

Love Must Be a Priority

Mark 12:28-34

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Introduction – How many of you made NY resolutions this year...

I talked about making resolutions or setting goals in this month's newsletter article...

First, we all need changes. Some we find very hard to admit to ourselves.

Second, when we change calendars is a good time for reassessment. How did last year go? What do I want to do differently this year?

Third, New Year's is an excellent time for mid-course corrections.

Fourth, New Year's is a time to learn to rely more heavily on the grace of God.

I believe one of the greatest failures of God's people is in the area of priorities. I would like to take the next 4 weeks and look at some of the things that are a MUST in the lives of children of God. This series is simply titled: "Priorities for the New Year"

In this series we will see that love, worship, evangelism & service must be priorities for us as followers of Jesus and for our church.

There was a man who only had an eighth-grade education. But this man wanted to be a soul-winner. God had laid a brilliant attorney on his heart. Obeying the Lord, he went to talk to the lawyer about Jesus Christ. But no sooner had he begun when the attorney used his legal training and brilliant mind to turn the man inside out. The man finally apologized for coming and for taking the attorney's time. He left with tears in his eyes as he said to the lawyer, "I just want you to know that I came here because I love you.

Dejected, he went home to his wife and said, "I don't want to be bothered. I don't want to talk to anyone the rest of the day. I just want to go to my room and be left alone; I feel like such a failure. About an hour later, the lawyer came and knocked on the man's door. He told the man's wife he would like to see her husband. She said, "I'm sorry, but he is not seeing anyone today." "Oh," he said, "I think he will see me. just tell him who I am." So the husband allowed the attorney to come into his room. He said, "Why have you come? Have you come to make fun of me? Have you come to argue with me again?. You know I cannot argue with you." The lawyer said, "No, I haven't come to argue with you. I have come to ask you to tell me how to be saved." The man replied, "I don't understand. What changed your mind? Every time I tried to tell you about Jesus you came up with an argument that I couldn't answer." The lawyer said, "Yes, I did.

But you came up with an argument that I couldn't answer." This soul-winner looked at him and said, "What was that?" The lawyer replied, "When you looked at me and told me you loved me, I couldn't argue with that."

Love can do amazing things. Friends, love is essential in the life of a child of God!

In Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers & Deuteronomy there are 613 laws given to men. There are some that instruct man to do certain things as well as some that forbid men to partake in certain actions. These laws formed the heart of Jewish belief and was the driving force behind the "Scribes & Pharisees" They would spend a great deal of their time debating these laws and seeking to identify the "greatest" among them.

Jesus takes the entire law and sums it up with two statements about one word - "**Love.**"

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength - Love your neighbor as yourself. He then finished by saying, "There is no commandment greater than these."

The Great Shema or Teaching - The Jews would quote this every day in their prayers. This was a personal reminder that there is no other God but Jehovah. We must make certain that God occupies the first place in our lives, ahead of every other love or allegiance! Most Christians today will proclaim that God is first and then they place other things and people in front of him. Notice areas in which we are to love the Lord above all else:

A. All Of Our Heart - Jesus is saying is that we must love the Lord without pretense. Our love for Christ must be authentic... This is a love that goes beyond words and is seen in our actions! What if you told your spouse that you loved them and then ignored them, never spent time with them and didn't seek to grow closer to them? When we truly love God and put Him first, it will be SEEN IN EVERYTHING WE DO!

B. All Of Our Soul - Here Jesus is referring to our emotions. We are not to love God in a nonchalant manner, but we are to be emotional in our love for Him. Our love for God should touch us at our most intimate levels. We are to love the Lord with all our emotional self. Our thoughts MUST center upon CHRIST. We should have a continual longing to draw closer to Him!

C. All Of Our Mind - Our love for God is not a mindless love! We are to love the Lord because we have considered Him, & meditated on Him and His greatness. We must make a conscious choice to love the Lord. We shouldn't love God because we were taught to or even because it is the right thing to do, but because of who He is and what He has done for us... Our thoughts should center on Christ!

D. All Of Our Strength - This refers to the fact that this love is not only in words but in the actions of our physical body. We must love the Lord with every ounce of our being! If we truly love the Lord, He will have prominence in every area of our life! True love for Jesus manifests

itself in every area of life. Do you love His people, His Word, His House, His Work, His world, His commandments, & His worship as you should? Love the Lord your God with everything!

And to what other extent are we to carry out this Great Commandment – Love your neighbor as yourself. And this love is no ordinary love - it is not a love we see in the world; but a love which comes from God – Agape love. Agape refers to a never-ending, unchanging, all-consuming love for someone. Agape love is not the kind of feeling that appears for a time than changes. Agape love is forever! It is a love that loves without regard for the worth of the object being loved. This is more than simple affection or some emotional feeling. It is a decision of the will!

One verse that illustrates what “Agape” love is Romans 5:8 “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”

We have several members who drive a great distance to get to this church. Why is that? It is not for the preaching, there are many great preachers in this area... It is not for the singing, they drive by many churches with wonderful choirs... Why is it that people drive so far to come to this church? I believe the answer isLOVE!

Do you want to see this church continue to grow? Then love people enough to invite them, and when they come in the doors, we must collectively show them love. People are longing to feel love. We must love them with the love of Jesus!

This, of course, is hard to do because by nature we cannot live this way. By nature we want to love in a selfish way, in a way that meets personal needs and desires, and does not consider the needs of others. That's because our nature is sinful. Sin is “missing the mark.” Those great commandments God gave us – we can't do it! We miss the mark!

We can't do it without Jesus. When we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. His love forgives us, cleanses us and empowers us to live and love in a way that reflects and show His love, for God and others.

When we love in the manner Jesus described and exemplified, then we will treat everyone how they should be treated. It is natural to love those who love us, but it is supernatural to love those who hate or mistreat us. Jesus is telling us that we can always be assured that we will do the right thing by God and by our fellow man if we will love our Lord above all else, and then it becomes natural to love others.

Conclusion: How is your love? Do you love God with all that is in you? Do you love your neighbor as yourself? If not then you have a lot to think about. What are some things you and family can do right now, that you're not doing already, that will help grow your love, for God and for others – devotions, regular worship, prayer, service projects, acts of kindness. I would encourage you to use this month as an opportunity to set some spiritual priorities for this coming year – as individual children of God or as a family.

Jesus said “If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love” and “My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.

How is your love meter registering today? If you seek to live a life that pleases God this New Year, then LOVE MUST BE A PRIORITY... For without love, nothing else will matter!

In Jesus,

Amen.