

## Loving God Rather Than the World

Let us turn to our Bibles to 2 Timothy 3, 2 Timothy 3 verse 4. Let us listen attentively to the word of God. I'll read the latter part of that verse. Lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God.

Let us pray. In this description, God at the end finishes this list. Paul contrasts, especially this last sin.

Loving an ordinate desire, lusting after pleasures rather than loving being devoted and seeking out God. May this not be the case for anyone here this morning, I pray God Almighty, and certainly any that we love and hold dear in our lives, that we would urge them, as Paul warns here in perilous times, that they are in perilous times, God, for loving pleasures rather than loving God. May we learn this morning in particular by the guidance of your spirit, what it means and how to continue to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength.

Amen. In Paul's list describing the perilous times of his day and ours, I'll remind you again, there was little attention given to the positive part, right? It's a list of bad things. If these things listed in the opening verses are very bad, what are the good things? Part of that is here listed in verse 4. There Paul explicitly contrasts love of pleasure with, or rather than, love of God.

## Loving God in Our Hearts

So let's look at what love of God entails for us, this love of Him. Loving God with our heart and loving God with our lives. It's a description here of the internal and the external part of our living.

Here the internal, the heart, our soul, our mind, our will, our emotion, our conscience, and all that. We have, as you know, different Greek words for the word love. In English, you have love.

And incidentally, in Hebrew, you just have the word love. There's not a bunch of different Hebrew words for it, although you could probably use some synonyms like affection or something, like in English. And so I wanted to define love broadly as a commitment and affection towards someone or something, commitment or affection towards someone or something.

And these different Greek words, therefore, describe and emphasize different parts of this concept of love that we all know intuitively, that we all live and exercise in varying degrees. One word that we know of, agape, A-G-A-P-E, emphasizes the preciousness of the object or the person, the preciousness. A lot of, as it were, shades and different kinds of application, but if you could distill it as B.B. Warfield distills it here, it's simply to preciousness.

Here, the word, as you recall, is philea, as we get from Philadelphia, the city of brotherly love. So that word can be translated love, but it tends to emphasize the pleasantness of the object or the relationship or the person involved. But, interestingly enough, up into this time

of the New Testament, philea was used more often than the other words for what we simply have the word love, which is a very broad concept, just love.

And that's apparently what's going on here. It's used several times, as you recall here, love of themselves, love of money, love of pleasure, that's the same prefix. They're compound words like we have in English compound words.

And what's interesting here with philea is it can be and is, even in New Testament, especially in the noun form, friendship. Friendship is typically used under this particular word to describe that kind of love. John 15.5, for example, no longer, Christ says, do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing, but I called you friends.

Same root word, just the noun form. For all the things that I heard from my father I have made known to you. Or companion, it could be translated.

And so, as I remind us again, love of self, love of money, love of pleasure, it's the same philea there, but of course it's a misuse of that description of the kind of love here. And the word here is phileotheos, that is the compound, you hear theos, you know that word for God, one who loves God or is devoted, you could translate it that way, to him. The Lord, of course, should be the most pleasant to our soul compared to anything else in this world.

And of course, the most precious, agape. Now, I grew up hearing some of these words, usually agape, talking about a lot of agape stuff, as I recall, in my younger years. And the implications seem to be, although I don't think it was intentional, that any other word is inferior.

Maybe that's me. Agape is the epitome of Christian love. This is the kind of love, it's really serious, this is what it really means to be a Christian, agape love.

Maybe I'm the only one who heard that or thought of that. That's just not the case. James 2.23, and the scripture was fulfilled, which says, Abraham believed God and was accounted to him for righteousness, and he was called a God.

There's that word phileia. Now, here we have the verb, Matthew 10.37, he who loves, phileia, father or mother more than me is not worthy of me. So God wants all the love, not just the agape love, is my point.

It's not somehow, as the word itself, superior and showing a more divine way of love, although it may be used that way in some texts. That's true, but the definition per se doesn't necessarily mean it, it's just preciousness. It's just different ways of describing love.

Preciousness or natural love, storgae, we'll talk about that later, and here, pleasantness. The epitome is what I'm highlighting here. And the Lord is our friend who sticks closer than a brother.

Matthew 11.19, the Pharisees complained, look, a glutton and a winebibber, a friend of tax collectors and sinners. There's that word again. Jesus, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.

Oh, the horrors. Of course, if you're, they were, the Pharisees as we know them today, most arrogant and prideful and thought, I got grace of God, but I got more grace than you, better than you. They looked down upon Jesus who indeed did befriend sinners.

Jesus is indeed our friend, not in a chummy sense, I know that's pretty common today, but in the personal sense of a shared relationship that is our salvation. He saves us. He's a friend that sticks closer than a brother.

Proverbs 18. He's a friend that speaks the truth even though it hurts. Proverbs 27.6, faithful are the wounds of a friend, but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful.

This is a glorious truth, brothers and sisters, that we should not ever lose sight of. Jesus is the friend of sinners, of sinners, of course, who are hating their sin and fleeing to him for deliverance. And we're supposed to love our God with the heart.

It just simply says here, the contrast, lovers are pleasure, and it is they are devoted to pleasure instead of being devoted to God. And that devotion, as we know, is supposed to be with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. It was asked of Jesus, and he gives that response.

And it was, of course, part of the Old Testament Deuteronomy. It's there, explicitly there. It's not a new ethic.

Jesus didn't come to bring a new ethic. But to clarify what the Pharisees had shrouded in deceit and confusion and layers and layers of tradition, Jesus is supposed to be the precious center of our lives, the purpose of our existence, whatever word for love we use out of the Greek. Our word here in this text is, of course, used towards God.

And we have elsewhere, I already read Matthew 10.37, where it's contrasted, for example, with the family. He who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me. So, of course, you ought to love your mother and your father.

That's not what he's saying. He's not saying, hate your parents. Just despise them.

But it's a relative contrast, more. If you have a conflict between your parents and God's word, you ought to follow God's word. Even children should be taught that in Christian homes, respectfully, carefully.

If it's a clear black and white matter, you know, parents tell you, go steal. We're a poor family. Go steal from me.

And that godly child will say, I love you, mom and dad, but I can't do that. I love God rather than you, in this case. I still love you, but not as much as I love God.

When there's a conflict, that's when you see where your love is more often than not. Now, there in Matthew 10.37, to give you an idea how the words can shade into each other, because there are basically descriptions of that one concept of love. He says, he who loves father and mother more than me.

And so, in that context of parents, that's clearly a natural context. There's another word for natural that emphasizes the natural affection that we have for parents, kinfolk, and people close to us, or even our nation, and that's storge. You've heard that before.

It's actually in our English language, although it's considered archaic now. Storge. And so, phileia here is used in Matthew 10.37, he who loves father and mother, obviously bringing in the idea of natural affections on top of a pleasantness towards your parents, a love of pleasure, because you have a pleasant time, you love them, they're pleasant in your eyes.

Not pleasant necessarily in the sense of, I'm having a grand old time with my parents all the time, but you have this love towards them. Now, loving God, of course, involves all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and the best rubric, I believe, for explaining that is the Ten Commandments, because God gave us the Ten Commandments, not just to say, hey, here's a way to save yourself, but rather, here's a way to show love to what? God and your neighbor. Two greatest commandments.

That is the summary of the Ten Commandments. The first four commandments, the first table of the law, as we describe it there, those first four commandments are about God and God alone. So, from that rubric, we can have a better understanding, I hope, and a better reminder and encouragement for us to continue on, to take seriously what it means to be a lover of God, rather than, to flip the verse the other way, a lover of pleasure, or devoted to pleasures of this world we find ourselves in.

And so, the first commandment, you shall have no other gods before me, has built into it the command to love him with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. Now, how is that? Well, first of all, as we know, not every verse can say everything at once. Secondly, when we understand the nature of the giving of the Ten Commandments as a summary of God's law, because there are lots of other passages that give other details of other laws, or that is, requirements of holy living, not explicitly in the Ten Commandments.

Is God confused? Of course not. He gave it as a summary. He understood that, and the Jews understood that back then.

It's simply a summary. Now, since our Lord has not a body like a man, God does not have a body, how are you supposed to have no other gods before me? What does that mean? Why is He speaking this way? Why does God use this language? No other gods physically before Him? Of course it can't be physical, not in the sense of, well, hey, this guy's blocking my view of God. That's totally not what He means.

You shall have no other gods before me. It's a way of speaking, right? The Jews, in their Hebraic language, often use concrete imagery to explain the eternal, and that's one way of doing it. It's before me, physical sense, but obviously He means in a moral sense, before your soul, in the eyes of your heart.

No gods blocking your heart, false gods blocking your view of the divine, your view by faith and faith alone. That's what He's referring to. They know they can't see God.

He spends a lot of time in Deuteronomy, like in chapter 4, verse after verse saying, you didn't see this, you didn't see that, you can't make these things. He says, you never saw me. I don't have a body.

And that necessarily means in fulfillment of these commandments, it begins with what? The part, we don't have a body either, our soul. We have a body, but the part that doesn't have a body, our soul doesn't have a body. Our soul is with a body.

It's a body-soul complex, as we say. They go together. But first and foremost, we're supposed to honor and love God with all our hearts, our soul, our mind, and our strength, beginning in our soul.

As Jesus said, we're supposed to worship Him in spirit and in truth. That's the primary issue here and the primary focus of the first commandment. It's about our hearts, and it has to be because it's about God, and God is a spirit, and we have a spirit as well, an analogy to Him.

So, He should be the only God, no other God before our heart, our soul, our commitment, and we should trust and therefore rely upon Him. He is the chief end of man. That's the point of the first commandment.

It's put in a negative form, of course. Thou shalt not have others what be a chief end between me and you. It's a block, and here in this passage, these lovers of pleasure have these pleasures, the things of this world, money, prestige, influence, family, whatever it is, between them and God, rather than being devoted to God.

There's that contrast. So, you have an absolute sense, of course, unbelievers, atheists, they have a completely other God altogether. The assumption here, of course, in the Ten Commandments, and given the Ten Commandments, is this is to God's people, and I'm your God, and you should have no other gods between me and you.

You can't divide your allegiance. The pagan doesn't have a divided allegiance. He's not part of the church of God at all.

Atheists clearly don't have a divided allegiance. They don't believe in any God. At least they say that with their mouth.

And so, that's what's going on here in the first commandment. Deuteronomy 6.5 is one of the later passages after Deuteronomy 4, expressing this implied part of the first commandment. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.

And the descriptions there, heart, soul, those are clearly immaterial, spiritual, non-material, non-physical. And so, the first commandment is primarily about the heart. Not exclusively, but primarily about the heart.

And so, all the powers of the soul are applied, therefore, in the first commandment. Deuteronomy 6.5 unpacks the first commandment, and fits clearly under the first

commandment. Our mind, our will, our emotions, and all that we have within us should have as a chief end, God.

We should therefore have joy, praise, thanksgiving offered to him and him alone, and have no other object to offer these things to. That's the first commandment. And that's how we can love God rather than love the pleasures of this world, putting him first.

The ways to do this, some practical ways, things that, of course, we know, and I encourage you to keep doing it. These are the methods and the tools God has given us to fulfill the first commandment, as well as the other ones, to be sure. The first and great commandment here to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength is both personal and public.

The personal part of keeping that love alive, of having Christ and our God and Savior above, being devoted to them as we are devoted to the best friend of our existence, which is Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. Personal, prayer life, daily talking to the Lord, asking for help, encouraging, asking for encouragement, and giving our thanksgiving to him. Thank you, Lord, that I have another day to honor you, that you've given me my family, that you've given me the breath that I breathe right here and now.

Bible reading, of course, and meditation, not just how many verses can I read real quick in one sitting, but think a little bit about what you're reading and what it means. You can read larger sections, smaller sections, it doesn't matter whatever works in your schedule. You're not more holy or godly otherwise.

That's mostly a matter of the heart. Are you desiring and striving towards learning more and understanding more, and of course, applying it to ourselves and to others around us for their good and not out of pride. A ready heart of repentance, which can come out of Bible reading, especially if you go through the law parts of the Bible.

Humility in the fruit of the Spirit, exercise day by day. God has given us these things by his Spirit within us, and we must exercise them. The more you exercise them, the more they grow sometimes.

Of course, Providence comes along if you get a little too prideful in exercising the fruit of the Spirit, and it whacks you across the forehead, and you get a little more humble, and you slow down, but exercise that we must. We don't just sit there and wait for it to grow somehow. You love more by exercising more love.

Isn't that interesting? You think about ways of how you can be helpful to your family, to your children, to your friends, to your church, and you do it, and in the doing, sometimes it grows your love even more. All this, of course, takes time. It takes sometimes quiet reflection, times of peace, and that's why often the church has encouraged us to have our own study time, our own certainly family worship time together.

Publicly, as you know, the means of grace that God has given us, these instruments or ordinances is the language we use in our confession, for example. He has given us these things that we may grow and become more like him, to love him more with our heart and

soul. God uses in these physical things, like reading the Bible, right, that's our mind, our eyes, these are physical activities that you can describe by science and mathematics.

In a way, you can't describe the soul. To help the soul. God gave us ordinances to help the soul.

One of the problems we have in the American scene, you need to be aware of, not because I'm interested in finding more critiques, but to help you help those around you who don't have a clear grasp of these things. Typically, they're not reformed, not always, but they frown upon the physical ordinances that God has given us. The structure of a church where you have leadership and deacons and elders and pastors preaching and gathering together.

I just meet God on my Bible on Sunday up in the mountains. But God gave you a day, in fact. It's not your day.

He gave you places to worship. Wherever God's people gather his people, wherever God's name is called by his people and the leadership of his people and formal public worship, forsake not the assembling of yourselves. These are physical acts.

You actually get together and sit there and just I'm meditating, it's my soul and God. It's God in you and your body as well. And he owns your body and he tells you what to do with your body.

And that includes using the ordinances, the physical things that he's granted us in the church. So the means of grace in particular there to strengthen and reinforce our weak faith. Baptism and Lord's Supper stand out in their physicality.

Minnesota's preaching, don't forget, I'm opening my mouth and sounds are bouncing off your ear. That's a physical act. To give public praise and honor to God in prayer and singing and of course preaching which points to Christ and his law and his grace.

Above all, the mercy is found in him. Call you back to Jesus to direct our lives, to trust him every day, day by day. We need this.

We need this together. It's not just me and my Bible. And that's the advantage and the strength of the public ordinances that God has given us.

## **Loving God with Our Lives**

Secondly, loving God with our lives. So this bleeds into the second point. By lives, I mean mostly our outward actions.

First, establish. Do you repent of your sins? Do you trust in Jesus to save you and bring you to heaven and not your own good works? That's the first point. That's the heart matter.

Do you love with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength? All kinds of loves, however you want to describe those loves. And here, loving God with our lives, with our actions. Love and

actions, right? Because some Christians are tempted, on the other hand, to feel especially holy but not really doing anything.

I love God. Trust me. I'm meditating upon him.

I'm reading his Bible day in, day out. Okay, great. Now what are you doing? What do I need to do anything for? Why aren't you part of the church? Why do I need to be part of the church? So you see the kind of go hand in hand in the American experience, at least as I've seen it.

Why do I need the church? Why do I need to hear preaching? Why don't I need to be under the leadership of a church at all? It's just a man thing. I have me, my God. I have my heart.

I'm pure. I've got the first commandment. What more do I need? The rest of the commandments would deal with what? External things, one another, human beings, and the church of God.

So it's not enough just to pray or even to attend a church. Some people go a little further, perhaps, and that's a good thing. They go to church, but they do nothing else for the kingdom of God.

Of course, it's first your family, your close friends, and the church and community, but we are called, nevertheless, in these things to love God through action. But specifically here, the other three commandments with respect to action. Christ tells us, if you love me, keep my commandments, both externally and internally.

The commandments direct and set boundaries for our holiness, and not just upon our hearts, but our actions of thought, word, and deed. And so the first table of the law, as I mentioned before, is about honoring God, loving God, and showing us how we can be devoted to him, rather than the pleasures of the world. By virtue of being made in his image, although fallen, we can and do.

And we have a body, and we use it for his glory. First, we talked there about the heart, mind, will, and emotions, and now here, the outward parts of loving God through second commandment, pure worship. Loving God through public praise of his name, although it could be private or familial worship as well.

The second commandment isn't just about the gathering publicly of God's people like we are here right now, but even in your family devotions, you can't violate the second commandment. It's not like, oh, I can do images at home, but not worship. It covers both, right? It covers both.

Wherever you are, wherever you have God before your thought immediately, you think of him in good thoughts, you think of him in pure thoughts, that's worshipping of him and honoring him. And he did this, of course, by the light of nature, which is especially described by our systematicians as being under the first commandment, that we know he's eternal and invisible, I highlighted that, and therefore he should be worshiped primarily with our

heart. But here, the Bible, of course, gives us particulars, these fall under the second commandment, these physical things like the sacraments.

You shouldn't come to God with any way you feel like, with any image you feel like, but what he demands and calls of us. And so we have, for example, because it does emphasize the image there in the second commandment, right? It's kind of interesting. It doesn't say only the image, right? There's shorthand for a lot of other things with respect to that moral commandment, but we read that the ark set there in the temple included angel wings covering over it.

It doesn't give a lot of details. It's there in Exodus 25. You could not do that.

Morally, you're not allowed to make a special box and carve special things on it and put special things inside it like Aaron's rod in the ark there of the covenant with the angel wings and all that. You couldn't do any of that on your own and say this is an act of worshiping God and honoring him unless he told you to do it. That's the emphasis there of the second commandment.

Okay, just come along and do all these things that you feel like and say, I'm honoring God now. I'm worshiping him with some special box. And so this way, not only the first commandment, but the second commandment teaches us how to express our love to God almighty, to love him rather than love the world by fulfilling and following the second commandment.

The third thing, love God through honoring his things. So the third commandment, if the first two commandments is God, God alone, and thinking in honoring God, we call it worship, either formal public worship or otherwise is still worship, is the second commandment. The third commandment are things related to God more immediately.

And we know that because the commandment is you shall not take what? The name of the Lord your God in vain. Is God concerned about his name? Yes. By name, we typically think of at least today reputation.

That's part of it. But it's shorthand for all the things related to God that he put his name on like the church. And so if you desecrate the church of God, I don't mean the physical church, but lying and attack the church and attack God's people and doctrine, you're breaking the third commandment because it's about God.

May not always be immediately with respect to him. That's the first two commandments. This is the things that he has put his name upon.

And so that often is under the category of his word and his works. Works of creation, of providence, of redemption, of course, and his word, the Holy Bible. Misuse of the Bible is a violation of the third commandment.

Because he what? Put his name on it. This is mine. In a way, no other book is his.

Because you can say if you want to be clever and cute, right? Well, God's in charge of all things providentially. He made all the books right, but he didn't put his imprimatur or his authority or name on it the way he does on the Bible, right? We all know this. That's what the third commandment is about.

That's you and your church and the church of God and his teaching. So we shouldn't use or talk about the things that are his in a light way like his name, let alone his name, his honor, his teachings, his doctrines to trivialize his works of redemption. And thus we show and exercise love and devotion to him rather than to the world.

And then fourthly, loving God through honoring his day. The fourth commandment is a time for formal public worship, especially, which is regulated, of course, by the first and second commandment. And the second commandment here is vividly showing our commitment to him.

The world wants us, the world, excuse me, wants us to think more of them and their wants. Title, loving God rather than the world. I use the world, remember, as a broad category to include loving yourself, loving money, loving the pleasures of the world, everything here under this category.

They want to distract you. One way they do it here today, of course, is on the Lord's day. They want you to pay attention to them and do their things on his day.

Entertainment distractions, of course, are one of the biggest things, sadly enough. But taking the Lord's day as his day, to show love to him, devotion to him rather than the world is the tool he has given us to help us to grow and to be more like him. And then lastly, love God through loving our neighbor.

So the first four commandments are clearly about loving God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. They are given to us so that we can have a metric, as it were. I guess maybe it's a crass word, but to help us to understand better what does it look like to be devoted to God, to be a lover of him rather than pleasures of this world.

And the first four commandments say, this is how you do it. This helps you. And the more you exercise and fulfill these commandments, the greater your love will grow as a general rule.

But also the second table of the law, with the last six commandments, they're about your neighbor. How's that relevant to God? Because God says, if you love me, you will what? Keep my commandments. And that's not just the first four.

It also includes the other six. Titus 3.15. We read there at the end of his letter, and we'll get there eventually. We're in 2 Timothy, right? I'm going to hit Titus next.

In Titus 3.15, Paul writes, all who are with me greet you. Typical greeting. Greet those who love us in the faith.

You already know where that word is, right? It's philea. The friendship or pleasantness, the companionship. You'll love us in the faith.

Grace be with you. So there you go again. Love doesn't have to be agape all the time.

That's a special super holy love. But here philea is used as well for each of us. Now we're supposed to have that kind of love, as I read in Matthew 11, towards God more than your family.

And so here again, you should love the saints, but not as much as you love God. It's as simple as that. Now, loving the Lord more than loving the world is the first and foremost giving of our hearts to the Lord God Almighty.

We must be born again with repentant heart and trust in Him. May the Spirit, I pray, be pleased to grant all of us more love of God and a desire and a devotion to Him rather than the pleasures of this world. Amen.

Let us pray. Father God, our Savior, help us to have the proper conviction, if needed, and encouragement as well that we are doing the right thing by being here as your people to hear your word and to be guided with the encouraging admonition and encouragement, in fact, not just the negative, but the positive, God, that you are with us. You've given us your spirit so that we can avoid the perilous times of living a life of pleasure and all the dangers, as we heard last week, that leads to.

But rather, God, we pray for the blessings of devotion to you here rather than pleasures of the world. Be with us, we pray, God Almighty, that this would be true for all of us. By the blood of Christ we pray.

Amen.