

Desire = Worship

Loving God with all your Heart Part 3

1 John 2:15-17 6-19-11

Summary: Loving God with your soul means looking to God to satisfy your desires – is that man-centered? Only if your desire is for something other than God. But if it is for God it is worship (desire for anything else is idolatry). God must be the only object of our love, because love for God and love for the world are mutually exclusive – since they come from different sources and are based on different beliefs.

Required Desire.....

Man-Centered?.....

Review.....

Two kinds of asking.....

Seeking God vs. Using God.....

Desire is worship!.....

Desire glorifies God.....

Using God.....

All requests must be seeking God.....

Forbidden Desire.....

God must be the only object of our love.....

Incompatible with love for the world.....

Worldliness = love for the world.....

How much separation from the culture?.....

Not geographic separation, but a matter of love.....

The source of your desires.....

Appetite vs. Desire.....

That's why they cannot coexist.....

Conclusion.....

1 John 2:15 Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For everything in the world--the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes and the pride of possessions--comes not from the Father but from the world. 17 The world and its desire pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.

Required Desire

Man-Centered?

It is fairly rare that Tracy will make a comment about my sermons, but last week when we were driving home from church she said, “Darrell – you seemed distracted by the people who walked out of the sanctuary last week during the sermon.” And I confessed to her that I was. The reason she noticed it as being an unusual thing is because people almost always walk out during my sermons. And I never think anything of it. It might be someone who is on call at work who got paged, or maybe they are sick, or they need to tend to something for whatever reason – I never make assumptions about why people are leaving. In fact most of the time I do not even notice when they leave. I have my notes all printed out, so usually when you see me up here stammering and stumbling over my words it means I am trying to decide whether or not to depart from my notes and give an explanation for something. And that is what happened last week. There were some people who got up and walked out right at the point in the sermon where I was saying something that, not long ago, I might have gotten up and walked out if I heard a preacher say that. I was distracted because I was trying to decide whether I should stop and give an explanation, because I could really sympathize with anyone who was uncomfortable at that point in the sermon. I decided not to because a proper explanation will take too

long, so I held it for today.

And if you were not here last week – here is what I said: I was talking about the many times in Scripture God is described as being like food and drink. I asked you to think of what you would say if someone asked you what God is like, and then I went on to say that more often than not the psalmists would say, “He’s like a banquet, He’s like Country Buffet.” And the whole sermon was about how God satisfies the appetites of the soul. Not very many years ago, if I heard a preacher say that I may well have walked out, because one thing I have a very low tolerance for is man-centered preaching. Preachers want to relate to people so they end up preaching in a way that makes it sound like God exists to please us, and what matters most in the universe is our happiness. God does not exist to please us. We exist to please Him. He is important; we are not important. What happens to me has zero intrinsic significance. If I am happy or sad, filled or empty, healthy or sick, alive or dead does not matter the slightest bit – except inasmuch as it reflects on God. If my being happy honors Him in some way, then it is a great thing. If my being happy dishonors Him in some way, then It is a terrible evil. If my being alive shows something about God – that is great. If my dying a slow, painful death would do something to show His glory – then my prayer is, “Lord, let me die a slow, painful death.”

Only God matters. So one of the worst things a person could ever say about my preaching is that it is becoming man-centered rather than God-centered. Man-centered preaching is evil. And it is cruel. The kindest thing I can ever do is point you to God. The cruelest thing I can do is point you to yourself or to me or to anything other than God.

So I resist with all my might that kind of preaching that feeds the self-esteem, self-importance, self-absorbed attitude of our day. When people say, “Jesus died for me – therefore I am important” – wrong conclusion. It should be, “Jesus died for me – therefore what amazing love He has!”

So where does that leave us with last Sunday’s sermon? A whole sermon about our longings and desires and cravings being fulfilled by God. I can sympathize with anyone who might have thought that was man-centered. However, I do not take it back. In fact I believe it with all my heart. It is not man-centered, and this morning I would like to explain why.

Review

Now, for those of you who are new let me get you up to speed. We have been studying Jesus’ words in Mark 12:30 where He delivered what He described as the first and greatest commandment:

Mark 12:30 Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.

And we began by looking in detail at the meaning of the word **love** and the word **heart**, and found that the emotional component of delight is an essential part of *agape* love. So loving God with all your heart involves delighting in Him (not just commitment and obedience). Then last Sunday we delved into the word **soul**, and found that the soul is the seat of the appetites. So you love God with your soul by looking to Him alone to satisfy the longings and cravings of the inner man.

Two kinds of asking

So it was a whole sermon about God satisfying our desires. Is that God-centered or man-centered? It depends. There is a way to ask God to satisfy your desires that is pure selfishness, and there is a way to do it that honors God. There might be two people sitting next to each other in this room right now, and both of them are praying the exact same prayer: “God – please, satisfy my desires” and one of them is self-focused and the other is God-focused. Let me show you that from God’s Word.

James 4:3 When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.

Those people were asking God to fulfill their desires, and the answer was no because they were asking for selfish reasons. Now let's look at the other kind.

John 16:24 Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete.

So Jesus commands us to ask with the goal of receiving and, through that receiving, gaining joy. But James rebukes the people for asking for the purpose of spending what they get on their pleasures. So what is the difference between those two kinds of asking? Obviously there is a huge difference, since one is commanded and the other is sin. But on the face of it, they seem the same – in both cases the person is asking God to satisfy his desires.

Seeking God vs. Using God

So what makes one kind of asking good and the other kind bad? That question is really easy to answer if you understand one basic principle (and this might be a new thought to some), but here it is: Desire is worship.

Desire is worship!

Remember, the soul is the stomach of the inner man – the source of your appetites. So to love someone or something with your soul (or to lift up your soul to someone) means to look to that person or thing as the source of satisfaction of your appetites. So when you feel the appetites of the soul – craving for joy or strength or meaning or motivation – and you look around and say, “What would satisfy this longing?” – and then you spot something and say, “That would do it” – that is worship. That thing you pointed to – that is the object of your worship because you are lifting your soul to that thing.

That is a pretty radical claim, isn't it? It goes against the way most Christians think. Most people think that you are not really guilty of worshipping or idolizing something unless you have extreme, overboard desire for that thing. So when does food become an idol? Most people would say – only when it is out of control. When you are eating way too much, and it is controlling your life – then it is an idol. This is why most people think the solution to idolatry is moderation. Just back off in how much you enjoy that thing.

But what I am saying here is very different. What I am saying is anytime you look to anything as the source of satisfaction for the appetites of the soul – that is worship. So if you are looking to God, then it is wonderful, pleasing, acceptable worship. But if you are looking to anything else, it is idolatry – regardless of how moderate you are about it. Moderate idolatry is just as idolatrous as overboard idolatry.

So let me see if I can show you this in Scripture. I need to defend this statement that desire is worship. There are two objects that Scripture speaks about people lifting their soul toward:

Psalms 25:1 To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul

Psalms 24:3 Who may stand in his holy place? 4 He who ... does not lift up his soul to an idol

The only two things Scripture ever speaks of someone lifting their soul to are God or an idol. Why? Because lifting your soul is worship. Looking to something as the satisfaction of your appetites is worship. The topic in Jeremiah 2 is idolatry.

Jeremiah 2:11 Has a nation ever changed its gods? (Yet they are not gods at all.) But my people have exchanged their Glory for worthless idols.

So clearly the problem was worshipping false gods instead of the true God. But look how God

describes the problem in verse 13.

12 Be appalled at this, O heavens, and shudder with great horror," declares the Lord. 13 "My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water...

Sin #1 in their idolatry was to forsake God as a spring. It does not say they forsook Him as a master, or forsook Him as a king, or as a lawgiver. The crux of the matter was that they turned their back on Him as a spring of water. At the core of their idolatry was that they stopped coming to God to drink. Is that literal? Is God literal H₂O? No – it is a metaphor describing refreshment, enjoyment, and satisfaction of desire. That is what water illustrates, and stage one of their idolatry was when they stopped coming to God for that. They stopped looking to Him to satisfy the thirst of the soul.

What was the second sin – step two of their idolatry?

13 "My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water.

A cistern is a holding tank for water. Sin #1 was when they stopped looking to God to satisfy the thirst of their souls, and sin #2 was they looked to some other source besides God to satisfy the thirst of their souls. What other source? Any other source. They looked somewhere besides God to satisfy their souls.

Now let me ask you this – how is that idolatry? If idolatry is worshipping a false god, how is it idolatry to seek satisfaction for the thirst of your soul from another source besides God? You see what God is teaching us here about worship? At the core of worship is drinking. Whatever source you go to for water – whatever source you look to for joy and strength and refreshment and encouragement – that is your God. And the act of looking to that source for joy and comfort and strength and all the rest is worship. When you drink from some spring to satisfy your soul you are worshipping that thing. That is why it is idolatry to drink from any source but God. But if you do drink from God's fountain – if you do look to Him to satisfy the longings of your soul, then not only is that not selfish, but it is acceptable, pleasing, God-glorifying worship.

Do not think of worship as mainly singing songs. Worship is anything that honors God as God. Any time you treat Him as God, that is worship. And any time you treat something else as God, that is idolatry. And since God made it clear that He is the only food and water that can satisfy the appetites of the soul, whenever you look to something to satisfy your soul – you are treating that thing as God. That is why Colossians 3:5 says greed is idolatry – because we are allowed to be greedy for one thing and that is the presence of God. Greed for anything else is wrong because it treats that thing as God.

Desire glorifies God

So that is why last Sunday's sermon was God-centered and not man-centered. The focus of all this is the glory of God. Nothing showcases God's goodness more than our desire and delight in Him. If you want to show how great a restaurant is, you show that not by saying, "I force myself to go there even though I don't want to." If you want everyone to see how great it is you say, "I go there because it's my favorite place to eat." If you want to show the glory of a piece of art you do not say, "I force myself to look at it," you say, "I can't take my eyes off it." And the greatest way to honor God is to desire and delight in Him. If we serve God out of sheer resolve and self discipline, the world will see that and be impressed with us. But if we serve Him out of desire and delight the world will see that and be impressed with Him. The reason the Greatest Commandment requires us to love God with our souls is that doing that is worship and it is the greatest way to honor God and put His goodness on display.

This is why loving the world is referred to in Scripture as both idolatry and adultery. Loving the world is an act of adultery against God because we are to love Him with all our heart (like a wife loving her husband). And it is an act of idolatry because we are to love God with all our soul (which is

worship).

Using God

So now back to our question – when you have desires and you ask God for the things you want, what is the difference between the James 4 kind of asking (which is idolatry) and the John 15 kind of asking (which is worship)? The difference is this: One is using God and the other is seeking God. The reason James 4-type praying is idolatry is when you just use God to take care of your problems and give you the earthly things that you think will make you happy – where is your treasure? The great treasure in your life – the water you are looking to for satisfaction, is something other than God. And your prayer is an effort to use God to get the real treasure. But when you seek God Himself as the satisfaction of your desires that is acceptable worship.

And if you do not know what I mean by that, let's think about it in terms of a marriage relationship. (You will find that I will be using a lot of marriage analogies in this study, and that is definitely on purpose. God invented marriage so that we would be able to understand the kind of relationship God has with His people.) Suppose you are with a group of women and someone asks, "What is it you love about your husband?" And one woman says, "Everything! He's handsome, he's funny, he's smart, he's so much fun to be around. He makes me feel safe. When I'm upset, all he has to do is hold me and it's like all my troubles just melt away. I love hearing his voice, I love the way he smells, I love the way he talks – everything about him just makes me happy." Then the next woman speaks, and she says, "I love my husband because without him I'd never be able to live in such a nice house. And he provides me with a luxury car to drive. And if he were not around I would have to mow the yard myself, and change the oil in my car myself. He earns enough money for me to be able to buy lots of expensive clothes, and jewelry. If I were on my own I would never be able to afford that stuff. And most of all, I love him because I can travel all over the world all I want."

What is the difference between those two women? Very simple – the first woman loves her husband; the second loves money and uses her husband to get it. Her husband is not really even needed. Any rich man could supply her with a house and car and jewelry and travel. She was not loving her husband; she was using him to get what she really did love (money).

But that first woman was loving her husband. Take her husband out of the picture and substitute another man and all is lost. Everything she loved was essential to that one particular man. She was not using him to get something else – she enjoyed HIM. If you take him away and leave her with some other guy who is wearing her husband's cologne and telling his same jokes and has the same IQ – she is not one bit satisfied.

Now, would you say both those women are selfish? After all, they both desire pleasure, right. They are both focused on getting what they want – right? Yes, both are focused on getting what they want, but only one of them is selfish. If you love a person it is not selfish to desire the natural benefits that come from the nature of that person. But if you are only using the person to get the benefits of something else, then that is selfish because that something else is what you really love, not the person. The people in James 4 are rebuked because they asked for things in prayer that were not for the purpose of enjoying God Himself; rather they were just using God to get the stuff they really loved.

Do not ever pray James 4:3 kind of prayers – using God to get the things you really love. Doing that is the most outrageous kind of unfaithfulness. I say that because that passage is the same one I read last week when I was showing you that God calls it adultery when we love the world.

James 4:3 When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures. 4 You adulteresses! Don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God?

You see, it is even worse than my illustration. In my illustration that woman who did not really love her husband was just using her husband to get what she really loved, which was money. But in

James 4 we see it is even worse than that. It is a picture of a wife who is using her husband not to get money, but to get another man. The prayer itself is adulterous. Like a wife who goes to her husband and asks him for some money, and the reason she wants the money is so she can pay for a hotel room with some other man. She asks her husband to supply her with what she needs to commit adultery. That is what we do when we ask God to supply us with something that we look to for our joy. When we pray for God to give us something, and our motive is anything other than increased fellowship with God, we are not only committing adultery with the world, but we are asking God to pay for it!

All requests must be seeking God

“Wait a minute Darrell – it sounds like you are saying every single prayer has to be for the purpose of fellowship with God. If I pray for the money to pay my rent, or pray for healing when I am sick, or pray for a better marriage – if I ask for any of those things and my purpose is not increased fellowship with God, then I am committing adultery against God?” Is that what I am saying? It is what God is saying in James 4:3-4. It is fine to pray for a new car if the reason you want that car is to experience fellowship with God through that car. But if I look to the car itself for my joy, it is both idolatry and adultery against God. So if I get the flu is it OK for me to pray for healing? Only if my desire to be healed is a desire to experiencing fellowship with God. If I want healing from God because I want to experience His nearness and healing touch, or because the flu is making it harder for me to seek Him and have fellowship with Him because I cannot concentrate – so I want to be healed so I can seek Him more, or I want to be healed so I can experience the grace of working side-by-side with God in my calling, rather than lying in bed, or I want to be healed so I can get out there and experience closeness with God by showing love to the people He loves – those are all great reasons to ask for healing because in each case the great object of my desire is nearness to God. But if I just want to be healed because I want to feel better – then the great treasure in my heart is feeling better, and that is the adulterous, idolatrous, James 4-type asking.

Forbidden Desire

God must be the only object of our love

So far in this study of the Great Command we have looked in depth at the word **love**, the word **heart**, and the word **soul**. We also looked briefly at the words **mind** and **strength**. But there is one word we have not discussed yet, and it is the most important word in the Great Commandment. It is the word **God**. I ended the sermon last week by saying love for God is the solution to every problem – not because there is anything special about love, but because there is something special about God. I would like to expand on that point, because it is critical that we understand it. The world believes there is something special about love itself so they hold up unconditional love as the greatest thing there is. It does not matter what the object of your love is, or the reason for it, or what the priorities of your love are; just so there is love in your heart toward everyone. But we saw last week that that is the opposite of what the Bible says. According to Scripture, the only thing that makes love good or evil is its object. If you love the good, that is good. If you love murder, you love torture, you love violence, you love seeing helpless people being mistreated – that kind of love is evil. So you take the word **God** out of the Great Commandment (so it is just, “Love with all your heart and all your soul and all your mind and all your strength”) and you don’t just lose a small part – you lose one hundred percent of what Jesus was saying. If God is not the object of the love, then the love is evil.

That is why John, who is known as the Apostle of love, when he wrote his first Epistle, the very first command began with these words:

1 John 2:15 Do not love...

The first command in the book of 1 John is a command not to love something. One of the best ways to understand the meaning of something is by understanding its opposite. So if we want to really

understand what it means to love God, a great place to go is 1 John 2:15, because that passage teaches us about the opposite of loving God.

Incompatible with love for the world

1 John 2:15 Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

Most people think they can love both. They think it is a matter of priorities – “As long as I put God first, it’s OK if I put other things second and third and fourth.” So they figure they can keep on loving the world as long as they love God also. But John says, “No, it’s impossible.” And so does Jesus.

Matthew 6:24 No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other.

And James says it too.

James 4:4 don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.

And I think the reason that is a hard principle for some people to grasp is because most of the time love is not exclusive. You do not walk into McDonald’s and have them say, “Look, you have to enjoy our food only – you cannot enjoy our food on some days and Arby’s on other days.” My kids do not come to me and say, “Dad – you can love me or you can love my sister; but not both.” It does not bother my kids if I also love their siblings. In fact they like it when I love them all. Everywhere you look in life, love can be shared, and is not exclusive – with one exception. There is one kind of love that is exclusive – marital love. No one expects a kid to say, “You can love me or my sister but not both” but everyone understands when a man says to his wife, “You can be in love with me or with that other guy, but not both.” Why is that? Why is marital love so different from all other loves? It is because the reason marriage exists is to teach us about the relationship between God and His people. And He made that relationship the only human relationship that is by nature an exclusive kind of love. If you try to include a third party in marital love, it is perversion. The reason you cannot have multiple spouses is because marriage exists to illustrate the way we relate to God and you cannot worship multiple gods. Which means you cannot look to multiple sources of satisfaction of the appetites of the soul. So as Christians we are not permitted to love the world or *anything* in the world.

Worldliness = love for the world

Last Sunday afternoon at the meeting someone asked Jeff to define worldliness, and he gave a great definition: It is loving the world. It is not worldly to walk into a bar, but it is most definitely worldly to walk into a bar because you love what is going on in there. In fact, even if you never set foot within five miles of a bar, if you love what is going on in the bar you are still worldly. Is it worldly to watch a secular movie or listen to a secular song that espouses the world’s outlook rather than God’s and human wisdom rather than the gospel? It depends. If your heart likes what it hears then yes – that is worldly. If your heart hates what it hears then, no – it is not worldly.

How much separation from the culture?

In John 17 Jesus talked about us being in the world and not of the world, and throughout church

history there has been debate about exactly how much involvement we should have with the culture. On the one hand we are to be salt and light in the world. The Great Commission was not, “Retreat” but “Go!”

1 Corinthians 5:9 I have written you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people--¹⁰ not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral ... In that case you would have to leave this world.

So we are to be in the world. But on the other hand God calls us to come out from among them and be separate (2 Cor.6:17). We are to be different and set apart.

Not geographic separation, but a matter of love

So what should we do? Should we be like monks and retreat to a monastery? Or do we go to the other extreme and belly up to the bar in order to befriend people there and eventually introduce them to Christ? The answer is in 1 John 2:15: Separation from the world is not a matter of where you live, but what you love. Worldliness is not mainly a matter of behaviors (drinking, smoking, gambling, etc.); rather it is a matter of affections – what you love. Worldliness is not measured by what you do and where you go, but why you do it and why you go there.¹ So any idea, attitude, belief, experience, theory, viewpoint, judgment, opinion, or argument that causes you to be attracted to temporal things above eternal things must be avoided at all costs.

Incompatible because those desires do not come from God

One of the most fascinating things I learned in our study of 1 John was from 1 John 2:16.

The source of your desires

1 John 2:16 For everything in the world – the desires of the flesh, the desires of the eyes, and the pride of possessions, comes not from the Father but from the world.

Think about the implications of that word “from.” Did you know that your desires do not come from you? We tend to think our desires are just built in to our DNA like our eye color or our gender. But that is not the case. Your desires are not built in - they have a source outside of you.

Appetite vs. Desire

Now, to explain that we need to differentiate between appetites and desires. Appetites are general, and desires are specific. Craving for food in general – that is an appetite. Craving for a hamburger specifically – that is a desire. Whatever it is that you think will satisfy your appetite – that is what you desire. We all have the same appetites, but we have different desires because we have different beliefs about what would satisfy those appetites. Two people are hungry, and one of them says, “I think a piece of cake would hit the spot,” but the other one says, “Not for me – I need some meat right now.” The same basic appetite (hunger), but two different desires because of two different thoughts about what would hit the spot and satisfy that appetite. Whatever specific thing you think would hit the spot – that is what you desire.

And what John is saying is, your desires are not built-in – they come from an outside source. Your appetites are built-in. We all have the same appetites. But when you have a desire, that desire is there because some outside source made you think that thing would hit the spot. If you are feeling down because your life seems pointless and meaningless, that means your God-given appetite for

¹ We are to be in the world and not of the world. Many Christians today have it backward – they are of the world and not in the world. They retreat from missions and evangelism, but in their hearts are all kinds of worldly desires.

meaning and purpose is going unfulfilled. So what do you desire? If you desire a lot of human praise and accolades from various people around you, that is because someone led you to believe that the praise of men would fulfill that appetite. If you desire the approval of God then it is because someone led you to believe that would hit the spot.

So general appetites are built-in, but specific desires come from outside sources. And John tells us what those sources are. There are two of them – God and the world.

1 John 2:16 the desires of the flesh, the desires of the eyes, and the pride of possessions, comes not from the Father but from the world.

The world is constantly preaching to you to persuade you that its temporary pleasures will hit the spot, and God is telling you that only His river of delights will satisfy. And so if you desire the world's solution it is because you were convinced by the world's argument; and if you desire God it is because you were convinced by what God said. And it is hard because the preaching of this world is relentless. People who say they do not like to be preached at, and they do not like to be told what to believe – those people should really hate the world, because the world crams its ideas down everybody's throat relentlessly. Commercials, books, movies, TV shows, talk shows, idle conversation at work – hammering away, sermonizing every hour of every day to persuade you that the pleasures of this world will satisfy. Happiness will come from a car. Joy is a product of recreation. Having a relationship with some wonderful person of the opposite sex will make you happy. A promotion at work will give your life meaning. When you watch enough of their commercials, and listen to enough of their music, and sit in enough of their classrooms, and immerse yourself deeply enough in their conversations, and read enough of their magazines or websites, or spend enough time window shopping in their malls – over time your soul will be persuaded by their message: Yes! Joy is to be found in temporal things in and of themselves. Satan has a lot of pulpits that preach his message. And if we do not figure out which of those pulpits is having an effect on our thinking and shut it down, we will become worldly.

That's why they cannot coexist

This is why love for God is exclusive. Love for the world and love for God cannot possibly coexist because desire for the world originates from different beliefs than desire for God. Love for the world means desiring the world, and desire for the world comes when you believe the world's message. Love for God means desiring God, and desire for God comes when you believe God's message. And you cannot believe both at the same time. I can love all my kids simultaneously because love for them all comes from the same source and arise from the same beliefs. But love for God and love for the world come from opposite sources, and they rise from opposite beliefs, so they cannot coexist.

Conclusion

We have spent three weeks now just defining what love for God means. And I know many of you are thinking, "Alright already – enough with the definition. Let's get on with part 2 of this study about how to generate this love. We understand love is delight in God, but how do I create that delight in my heart? Loving God with my soul means desiring Him, but if it just seems to me like the things in this world are delightful and satisfying, and time with God seems kind of boring and unsatisfying – how do I change that? Well, I think we have laid a good enough foundation in understanding what it is, Lord willing, next week we can begin really delving in to how to love Him more.

Benediction: Psalms 86:1 Hear, O Lord, and answer us, for we are poor and needy. ... 3 Have mercy on us, O Lord, for we call to you all day long. 4 Bring joy to your servants, for to you, O

Lord, we lift up our souls.