

Mark 12: 28-34; “To Love God with All Your Heart”, Sermon # 96 in the series – “Astonished at His Teaching”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall, on March 4th, 2012, in the Morning Worship Service, in preparation for the Lord’s Supper.

As this is a communion Sunday I was seeking in my mind to determine what I could preach on this morning which would lead us into a serious consideration of why the Lord Jesus had to die on the cross for our sins. And as I did so, I remembered that this was the next text in our consecutive exposition and study of the gospel of Mark. I thought that this text would be of great value to us all this morning, very appropriate for our preparation to observe the Lord’s Supper. Whenever I think of this text, I think of my dear father and how he tried to teach me this commandment before either one of us was ever converted to Jesus Christ. I think that it was about 1957 or 1958, when I was about 6 or 7 years old, he took me into my bedroom and he had me kneel down on the floor with him, next to my bed, and he would have me recite this verse after him as a prayer. The first of all the commandments is: “Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.” “And you shall love the Lord your God with all our heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.” It had a very great impression upon my young soul, even though I did not know the Lord yet, and neither did he. He was doing this so that I would be able to memorize the verse and he sincerely hoped that I would keep this all-important commandment. I love my father for having done this for me; having done this with me. It truly made its impress on my soul. But it is amazing is it not, what a curious mixture of sin and good intentions is every man at his best. Many people do not understand themselves. Many people think that they are keeping this first and greatest commandment when they have not really scratched the surface. To love God with all his heart is something that every truly religious man wants to do, when he is feeling his most religious. But the commandment goes far beyond a person’s good intentions. This man who asked Jesus the question, even though he approved of Jesus’ answer and commended Him for it, and even though he knew the difference between being outwardly religious and keeping this commandment, even he was not yet in the kingdom of God, Jesus says. He was not far from it, but he was not in it. Why was this the case with him? Why, if he knew this much, was he still not in the kingdom of God? It was because He did know Jesus. He did not know and understand that Jesus was the only One who could keep this first and greatest commandment. The Lord Jesus loved God His Father with all of His heart, and soul, and mind, and strength, and because He had this perfect love, He submitted to the Father’s will, and went to the cross to die for our sins. What was it that led the Lord Jesus to the cross? It was first of all because He loved God with all of His heart and soul and mind. 2nd – Because He loved His neighbor as Himself. And 3rd – Because He offered up

Himself as the sacrifice that went beyond the whole burnt offering. I am sure that our exploration of these reasons will be a help to those both in the kingdom and not far from the kingdom.

1st of all – Jesus went to the cross because He loved God with all of His heart and soul and mind and strength.

All real and true obedience to God begins in the heart. The heart here is primarily referring to the affections in this verse; otherwise there is a redundancy in the wording when it says “mind” afterwards. However, the word “love” is *αγαπαι* (agapan). It expresses the love of intelligence and purpose. (R.C.H. Lenski) The word “heart” usually encompasses the mind as well, in its Biblical definition, and the soul would encompass both. The soul and the affections would usually be under the influence of the mind in learning and doing what is right. The mind would usually be leading and the heart and soul would follow. John Albert Bengel says, “The Heart – is that which lives and loves.” “The Soul – is that which enjoys and relishes.” “The Mind – is that ceaseless active power of thought. He says that “this is expressed by “understanding” in verse 33. With all our strength – meaning all the active corporeal (that is – bodily) power.” But here we find that the affections are placed first in the order. Why? Because if there is a right desire, there will be a right end in pursuing the keeping of this commandment. If there is a sincere desire and willingness to do God’s will in our heart, it will lead to obedience to God in the way that we live our life. And this obedience will come to be seen in the particular things that we will do to honor and to serve Him with our bodily strength. We will be learning to love Him with all of our heart. Ask yourself now if this is true of you? Do you love God with all of your heart? You say, “I do not believe that I do.” This is true honesty. But are you willing to do His will? You say, “How do I know that I am willing?” The answer is found over in John 7: 17, where Jesus says, “If anyone wills to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether I speak on My own authority.” The words “wills to do His will” could also be translated “desires to do His will”. It is a will of desire to do the will of God. And how often it is true, in many people’s hearts, that they are not sure (if they are honest), that they are willing to do God’s will in every particular. They are not sure whether their desires are great enough. How does a person come to have this desire to always be doing God’s will in their heart. It comes from their trusting in Jesus Christ. Jesus loved God His father with all of His heart. And so He could say in John 6: 38 – “For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.” This is why we trust in Jesus. We are resting our faith upon His having had a perfect will to do His Father’s will concerning every aspect of being obedience that we will face, and fail to render to God a perfect obedience.

When Jesus was praying in the garden of Gethsemane He struggled with doing the Father’s will, which was for Him to go to the cross to suffer in our place. It says in Matthew 26, verse 36 – “Then Jesus came with them to a place called

Gethsemane, and said to the disciples, ‘Sit here while go and pray over there.’ “And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and He began to be sorrowful and deeply distressed.” “Then He said to them, ‘My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death.’ “Stay here and watch with Me.” “He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, ‘O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will.’” Peter, and James, and John could not even watch with Him one hour, let alone atone for their sins, or the sins of the world. They loved God, and they loved their Lord, but they did not have a love that could do the Lord’s will in this situation. If we were there, we would have been the same way. As you think about your own obedience to God, you are often not sure whether your mind is fully and completely and continually interacting with God in love. The problem is that our hearts are treacherous and deceitful even when we believe ourselves to be most sincere in our wanting to do His will, and being willing to do His will. Later on, as we think about it, we realize that we were not loving God with all of our heart. Why is this? Well, let us talk about our hearts for a few minutes.

Turn with me over to Jeremiah 17, verse 9. It says here something that is true of all men except for the Lord Jesus. “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?” “I, the Lord, search the heart, I test the mind, even to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his doings.” This is the reason that many people can deceive themselves thinking that they are keeping the commandments of God, when they really are not. Their heart, in which are found their greatest desires, is deceitful. It is deceitful in relation even to the best of their works as an unbeliever, or the best of their motives as a believer. This is why many unbelievers and not a few believers do some of their good works, or even many of their good works, unto their own glory. This is why we must have Jesus Christ to be our Savior. We cannot be saved by our own good works. And that is why, even when you become a Christian you still need considerable help in even beginning to love God with your whole heart. If you will look back up at verse 7 it says: “Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, and whose hope is the Lord.” “For he shall be like a tree planted by the waters, which spreads out its roots by the river.” If your trust is in the Lord Jesus Christ He is the river whose streams make glad your heart; that is, those persons who will trust in Him to save them from themselves and their sins. What will those trusting in the Lord be like? “They will not fear when heat comes; but their leaf will be green, and will not be anxious in the year of drought, nor will cease from yielding fruit. This is the fruit of righteousness which comes from Jesus Christ, and it leads to your first of all loving God with a thankful heart, and then your praying to love the Lord with all of your heart by pursuing Christ Himself by faith, so that you might love God more. The greatest of your labors, after you come to know God by faith in Jesus Christ will be your maintaining your love to the Lord your God so that you will be making progress in your loving Him with all of your heart. He is

now your Lord, and He is giving you His precious grace so that by faith working through love you will keep God's commandments. But since Christ's blood and righteousness cover you, you are no longer afraid of God's condemnation when you fall short of perfect obedience. You now know His love in the forgiveness of sins through His having sent Christ for you.

But I hope that you understand that you are commanded to love each of these 3 Persons of the Godhead with all of your heart. They are of the same essence of Deity. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are all one God. But they are distinct Persons within the Godhead. You are to love each of these Persons all with all of your heart. You need to pray to God that He would show you more of how great and glorious a God He really is. Listen to Verse 12: "A glorious high throne from the beginning is the place of our sanctuary." "O Lord, the hope of Israel, all who forsake You shall be ashamed." "Those who depart from Me shall be written in the earth, because they have forsaken the Lord, the fountain of living waters." If you cannot say with all sincerity that you love the Lord your God with all of your heart, then you need to pray the prayer of verse 14: "Heal me, O Lord, and I shall be healed; save me, and I shall be saved, for You are my praise."

When you sincerely pray this prayer God, in the name of Jesus, the Lord God will change your heart and you will come to know Him as the Fountain of Living Waters. These waters of Christ's grace will be flowing in and through your heart, creating by the power of His Spirit the love for God which is the righteous requirement of His Law. Indeed God will have written on your heart this first and greatest commandment which is the sum of all the others, based upon the New Covenant established with Christ; the Covenant of Grace which He makes and keeps with all believers. The waters of grace are given so that your love might flow unto God. Unless one is born of water and the Spirit they cannot see, nor can they enter the kingdom of God. But once they are born again, the love of God is poured out in their hearts by the Holy Spirit who is given to every Christian. (Romans 5: 5) The duty and responsibility of the believer in Christ is to see to it that this love for God and Christ and His Spirit's working in them, does not grow cold. That is what this Supper is all about. This is why Christ died and was raised again from the dead. It is to take away your sins, and to give you a righteousness better than your own; yes! But it is also that your love for Him and your love for God the Father and the Holy Spirit would not grow cold. Behold, all that Christ has done for you. Believe in the power of His grace toward you to raise you up from your lethargy and careless to a fervent love for Him and for the Father and the Spirit as well. The Lord Jesus Christ had to die for our sins because you and I have not kept this first and greatest commandment of God's holy law. We have not kept it, and we do not keep it now as we should. But He did. He kept it perfectly in every way possible. What was it that led the Lord Jesus to the cross? It was first of all because He loved God with all of His heart, and soul, and mind and strength.

2ndly – Jesus went to the cross because He loved His neighbor as Himself. (verse 31)

“And the second commandment which is like it is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ “There is no other commandment which is greater than these.” We have seen now, that only a believer in Jesus Christ can come to have a truly sincere and loving heart toward God. God expects all men to keep all of His commandments; the greatest of these which is love to Him, is the summation of all the other commandments. We are commanded to love God with all of our heart, with all of our soul, with all of our mind, and with all of our strength; which means, with everything within us, we are to love Him first and foremostly beyond our love even for ourselves, or for people that we may dearly love around us. We are not commanded to love ourselves with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength; no, we are commanded to love God in this complete way of faith in Christ; entrusting everything we are and everything that we have been given, to the Lord our God. God wants us to love Him, with all that is within us, all of the time. But I want to show you that there is a direct correlation between your keeping the first and greatest commandment and your keeping the second; which is like it. Loving your neighbor as yourself flows out of your loving God first and foremostly. Turn with me over to Matthew 19, verse 16. “Now behold, one came and said to Him, ‘Good teacher, what good things shall I do that I may have eternal life?’ “So He said to him, ‘Why do you call Me good?’ “No one is good but one, that is God.” “But if you want to enter into life keep the commandments.” “He said to Him, ‘Which ones?’ (Jesus gives him the commandments of the 2nd table of the law) “Jesus said, ‘You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not bear false witness, honor your father and your mother, and you shall love your neighbor as yourself.” “The young man said to Him, ‘All these things I have kept from my youth.’ “What do I still lack?” “Jesus said to him, ‘If you want to be perfect, go sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven , and come follow Me.’ “But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.”

Now you can see here that this man thought that he was loving his neighbor as himself, because he said that he had been doing this from his youth. He evidently loved those whom he wanted to show love to, on his terms, and in his own way. But here, when Jesus asks him to sell what he had and give to the poor, he cannot keep this commandment. Why? Well, certainly we can say that he was a covetous man. Jesus had not asked him about this commandment at first because He knew that this was where his besetting sin lay. Jesus proposed this test to him as all or nothing; either he could hold on to his money or He could have Jesus and treasure in heaven. But this man wanted to hold on to all that he had worked for and all that he had accumulated, never thinking that God (who was standing in front of him) would call for it. He did not want to give it to the poor. He could not love his neighbor, the poor man, as himself. He should have reasoned this way; if I was

poor and needy, would I not want someone who had money to help me out? So he broke the 10th commandment and he broke the sum of all the commandments of the second table of the law; that he should love his neighbor as himself. But it was more than that. He certainly understood Jesus to be good. He called him good at the beginning of their conversation. It does appear that he knew or he had at least heard that Jesus was the Son of God because in Mark's gospel it says that when he first came to Jesus, he came running, and he knelt before Him. Jesus was essentially good and He is essentially God. But it was because this man could not love God with all of His heart that he could not give up his money when asked for it by Jesus. Covetousness is a form of idolatry. This man was breaking the first commandment, "You shall have no other God's before Me." But the reason that He was breaking that command was because with his heart he loved something more than God. It was his riches. He would feign the worship of Jesus, but he could not love Jesus with all of His heart. Jesus spoke the very words of God to him and yet He could not obey them. Jesus loved this man as Himself. He looked upon him, it says in Mark 10: 21 and loved him before he told him what he lacked. Whether he came to know the Lord, we are never told in the text. But that Jesus loved him as himself, there is no question. Jesus will always show us where we lack if we would become a Christian. But He will also tell us where we can find the true riches. They are found in Him. As we come down front to observe the Lord's Supper now, let us ask ourselves if there is something that we think that we could not give up for Jesus if He asked us for it? Let us ask ourselves whether we can help the poor and the needy when Jesus places the opportunity in front of us? Let us consider whether there is anything more important to us than having Christ? And let us thank Him that He loved God His Father with all of His heart, so that we could be forgiven of our not loving Him with all of our heart. Let us remember that His death was for our life, so that we could begin and continue to love God with all of our heart, by His grace.

And 3rd – Jesus went to the cross because He would offer Himself up as the sacrifice that went beyond the whole burnt offering. (verses 33 and 34)

"We are here at the Lord's Table once again to remember our Savior and what He has done for us. But as we remember Him we offer the sacrifices of praise, giving thanks for what He suffered on our behalf. We praise Him for His love which went beyond ours to fulfill the law on our behalf. We praise Him for His love to us, as sinners, that He would lay down His life for us. We give Him thanks that His blood covers not only all of our sins, but also all of our attempts at righteousness; the doing and keeping of God's commandments. Surely His sacrifice was the greatest sacrifice ever offered. It satisfied God's justice and it demonstrated His righteousness. And it saved us from our sins. The scribe of our text understood that God is more interested in the worship of our heart more than the outward participation in any ceremony or ordinance. This is just as true for us

here today. God desires as well as demands the love of His people for what He has done for them in giving them His only-begotten Son. The loving obedience of His people to His Word means more to Him than whole burnt offerings and sacrifices. These sacrifices were offered up by the Old Testament priests. But the Lord Jesus was of a different priesthood than Aaron's. His was of the order of Melchizedek. He would not offer bulls and goats on the earthly altar designated by God. He would, out of love to God and love to us His people, would go far beyond these sacrifices. He as the Great High Priest of our faith would offer up Himself as the sacrifice for sins and sinners. His would be the sacrifice that would fulfill all of the Old Testament sacrifices. He would offer up His body to be broken, and His blood to be shed. Melchizedek was a type of Him. And He offered bread and wine; the symbols of the broken body of Jesus and the shed blood which He gave for our salvation. His sacrifice would be of infinite value to both God and men who trust in Him. Remember it is not ultimately great knowledge that God is looking for from you. It is great love. This scribe did not go on to ask how it was that he could come to love God with all of his heart. He simply re-stated what Jesus had said was true about what was the first and greatest commandment. And this is why Jesus said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom." It is not enough to have the knowledge that love to God is the first and greatest commandment. You must actually come to know and to believe that that love is only perfectly found in Christ, and that you either have that Christ, or you need that Christ. I trust that each one who partakes of the Supper today has found this Christ, and that those who are not sure would come to know Him by faith. Jesus has loved God with all of His heart, all of his soul, all of His mind and all of His strength. He has loved His neighbor as Himself. All of this perfectly. And so He went to the cross and made atonement for our sins. Let us be thankful in our hearts and pray that through the means of this Supper we will grow in our love for God; the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.