

Do you “LOVE MUCH”?



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All scriptures are NKJV unless noted otherwise.

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Summary: Jesus spoke of a certain woman who “loved much” – and yet she was a terrible sinner. This message makes sense of what seems a contradiction with other scriptures. Do YOU “love much” – or just love a little. Jesus defined both words. It’s crucial to understand.

There are many songs which are sung in church about “Oh, how I love Jesus” and others like it. Of course *most* Christians would profess to loving God. But do you *really*, and what is **one of the biggest indicators** according to Jesus that you have great love for God and Jesus? And, an indicator also of your great love for fellow men and women?

Of course you probably know scripture is clear that loving God is NOT just a matter of telling God we love him. The words have to be matched by actions and a way of life that prove our love for Him. So many speak of how they “love the Lord” and ask others if they love the Lord. It’s more, much more than that, as we’ll see. Jesus in one story in Luke 7 actually speaks of a terrible sinner as “loving much” in her relationship with God. Seems a paradox.

There are numerous verses that say we prove our love for God by obeying Him and keeping his commandments. So let’s first look at a couple of those before focusing on the focus of this message today -- how we grow into actually what Jesus calls “loving much”, the focus of this message today.

Jesus doesn’t mince his words. He gets right to the clear point:

John 14:15

"If you LOVE Me, keep My commandments."

How are we doing so far? Do our lives reveal we love God? Look at your life in this past week. Do we really follow all Christ’s commands and instructions? One of Messiah’s commands is to seek FIRST the kingdom of heaven and

God's righteousness (Matt 6:33). How has your prayer life been? Do you skip some days spending no time talking with your Father and Savior? Do you daily spend time in God's word?

Have you been lusting at all, or gossiping, or have you told any lies – the half-truths, the “little white lies”? They're still lies.

Are you following Jesus' commands/teachings on how to resolve issues with others – by going FIRST to that offending person alone, just you and he (Matt 18:15-17) alone, no one else. But what do we do? Many will gossip instead and speak evil of that offending brother.

Are we following what the Bible commands us -- to “honor all” – especially the elders and pastors God has placed over us? But some will – instead – bad-mouth the elder and refuse to welcome them in the love of God. I'll give a full sermon soon on HONOR ALL. Many of God's people are not obeying this command.

Are you **zealous** for the things of God – or more like a lukewarm Laodicean, whom Jesus says nauseates him and makes him want to spit them out of his mouth (Revelation 3:) He commands us to repent when we see our lukewarmness and when we don't see ourselves the way HE sees us.

All of these examples and many more I can give – are all commandments of God, besides The Ten we think of, when we say “God's commandments”. The entire Bible includes God's commandments. When God tells us to do something, I take that as one of His commands; not just the big Ten.

It's not enough to just know the commandments, but we must KEEP them. That includes walking as Jesus walked as 1 John 2 says. But as we continue looking at this, **remember keeping God's way must never become mechanical, or routine**. God wants deep feeling with our obedience as well, as you'll see.

And I remind you – the Commandments include the 7th day sabbath.

1 John 2:3-6 NASU

“By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. 4 The one who says, “I have come to know Him,” and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; 5 but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him: 6 the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked.”

John 14:21

“He who has My commandments and *keeps them*, it is HE who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and **manifest [reveal, show] Myself to him.”**

When Jesus realizes how much we love HIM and our Father, He says He reveals himself to us more. Maybe not visually – but in understanding the Bible, in answered prayers, in giving us peace in our storms of life. So have and KEEP God’s commandments. It really is to our benefit.

1 John 5:2-3

“By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments. **3 For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments.** And His commandments are not burdensome.”

In fact, ALL of God’s commandments can be summed up in one word – LOVE. They’re all intended for showing love. Love for God (the first 4 commandments including keeping the seventh day sabbath) and the last 6, love for mankind.

But what about those who have failed to keep the commandments?

But now what about all those who really struggle to keep God’s commands? They covet, they lust, they hate some people, they lie, they steal and so on... can they EVER be shown that they in fact can love God, and love him a LOT? It almost seems a contradiction in terms, doesn’t it?

SO THAT will be my focus that might intrigue some of you – how someone NOT keeping the commandments, but does something important, can be seen as “loving much”.

But before that, let me say one more thing: We can’t claim to love God simply because we sing how much you love Jesus, or use his name in your prayers and activities. It still comes down to the way we LIVE – in surrender to God, in obedience to his commands, and in seeking God’s will in everything we do.

If you really love God, your faith will give you PEACE in the storms of life you face. And certainly, once God has answered your prayers –REJOICE. Don’t continue in shock or fear over trials you thought were about to smack you hard in the face – but didn’t, for God resolved them.

(Example of pastor whose teens/young adult children was being carried out to sea by a strong rip current. It panicked him and the rest of us watching, as we prayed fervently for their lives, their safety and rescue. But it looked really bad for a while. But the episode so traumatized him, that he resigned from active ministry. But rather than continue to be traumatized, he should have been singing praises of joy to God – and moving on).

Take a look at these scriptures. Jesus actually says he never even KNEW some of these people who do all sorts of things in HIS name!

Matthew 7:21-23

"NOT everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, *but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.* 22 Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?'

23 And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'

So give your expressions of love for God some careful thought. Are you matching your expressions of love with actions of love and obedience and lawfulness instead of lawlessness? Be careful, as so many churches teach God's law, including His ten commandments, have all been done away with.

BUT WHAT IF you have not been obedient to the commandments?

Now here's where the paradox can come in. I'm making a major shift in our discussion right now, a very crucial shift.

CAN SOMEONE who frequently sins – who breaks ALL God's commandments and has been living a life of SIN, like maybe a prostitute or a man who has sexually assaulted various ones in the past – can someone like that ever come to really LOVE GOD? Could God see someone like that as deeply loving him even MORE than those who were always obedient? Here's a remarkable story of that very thing happening.

Luke 7:36-50

Then one of the Pharisees asked Him to eat with him. And He went to the Pharisee's house, and sat down to eat.

37 And behold, a woman in the city who was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at the table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of fragrant oil, 38 and stood at His feet behind Him weeping; and she began to wash His feet with her tears, and wiped them

with the hair of her head; and she kissed His feet and anointed them with the fragrant oil.

39 Now when the Pharisee who had invited Him saw this, he spoke to himself, saying, "This Man, if He were a prophet, would know who and what manner of woman this is who is touching Him, for she is a sinner."

40 And Jesus answered and said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." So he said, "Teacher, say it."

41 "There was a certain creditor who had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. [a Denari was a coin worth a day's wages. So 500 denarii would be like 1.5 year's wages] 42 And when they had nothing with which to repay, **he freely forgave them both. Tell Me, therefore, which of them will love him more?"**

43 Simon answered and said, "I suppose the one whom he forgave more." [Jesus never minced his words but spoke frankly, directly]

And He said to him, "You have rightly judged." 44 Then He turned to the woman and said **to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave Me no water for My feet, but she has washed My feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head. 45 You gave Me no kiss, but this woman has not ceased to kiss My feet since the time I came in. 46 You did not anoint My head with oil, but this woman has anointed My feet with fragrant oil.**

47 Therefore I say to you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, FOR she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little."

48 Then He said to her, "Your sins are forgiven."

49 And those who sat at the table with Him began to say to themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?"

50 Then He said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you. Go in peace."

By saying, "*To whom little is forgiven, the same loves little,*" Jesus is not implying that Simon has no sins. Rather, **Simon's lack of love shows that he didn't recognize the seriousness of his OWN sins and the need for God's forgiveness. Many fall into this trip.**

Those who think they are righteous (or less sinful), or more righteous than others, also tend to love God AND OTHERS less because they don't SEE, or feel or realize the weight of THEIR OWN SINS and how much God has to forgive them. Let that sink in. Let me repeat it.

Apostle Paul saw the weight of the sins he had committed against God's people and it kept him humble. And made him LOVE MUCH. The Apostle Paul – though a strong Pharisee before he was called – saw himself as the worst sinner ever, Chief Sinner, and less than any other apostles. We must not take forgiveness lightly. It's so precious.

1 Corinthians 15:9 – “I am least of all the apostles, unworthy to be called apostle.”

Ephesians 3:8 – am the least of all the saints,...

1 Timothy 1:12-16

“And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry, 13 although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief.

14 And the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant, with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. 15 This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am CHIEF.

16 However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life.”

NONE of us can perfectly keep the law of God and ALL the commands of Jesus, that go way beyond the Big Ten Commandments. NONE of us can. And so there's NO GROUNDS to be feeling better than anyone else. What we must ALL come to – is to see our own unrighteousness and come in deep repentance before God asking for His total forgiveness.

IF we do repent as deeply as the sinful woman weeping before Jesus with tears and using her flask of fragrant oil, we'll be far less critical of others' lives and we find far less fault with others. At that point, we will be doing what Jesus called “Loving much” -- loving GOD deeply loving others much better too because we see we're not any better than the others.

We all pray, daily, “Forgive US our debts AS WE forgive those indebted to us, as we forgive our debtors”. We so deeply appreciate God's love in our deep sorrowful repentance that he sees that as loving much – in spite of our previous terrible sins that God is now forgiving.

You might recall the parable of the Pharisee and the sinful tax collector who went to the temple compound to pray. **Which one did GOD declare to be righteous – which is what “justified” means?**

Luke 18:9-14

“Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: 10 "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.

11 The Pharisee stood and **prayed thus with himself**, 'God, I thank You **that I am not like other men** – extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. 12 I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.'

13 And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, '**God, be merciful to me a sinner!**' 14 I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

In Luke 15, we have another parable that makes this point: the parable of the Prodigal son. The *faithful* son, who stayed home and worked the farm and who did NOT go squander the father's inheritance – sure, that was good, but he was critical of his sinful brother, since the older son could not see any fault in his own life. Sure, he was not so obviously bad as his prodigal brother – but still the older son was also imperfect. Being so critical of his wasteful brother who had returned in deep repentance and humility was itself a deep flaw in the older brother. Only JESUS was perfect.

But Jesus was so willing to forgive – even while on the cross, as he died for those trying to kill him and for ALL humans, imperfect as we are. “Father, forgive them” was uttered before any evidence that any of his accusers had repented yet.

So one big point of this sermon is this: I must, YOU must, we all must stop being so CRITICAL of other brethren, leaders, and one another.

Quit being like the Pharisee hosting Jesus – “If he was really a prophet, he'd know what kind of sinner this woman is”. He couldn't see himself and his own sins. Quit being like the faithful son who could not rejoice in his prodigal brother's repentance and did not wish to go be part of the welcoming dinner.

We ALL have so much to learn on this.

- Forgiveness is not just a transaction where our sins are erased – but God's forgiveness of YOU, of ME, and everyone is meant to STIR UP LOVE FOR GOD as well as for other persons being forgiven.
- *Love and gratitude should flow mightily, naturally, from a heart that sees how much we ourselves have been forgiven.*

This is “LOVING MUCH”, even after MUCH SIN and DISOBEDIENCE have happened – *when a person deeply repents, like that woman washing Jesus' feet with her tears in her deep repentance. Like the Tax collector in the temple.*

Though loving God is defined as keeping His commandments, even when we haven't kept and obeyed all the commandments – we can still show profound love by showing how grateful we are for God's forgiveness as the sinful woman did, as the prodigal son did, as the tax collector praying in the temple did. And it stirs us to better come see our own selves better.

*So Jesus said, **Luke 7:47***

“Therefore I say to you, her sins, which ARE many, are forgiven, FOR she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little.”

48 Then He said to her, "Your sins are forgiven."

Let me say it again this way: when we actually SEE the depth of God's grace and favor on ourselves and in future sinners who repent – our hearts should more naturally be moved to love more deeply God and Jesus – as well as one another more deeply as well. That's “Loving much” as Jesus called it.

In saying, "her sins, which are many, are forgiven, FOR she loved much," Jesus is recognizing that her actions reflect a HEART that understands the magnitude of her OWN forgiveness. Her repentance and subsequent love she showed, demonstrate that she has received God's mercy, and it's a response that shows the depth of her transformation. Please let that sink in.

Jesus is affirming that those who are truly forgiven will respond with great love because they understand how MUCH they've been forgiven. This is not to say that forgiveness depends on our love, but that love for GOD and one another is the natural response to receiving forgiveness WHEN we really understand it.

*WE also must show more FEELING and HEART-FELT gratitude when we receive God's mercy and not make repentance just a rote action. **And when***

we sin – we should feel it deeply, and be like the publican in the temple, “Forgive me O God, a SINNER”. And we should feel the repentance deeply as the prodigal did – “Father, I’m no longer WORTHY to be called your son, so may I just be like a hired hand.”

“Loving much” says we should also feel DEEPLY the JOY of seeing others also forgiven. I’m still having to learn this better too. I hope you’re seeing it better now too.

Something that makes it easier to forgive yourself

One more quick point: when a person has committed some very, very evil sins – as many of us have – it’s sometimes hard to fully forgive yourself. When your sins have hurt so many, so badly, we sometimes remain in the “feeling awful, unworthy of God’s forgiveness” frame of mind.

We KNOW God says he will forgive, but it’s much harder to accept God has truly forgiven us when we see God’s children, our brethren, refusing to really let our sins be washed away by God and left in the past.

Repentant sinners will find it so much easier to move on with their new creation life in Christ when all the brethren LET them move on, by forgiving them fully and accepting them back into fellowship with loads of love.

That’s what 2 Cor. 2 was all about. Be sure to read it carefully. Paul, who had acknowledged how sinful a particular sinner was, whom they had disfellowshipped in **1 Cor. 5**, now had to show the Corinthians it was time to lovingly welcome him back into their fellowship and demonstrate the deep love of God to him.

There are so many who feel they can’t be a part of any congregation because those who know of their past sins won’t LET them come back into fellowship and be friends again. Don’t YOU ever be part of that sentiment.

In the song, “Tie a Yellow ribbon around the old oak tree” – we see this play out. The man had been in jail for several years and was hoping his wife would be happy for him to come back home but he didn’t know for sure. What did he say in the song? Let me read the words as it connects the forgiveness from others with being able to forgive one’s self so beautifully.

*“I’m coming home, I’ve done my time
Now I’ve got to know what is and isn’t mine*

*If you received my letter telling you I'd soon be free,
Then you know just what to do if ... if you still want me.
If...you still want me.*

*CHORUS: Just tie a yellow ribbon round the old oak tree
It's been three long years, do you still want me?
If I don't see a ribbon round the old oak tree
I'll just stay on the buss, forget about us, and put the blame on me,
If I don't see a yellow ribbon round the old oak tree.*

*Bus driver please look for me,
cuz I couldn't bear to see what I might see
I'm really still in prison and my love she holds the key
A simple yellow ribbon's all I need to set me free
I wrote and told her please.*

(CHORUS Again.)

*Now the whole dang bus is cheering... and I can't believe I see
A hundred yellow ribbons round that old oak tree."*

I hope my message today helps us all extend God's love and forgiveness first to OURSELVES for all our own sins as we deeply feel our repentance and turn around to be a true obedient child of God. And then to extend that same love to all who have repented, and **to all who have "LOVED MUCH" and came to see the enormity of their sin.** Let's love much also by opening the door widely to them coming back into fellowship, like the prodigal son and the others we talked about.

Closing prayer.