

Loving God 4 – the Manifestations

We have looked at many things as we studied the topic of loving God. We saw that what God expects is to be loved supremely, to be loved absolutely. He alone is to be loved as an end, not as a means to anything else. We saw why we should love God. He is the only true God, there is no one like Him, and He alone is worthy to be loved. We saw how we do that. God must grant us a new heart and a new state by regenerating and justifying us, and then we must continue to see His glory in the Word of God to be sanctified. We saw that the only way that happens is when we seek God wholeheartedly, single-mindedly. And we saw that Jesus told us that to do so, we have to deny self, take up our cross and follow Him.

Christians who seek God wholeheartedly, will see more of the glory of God in the face of Jesus in the Word by the Spirit, and their new hearts respond with love.

The last thing we want to deal with is then – what does that look like? What does it mean that our hearts see the glory of God and rise up in love for Him?

I am going to give you a definition that you might not have heard before, but as we examine it, it may make more and more sense to you. To grow in love for God is *to grow to love what He loves to the degree He loves it and in the manner appropriate for it*, which means to love what He loves, and to love them as much as He loves them and in the way that belongs to that thing or person.

I didn't say you would accomplish it in your lifetime, but it begins now.

Let me illustrate for a moment before we look at some Scriptures: When two people, particularly man and woman show an interest in each other, one of the first things they do is find out about one another's loves. What does the other one enjoy? What does he like to eat, watch, listen to, participate in and talk about? Where do his interests lie? The reason we do this, almost without thinking about it, is because what a person loves is the deepest thing about them. It is who this person is. And if you are going to end up marrying someone, the most important thing you can do is find out if you love the same things - if your greatest loves are the same.

In the Scripture in Jeremiah, God tells us that to know Him is to know what He loves – He loves righteousness, justice and loving-kindness.

Modern Christianity has almost totally neglected the idea that the deepest part of you is what you love, and therefore the deepest change that can take place is at the level of your loves.

We talk about orthodoxy – which means right beliefs. We need right beliefs, we need right doctrine. We talk about orthopraxy – which means right behaviour. We need obedience coming out of right belief. But going before orthodoxy and orthopraxy is what you might call orthopathy – right love, right affections. To live the Christian life you need all three.

Sanctification is not primarily changing outward behaviour. It is not even primarily changing beliefs. It is firstly changing loves. When you change your love, you change your belief. When you change your belief, you change your behaviour. At the root of holiness, of real spiritual growth, is a heart change in what you love and how you love it.

To love God with all your heart, soul and mind is to see His glory in the Word so that your loves are changed. You come to love what God loves, you love it more and more to the degree He loves it, and you love it according to its true nature.

Well, what does God love? To begin with, what does God love supremely and absolutely? God loves Himself supremely and absolutely.

Isaiah 42:8 *I am the LORD, that is My name; And My glory I will not give to another, Nor My praise to carved images.*

God takes infinite delight in His own excellencies. God is delighted by His own glory more than anything else. God is most jealous over His name, because it is what is most valuable to Him. For God to love Himself supremely is just, because He is supremely lovely. If God did not love Himself supremely, he would be unjust – he would be loving something less valuable as if it were more valuable.

Therefore, to love what God loves is to love Him absolutely. It is to make Him the only one I love for His own sake. We saw that Jesus told us that not even parents, children, spouses or even self must be loved for their own sake, and they must be regarded as people to reject should they try to occupy that place.

This kind of absolute love for God's person will be manifested in many things: Delighting in Him, rejoicing in Him, fearing Him, praising Him, adoring Him, meditating on Him, seeking Him, thanking Him, confessing sin and repenting of it before Him; pleasing Him with obedience, or service, or sacrifice or suffering; trusting Him, depending on him, being loyal and faithful to Him, surrendering my all to Him, presenting my body to Him. These sound like different things, but they are simply different colours of the same rainbow – loving God absolutely. They are different facets in the diamond of loving God as an end, wholeheartedly - loving Him as my only God.

But that raises another question. What about other loves? Are we not commanded to love our neighbours? Are we not commanded to love enemies? Are we not commanded to love one another? Shouldn't we love creation? If God is our absolute love, what space is there for other loves?

Those are good questions. Let's see how the Bible answers them.
Enemies:

Matthew 5:43-45 *You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' ⁴⁴ 'But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, ⁴⁵ 'that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.*

What reason does Jesus give for loving your enemies? Because God the Father does it. In other words, God loves them. Why should you love your enemies? Because God loves them, and you are to love them for His sake – to be like Him and reflect Him. You don't love your enemies for their sake; you love them for God's sake. Which means that loving your enemies is part of loving Him.

Wives:

Ephesians 5:25-29 *Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, ²⁶ that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, ²⁷ that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. ²⁸ So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹ For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church.*

What pattern is a husband to take in loving his wife? Christ loving the church. Jesus Christ loves your wife. He died for her. The fact that the God you love loves your wife means you can love her for His sake. What that means is that God is basing a husband's love of his wife, not in the properties and attributes of his wife, but of Christ's love for her. He loves his wife for Christ's sake. Loving his wife is an act of obedience to Christ with Christ as His model. God gets our absolute love. But can you love your wife? Yes, you love her for God's sake. Your love for her is rooted in and flows out of and back towards your love for God.

Brethren:

Matthew 25:34-40 *d, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: 35 'for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; 36 'I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.' 37 "Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? 38 'When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? 39 'Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?' 40 "And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.'*

Ephesians 5:30 *For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones.*

1 John 4:20 *If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?*

Why do we love fellow believers? For their own sake? No, because what you do to one of His, you do to Him.

What this teaches us is that the only one we love absolutely is God. But because God loves these other people, we love them too. We love others because God loves them, and we love them for God's sake. That is how we make sure they do not become idols. It is also the safest and best and most faithful way of loving people. If you love people as an end, they are sure to disappoint, or even betray you. If you love people for who they are, they may change, age, weaken, fade, and so will your love for them. But if you love them for God's sake, your love can be a pure, and as faithful as His.

This is why we love the lost. Because John 3:16 tells us that God so loves the world of lost men. This is why we love our neighbour. Because God loves every human created in His image. This is why we love God's creation. Because Proverbs 8 tells us that God rejoices and delights in the work of His hands. This is why we can enjoy and love God's gifts. Because James 1 tells us that every good and perfect gift comes from above. God loves to give them, and loves to delight us; therefore we can love them for His sake.

And so the one another commands of Scripture are ways of loving God, because God loves His people. Evangelising the lost is a way of loving God because God loves the lost. Showing forth God's righteousness in my testimony to my neighbours and colleagues is a way of loving God because God loves my neighbour. Showing mercy on the oppressed, the fatherless, the widow, the disabled is an act of love to God because God loves these people. I can love these because God loves them. Enjoying the gifts of food, family, comforts, beauty and health are part of loving God because God loves giving those gifts.

So let me put your mind at rest. If you are doing something enjoyable that is found within the

bounds of God's law; if you are working in a way which reflects God's image, even if you are not immediately conscious of God in those moments, those are acts of loving God. So long as we do not love the gifts for their own sake; so long as we do not love friends, family, fellow believers, our neighbour, the creation as an end, for their own sake, we can love them because God loves them. Loving something that God loves is part of loving Him.

Now, let me turn this around. If loving God means loving what God loves, it also means, hating what He hates. If God is your absolute love, and you only love something for God's sake, should you love something that God does not love?

Psalm 97:10 *You who love the LORD, hate evil! He preserves the souls of His saints; He delivers them out of the hand of the wicked.*

Hate is the natural and opposite side of loving something. If you love dogs, you will hate cruelty to dogs. If you love peace and quiet, you will hate loud parties next door that go on for hours. If you love babies you will hate abortion. If you love your child, you will hate the cancer that shows up in the blood test. What we love determines what we hate.

Jesus loved the worship of His Father. Therefore He hated people using the Temple to make money and exploit the worshippers of His Father. Jesus loved the truth of the Word. Therefore He hated the additions and perversions that the Pharisees had made of it.

If God loves righteousness, then what does He hate? Sin. A person who loves God is growing in their hatred for what God hates. God hates idolatry. God hates pride. God hates murder. God hates malice and bitterness. God hates fornication. God hates adultery. God hates homosexuality. God hates the profaning and blasphemy of His name. God hates the desecration of His worship, and His day. God hates the abuse of His Word by false teachers. God hates the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and pride of life – that is God hates this world system. God hates unbelief. God hates lying. God hates covetousness. God hates envy. God hates drunkenness. God hates sorcery. God hates contentions. God hates slander and people that sow discord. God hates the perversion of justice, bribery and corruption. God hates gossip and evil speaking. God hates theft. God hates a false balance.

Do you see how a true change of life is not merely changing the actions? It is not even changing the beliefs about these actions. It is changing the loves. It is changing the desires, so that these things become detestable and hateful to you. You flee from them, repent of them, abstain from them, amputate them, make no provision for them, avoid all appearance of them and mortify them. To grow in love for God is to love what He loves and hate what He hates.

That leads us to another important point. Growth means you are growing to love God and the things He loves with a greater love, and growing to hate the things He hates with a greater intensity than ever before. As we grow in love for what God loves and hatred for what He hates, there will be a whole spectrum of things from absolute love on this end, to absolute hatred on the other. And along that spectrum, we will love some things more than other things. We will hate some things more than other things.

I don't like boiled eggs. But my level of dislike for boiled eggs must not be anything like my level of hatred for sexual perversion. I love my dog. But my love for my dog must not be anything like my love for my wife.

What we're saying is this: Once we understand that it all comes down to loving what God loves and

hating what He hates, we should be continually working on a hierarchy of loves. We should be placing our loves in the order God places them. It is what Augustine called 'ordo amoris' – the order of loves. Ordinate affection - love in its right place.

You already know what you are supposed to love most - God. After that, you are aware of things that must be loved more than others, how they should be loved relative to each other – spouse, children, brothers and sisters in Christ, neighbours, enemies, job, health, money, success, the creation.

A godly person, one who loves what God loves, is also learning to what degree he or she should love things. He or she is learning to order his or her loves by God's priorities.

Does God love cats? Yes, I believe He does. Does God love cats more than humans? No, because humans are made in the image of God. Therefore, if I live for cats, and hate mankind, and eventually bequeath my belongings to my cat, I have inordinate affection. I have disordered loves, that is, not loving what God loves *to the degree* that God loves.

Does God love my children? Yes, I believe He does. Does God love my children more than He loves His own glory? No, because His glory is infinitely more valuable and beautiful than my children. Therefore, if I love my children, more than I love God's glory – I have inordinate affection. I do not love what God loves *in the order, to the degree* that God loves.

Does God love me? Yes, I believe He does. Does God love me more than He loves His name? No He doesn't. Therefore, if I live for my own sake, please myself, seek to find my own life – I have disordered loves. I do not love what God loves to the degree He loves.

The same goes for hatred. Does God hate traffic jams as much as He hates grumbling? No. Therefore, if I hate the traffic jam, more than I hate the sin of grumbling, I do not love God as I should, I have disordered hates.

Does God hate rude service more than he hates pride? No, pride tops the list of His hatred nearly every time sins are listed. So if I hate the rude sales assistant more than I hate the pride in my own heart, I have disordered loves.

Does God hate weakness of body more than He hates broken covenants? No. So if I hate the tiredness of my own body after two services more than I hate breaking my membership vows of being faithful to all the services – I have disordered loves. I have placed something above another which I shouldn't.

Does God hate the upsetting of my schedule more than the neglect of spiritual needs? No. So if I hate being interrupted or bothered or having my family off schedule more than I hate the thought of neglecting an urgent spiritual need in the body of Christ – I have disordered loves.

I'm sure by now you're aware that we all have inordinate affection. In fact, I hope by now you're beginning to see that the whole process of sanctification, the whole process of Christ likeness is one of reordering our loves – to love what God loves, hate what He hates, and to love those things in the order, the hierarchy, the degree He loves or hates them.

How will I know what God loves and what He hates? When I wholeheartedly seek the glory of God in the Word of God – the Spirit of God will take the truth and show me the mind of Christ. I will

learn what God loves and what he hates. I will learn the degree to which He loves and hates.

There is one more thought that comes out of this. When we realise that we must place our loves in the order that God places them, it should lead us to realise something else. Along that spectrum of loves, up and down the hierarchy of loves, you, in fact, love in very different ways. It is not simply that you must love something or people more than others, it is that the kind of love, the manner of your love, must be different. Let me illustrate. Bob is a miser and loves his money. He cuts corners and finds out that through cheating someone else, he has just made a huge amount of money. He loves the news and rejoices.

Mike is a soldier and loves his country. He voluntarily joins the army to defend a threat to his nation. In combat, he gives himself entirely and is shot. In his dying moments, he sees that his country's forces have beaten the enemy. He loves the thought of that and rejoices. Are Bob and Mike's loves the same kind of love? The love Bob has for money is an altogether different kind of love that Mike has for country. We use the same word, but they are in fact very different things. The love a child has for his teddy bear is different to the love a grandparent has for that child. The love a botanist has for plants is different to the love a criminal has for getting away with crime. The nature of the thing you love determines the kind of love you give it. You love food differently from how you love your clothes, differently from how you love a sunset, from how you love a painting, a bath, a friend, differently from how you love your job, differently from how you love your spouse, differently from parents, from siblings, from God Himself.

You see, if I were to apply a certain love to the wrong object, I would have a problem. I love my dog. But what if I took that kind of love and applied it to church members? I love my books. What if I were to take my love for my books, and apply it to my son? Pull him out of his room, stare at him for about an hour, and then put him back and close the door?

Some men's love for cars has become a love that doesn't belong to a machine that gets you from A to B. You see people whose love for their dogs or cats goes far beyond the kind of love that belongs to a pet animal. You see people whose love for their job goes way beyond the kind of attention and effort that should be showered on that task.

I think you understand that to grow in love for God is not only to love what He loves to the degree that He loves, but also in the manner that He loves. God loves things perfectly and appropriately for their nature. This is ordinate affection. You are learning to put loves in the right order. You are loving what ought to be loved relative to other things, and you are loving it with a love appropriate for its nature.

Now, when you consider that we must love in a way appropriate to the thing or person we are loving, it raises some important points regarding God. If I must not love my son the way I love my books; if I must not love church members the way I love my dog, can I love God the way anyway I decide? Can I love Him like a girlfriend or a wife? Can I love Him the way I love my son or parents? Can I love Him the way I love food? I must love God according to His nature.

Ask yourself this. Are there words that are inappropriate to say to God? Absolutely. Are there attitudes that are inappropriate to have towards and before God? Absolutely. Are there emotions inappropriate to have before God? Absolutely. Are there gifts I might give Him inappropriate for who He is? Certainly. Could there be poetry inappropriate for God, painting inappropriate for God, music inappropriate for God? Of course.

Ordinate affection, right love is recognising not only the order in which I must love things and the degree to which I love them, but the kind of love I give them in response to their nature.

What kind of love do you give God? Do you give him the romantic love of a boyfriend? No. Do you give him the sentimental love of the movies? No. Do you give Him the playful love of a pet? Do you give Him the selfish love of a glutton? No. Do you give Him the flattering love of an opportunist? No. What kind of love do you give God?

You give Him a reverent love, a submissive love, a loyal love, a humble love, a trusting love, a grateful love.

Hear, O , Israel, Yahweh is our God, Yahweh alone. And you shall love Yahweh your God with all your heart, all your soul and all your might. How? By receiving His Son as Lord and Saviour and then by single-mindedly seeking His glory in the Word by the Spirit. If you deny yourself, take up your cross and lose your life towards the goal of seeking Him for His own sake, God the Spirit will illuminate truth to you, which will change your loves. You will love what God loves, to the degree God loves, and in the manner appropriate to those loves. That's the meaning of godliness. That's the meaning of Christ likeness. That's the meaning of holiness. And that's our created purpose.