Jesus more and more. Love is the first fruit of Spirit.

⁷ Acts 2:38.

⁸ Rom 5:10; 8:7.

⁹ Eph 5:18.

Galatians 5:22 (ESV)

²² The fruit of the Spirit is love...

When the Holy Spirit is powerfully at work in our hearts, and we are continually submitting our will to God's will, then he will produce more and more love for Jesus within our hearts. We need the continual help of the indwelling Holy Spirit to continue to grow in our love for Jesus. It is the Holy Spirit who helps us obey the commands of Jesus.

(John 14:15-17 ESV)

¹⁵ "If you love me, you will keep my commandments. ¹⁶ And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, ¹⁷ even the Spirit of truth..."

Our ability to love Jesus at all begins with us receiving his Spirit, but it is also the Holy Spirit who enables us to **go on** loving Jesus and even to **grow** in that love. Our love for Jesus never remains unchangingly consistent and ever increasing. Our love for Jesus waxes and wanes, ebbs and flows, and is stronger or weaker. We need the help of the Holy Spirit in order for our love to grow stronger because Paul teaches us,

Romans 8:26 (ESV)

²⁶ the Spirit helps us in our weakness.

If we are to obey Jesus command to love him more than we love mother or father, sister or brother, husband or wife, and even more than son or daughter we need the help of his own Holy Spirit. If we are to be filled with love **for** Jesus we must be filled with the Spirit **of** Jesus.

What Does Loving Him Involve?

When Jesus commands us to love him, what exactly does he mean? I have heard some people argue that loving Jesus means obeying him.

(John 14:15 ESV)

¹⁵ "If you love me, you will keep my commandments."

Loving Jesus Involves Obedience

Loving Jesus involves obedience, but is not defined as obedience. Jesus does not say, "Loving me *is* obeying me." Love for Jesus is what **causes** obedience. There is a difference between the cause and the effect. Love is the cause while obedience is the effect. Love and obedience are two separate but related things—they are related, but not equated. **Obedience of Jesus flows out of love for Jesus.** Love for him is the ground of obedience, it is not the same as obedience. Obedience is the house that rests upon the foundation of love. Therefore, although loving Jesus will result in obedience, love for him is more than the mere keeping of his commands. This should be obvious from a couple of examples.

Loving Jesus Is More Than Mere Obedience

It is possible to obey Jesus without loving him. The Pharisees embody this truth. Outwardly the Pharisees were tenacious keepers of the law, and yet inwardly they were *“filled with dead people’s bones and all uncleanness”* (Mt 23:27). When thinking back on his days as a Pharisee, Paul described his keeping of the commandments,

(Philippians 3:6 ESV)

“...as to righteousness under the law, blameless...”

Paul, and the Pharisees were able to outwardly keep the letter of the law, and yet inwardly their hearts were far from God. They obeyed him outwardly, but inwardly they did not love him.

(Matthew 15:7-8 ESV)

⁷ *You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, when he said:*

⁸ *“This people honors me with their lips,
but their heart is far from me...”*

Outwardly the words and actions were there, but their hearts were not. Outwardly they worshiped him, but there was no affection in their hearts toward God. It is possible to do all the outward expressions of love and devotion, without experiencing any of the inward affections which should motivate those actions. Loving Jesus is not mere outward obedience. ***True love of Jesus is outward obedience motivated by deep, inward affections.*** Love is both outward action, but also inward affection. Love is action flowing from affection.

I Don't Want to Buy You Flowers

The best way I know how to illustrate this is to tell you an embarrassing story about when Alisa and I first began dating. We were friends for about a year before we started dating and I was still getting to know her. I had learned that she, just before we met, had gone through a painful breakup. I did not want to hurt her, and I was still unsure of exactly how I felt about her.

After going out a few times she subtly hinted that it was good form for male suitors to occasionally bring flowers to his date. Diplomacy is not my best skill. I responded by saying something like, “I know it’s traditional for guys to bring flowers to his date, but I’m not going to get you any flowers.” With a puzzled look in her eyes, she asked, “Why not?” To which I responded, “Because I don’t want to get you any flowers because all it would be is empty tradition.” As you can imagine, this led to a less than pleasant discussion followed by a fairly unhappy evening.

In my own unfortunate way, I was intending to communicate to her that I was not going to play games with her heart. I knew she had been hurt before and I was not interested in hurting her any further—which, despite my best intentions, I nevertheless accomplished quite successfully. If I had gotten her flowers at that point in our relationship it would have only been outward

action *without* a deep inward affection. I didn't want my outward actions to send confusing messages about the inward disposition of my heart. So I refused to buy her flowers until my heart was truly in it. I wanted her to know that the day I chose to buy her flowers was the day that my heart was moving toward her, and my inward affection for her were growing. This is love, outward action that flows from inward affection.

This is love of Jesus, outward obedience to his commands that flows from a heart that happily complies with his demands.

Do you love Jesus? Or are you merely obeying him? Are you serving him because you delight in him or because it's your duty? Are your lips praising him while your heart is far from him? If so, then right now ask him to change your heart? Pray that his Spirit will work within you to cause your affections for Jesus to grow within you.

Conclusion

Jesus commands us to love him above all other human relationships. This is a command we cannot obey without the help of his Holy Spirit. God gives his Spirit to those who ask him.¹⁰ We receive his Spirit when become believers and when we receive his Spirit, one of the first things he does is to pour out within us a love for Jesus and God the Father.

This love he pours out in our hearts does not only result in outward obedience of his commands, but rather it also results in deep feelings of affections for Jesus.

The love that Jesus commands is a love that is to exceed love for parents, spouse, sibling, and children. I suspect that your love for each of those people in your lives gets expressed, not only by actions, but also by a deep affection for them in your heart. The love that Jesus demands from you is more than that. It is more than only outward obedience. It is more than only inward affection. It is both. It is outward obedience motivated by deep affection of the heart, both of which flow out of the inner, unseen work of the Holy Spirit. This is why we need to be filled with his Holy Spirit, so that our love for the Lord will grow and deepen and so that our actions will be bold and honoring to him.

¹⁰ Lk 11:13.