

# LOVE THE LORD

How many times have you thought, "This would be a pretty nice place to live if it weren't for the people." I've heard people making statements such as, "We can solve the technical problems, it's the people problems that take all the time." It doesn't take long for a person to realize that *relationships* are what life is all about. Just think how much more we could get done and how much better we could make the world if everyone knew how to properly handle relationships. One of the main reasons relationships are not what they ought to be is that people are typically totally self centered. People are led to believe that it is a dog-eat-dog world and that you have to watch out for Number One. If one person takes that attitude, then others will see what's happening and they will start "protecting" themselves. Pretty soon, it does become a dog-eat-dog world, but it doesn't have to be that way. If we focus on ourselves and our resources, then we will see a finite and limited world. Life is then approached as a "zero-sum" game. That is, if you win, then I lose. Or if I win, you lose.

There is a better way. Normally, once the main problem is recognized, then a solution can be found. If the main problem is that we are self-centered and focused on ourselves, then the solution would seem to lie in changing the focus. One solution is to shift the focus away from ourselves to others. We will be outward looking and think about the effect our actions will have on others. We will be careful to be last in line and to make sure that everyone else has enough before we can enjoy what life offers. While this is a better approach and leads to more harmony, it is still plagued with limitations. We may look to others and we may pool our resources but there are still limitations. It is still a zero-sum game, but now we have a bigger pie to divide up. We might describe this as being "community centered" rather than "self centered." We can recognize this approach by the name "communism." We know that the experiment of Marx and Lenin just didn't work.

There is a best way, a way that overcomes the problems of self centeredness and community centeredness. Both are plagued by limitations. If we are to eliminate limitations, then we must carefully choose our focus to be on the infinite. The obvious answer is that we are to focus on God. If we are God centered, then our focus will be on the Source of supply and not on the limitations of our own finiteness. If we go to a dinner and we see that there is ten times as much food as the people can possibly eat, then there is no reason to try to be first in line so that you will not be left out as a self-centered person might do. Also, there is no reason to be last in line as a community-centered person might do. We can approach life naturally and enjoy what is there without worry. If our relationship with God is right, then all the other relationships will fall in line. If we are trusting Him, then we don't have to worry about getting ahead of everyone else which leads to people not trusting each other. The sense of caring for each other will be a natural result that flow out of the love we know that God has for us. I think this is why the first and greatest commandment is that we are to "Love the Lord with all our being."

After spending 40 years in the wilderness, the Israelites were about ready to move into the land God had promised to their father Abraham. Moses was still their leader and he reminded the people of God's requirements for them to be successful in the land they were about to possess. He started out by repeating the Ten Commandments for them. He gave additional explanation regarding these commandments and why they should observe them.

**DEUTERONOMY 6:1-3** Why did God give us the Ten Commandments? Simple answer: That we might do them. Why does God want us to do them? Does it do anything for God? It is not for God's good, but for our own good that He wants us to carry out His statutes and judgments. It may come as a surprise to people that God really cares about their good. Why would He care? Because He

loves us. If God did not love us, then He could simply let us learn everything the hard way. We wouldn't do that with our children. We would not let them learn the truth that they should not play in the street by letting them experience being hit by a car. Why? Because we love them. We want what is best for them.

We can see this same caring in that God knew that their being able to continually abide in the land and to live long lives as individuals was going to depend on their doing what He said. There was a good chance that they did not always see the reason for certain commandments. Moses appealed to the people to obey out of reverence and awe of the power of God. Little children may not understand why they should not play in the street, nevertheless, we still require them to obey and they do because of respect for their parents.

God also promised them prosperity to go along with the long life if they would hear and do what He said. And what God said when He gave the Ten Commandments started with a relationship with Him. He requires a Number One position in our lives.

**DEUTERONOMY 6:4-5** Verses four through nine are probably the most significant verses for all of Israel. This passage is referred to as the *shema* which is the Hebrew word for "hear." The fourth verse ["Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God is one Lord."] possibly has more than one meaning. It has been variously interpreted to mean that the God of Israel was different from the gods of the Canaanites in that they worshiped multiple deities. Another meaning is that the God of Israel is the ONLY true God. Verse four would then read "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God is *the one and only* Lord." This makes a nice fit with the first of the Ten Commandments in which they were to have no other gods before God. The consequences of there being only one true God is that our devotion must be focused first and foremost on Him. We saw earlier how important relationships are and this is the ultimate relationship. Being rightly related to God is the key to success.

Making that relationship work requires that we hear what God says to us in His word.

We hear so that we can incorporate the message and the meaning into the milieu of our lives. God's word is to the background and foundation for all of life and we will want to have it that way if we really love the Lord.

**DEUTERONOMY 6:6-9** If we are to love God with all our being, then that love has to find expression. How do we express our love to God? Jesus told His disciples, "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments." How can we keep His commandments if we don't know what they are? To just have a copy of the Ten Commandments or even to memorize them is not enough. We can own several copies of the Bible and we may have memorized many verse; but, if we are going to be what God expects of us, then we must put His commands into our hearts. That is, they are to become a part of who we are. To accomplish this objective, people need to have the knowledge of God and His commands interwoven into their lives. Everything we do is to be influenced by our knowledge of God and what He expects. Whether it is teaching our children, preparing a meal, taking a trip or anything else, we are to incorporate the word of God in those activities. The way we dress and the appearance of our homes should also be testimony to our relationship with God and a reminder to ourselves of who we are.

We are not to consider just ourselves but need to pass along God's ways and His values to our children. Moses's advice was to diligently teach them to their children. The NIV says "impress them on your children." Children are impressionable and the earlier we start teaching the truth to them to easier it is for them to learn. If they see that God's word makes a difference in your lives then that will make a significant impression on them rather than just telling what the Bible says.

We can use reminders to help us keep the word of God in the forefront of our thinking. Writing them on the door post and gates may not fit with the latest fad in decorating, but the way we decorate our homes can witness to others and serve as a reminder to ourselves of the kind of relationship we must have with the One True God.