

A call to relationship with God

We are called to follow Jesus. However following someone doesn't automatically mean you have a relationship with that person. Following someone has become a very loose term as you can follow someone on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and other social media without any inkling of a relationship between you at all. When Jesus calls us to follow him he calls us into a relationship with God. What does that relationship look like as even relationships are vast and diverse depending on whom you're relating to? There are husband-wife, parent-child, and employer-employee relationships besides many others.

Matthew 22: 34 – 40

1) Christianity: legal or relationship?

- The Sadducees and Pharisees, both legalistic Jewish sects, questioned Jesus, not because they really wanted to know the truth but normally to test Jesus' faithfulness to adhering to the Law of Moses.
- Their focus was always on legality and they watched Jesus' life intently and judged him constantly specifically on the issue the Sabbath – healing, permitting His disciples to pick and eat corn.
 - They even concluded that He can't be from God because of His lack of adherence to the Law.
- Jesus turned their questions back to relationship – here he taught that loving God was the primary command. Prior to this incident in response to the Sadducees question on the resurrection and marriage he spoke about God being the God of the living and not the dead – a living God who has relationships with living people.
- At other times he rebuked the Pharisees, Sadducees and teachers of the law for their hypocrisy. Matthew 23: 13 – 33
- He also warned his disciples to beware of them.
 - Matthew 23: 1 – 4 Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples: "The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. So you must be careful to do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach. They tie up heavy, cumbersome loads and put them on other people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them."
- Here we'll see that Jesus brings it back to how people are treated.
 - Relationship with God is not about legalism that brings death and puts burdens on people.
 - On the contrary Jesus said in Matthew 11: 29: Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.
- A relationship based on love is liberating and not burdensome.
- Jesus freed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us
 - Galatians 3: 13 Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a pole."
 - He freed us from sin and death so that we can be free to have a living relationship with God.
- If Jesus became a curse to free us from the curse of the law then we should not reduce Christianity to set of legal dogma, but to focus on our relationship with God.

2) A relationship of love

- Of the more than 600 laws in the law of Moses Jesus cites loving God as the first and foremost of all of them.
- It's a misconception that the Old Covenant was about legalism and the new was about relationship. God always intended to have a relationship with His people.
 - Galatians 3: 24 Therefore the law was our tutor *to bring us* to Christ, that we might be justified by faith.
- But what kind of relationship is it if we have to love God? Isn't a relationship two ways?
 - Absolutely yes! And God loved us before we loved Him
 - 1 John 4: 19 We love because he first loved us.
- Hence the command to love God is merely the reciprocation of His love for us.
- He wants us to love Him unconditionally without limits the way He loved us. How did He love us?
 - Romans 5: 8 But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.
- The word that Paul used to describe God's love towards us and that Jesus used to command us to love God is agape – a complete sacrificial love. Not just a feeling or a friendship but an intimate love that gives all.
- We are to love God with all our hearts, soul, mind and strength.
- This means that God expects us to love Him unreservedly in every aspect of our lives and being without exception.
- This means that we would be absolutely devoted to Him in ways that please Him in our thoughts, attitudes, and actions towards Him and His will for our lives.
- We move from asking questions like "is it a sin to smoke?" or "is drinking permissible?" to "does what I do and think glorify the God whom I love?"
 - If we love God absolutely we'll want to please Him absolutely. We won't be looking for the loopholes of what we can do and get away with that's possibly permissible.
- The God that Jesus commanded us to love is the Lord our God – Yahweh. And He is Yahweh come in the flesh. So it isn't a command to love some unknown God but the relational God who knows and loves us. His name is Jesus!

3) Loving holistically

- We might say that we love God but we don't love people – or even a specific person.
- Jesus didn't leave that option open to us as the second command is to love your neighbour as yourself.
- 1 John 4: 20 Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen.
- 1 John 3: 14 We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love each other. Anyone who does not love remains in death.
- We need to understand that loving God and loving others isn't of ourselves but it's God's love within us that enables us to love
 - Romans 5: 5 And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.
 - Galatians 5: 22 – 23 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.
- Against such things there is no law!
- Once again there's no legalism in love and no legal restraint on love.
- If there's any obstacle in the way of us loving God or others then we need to deal with it in order to be obedient to Jesus in love.