

# Session 3

## LOVING GOD WITH ALL MY SOUL

*Matthew 22:37; Colossians 3:16-24*

### Memory Verse

*Let the word of Christ dwell richly among you, in all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another through psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts.*

– COLOSSIANS 3:16, CSB



## Loving God With All My Soul

**THEOLOGICAL THEME:** Loving God with all one's soul means treating every interaction, duty, and responsibility as an opportunity to bring glory to Him.

In his 2014 book, *Soul Keeping*, pastor and author John Ortberg writes of the unique and often neglected spiritual task of caring for the soul. As he walked through the various peculiarities of soul care, Ortberg addressed the unique reality in which the soul needs to be with God. "The soul seeks God with its whole being. Because it is desperate to be whole, the soul is God-smitten and God-crazy and God-obsessed. My mind may be obsessed with idols; my will may be enslaved to habits; my body may be consumed with appetites. But my soul will never find rest until it rests in God."<sup>1</sup>

Loving God with one's soul, then, is the soul's response to its true home and the soul's greatest longing for peace. "The soul is that aspect of your whole being that correlates, integrates, and enlivens everything going on in the various dimensions of the self. The soul is the life center of human beings."<sup>2</sup> Loving God with one's soul necessarily involves loving God with every interaction, conversation, task, and expenditure of energy. It is an incredibly complex idea that finds simple, tangible expressions every day.



How many differing understandings of the soul are you aware of in today's culture? Why do you think it is so difficult to concisely define a person's "soul"?

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**?** What items can you think of that are described by using “soul” as an adjective? What commonly shared effects do those different items have on a person who partakes of them? What do those commonly shared qualities indicate about the experience of a satisfied soul?

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## Session Summary

In this week’s session, Paul wrote to the believers in Colossae about the importance of bringing glory to God in everything they did. In doing so, Paul connected opportunities to bring glory to God with key relationships and work ethic. Paul’s repeated admonition was that all things be done as a reflection of the character of God. Living in such a way would provide tangible evidence of loving God with one’s soul.

### 1. Loving God with the Soul by Knowing His Word (Matthew 22:37; Colossians 3:16-17)

The second manner of loving God mentioned by Jesus in the Great Commandment in Matthew 22:34-40 was to love the Lord your God with all your soul. While the other two ways of loving God – with all your heart and with all your mind – might seem more straightforward and applicable, the effort of loving God with all of one’s soul begs for clearer understanding on exactly how a believer can go about doing that. Certainly, Jesus’ overall point in quoting Deuteronomy 6:5 was to direct His hearers to love God with everything that they were. Still, in listing the three different aspects of loving God, Jesus emphasized particular expressions with each.

Paul’s letter to the Colossian believers expressed a similar idea to loving God with all one’s soul as he spent chapter 3 highlighting the outward impact the inner transformation of the believer through the Holy Spirit should have. Paul began chapter 3 by warning the believers to no longer have anything to do with the inclinations and evidence of brokenness that previously characterized their lives before a relationship with Christ. As Paul deliberately addressed the fruit of a life with Christ, he turned his attention to the bond of the faith fellowship, urging them to show love toward one another and pursue peace. These are not natural reactions amid any group of people, apart from Christ’s empowerment to do so.

In verse 16, Paul identified the fuel for such an uncommon unity: “let the word of Christ dwell richly among you.” In order for the Christian community to be able to do the things that Paul had just encouraged them to do (bearing with and forgiving one another, being united in love, putting away all malice and lust, being known for the peace of Christ and thankfulness, etc.), something beyond their base nature would need to direct their interactions, responses, attitudes, and affections. That transcendent fuel was the word of Christ dwelling among them. The teaching of the word of Christ was never to be divorced from the right and regular application of that taught word to immediate daily living. Daily living is the evidence of soul love for God, inextricably linked to an ever-deepening understanding of who God is.

**?** What has been the most life-changing thing that God has shown you as you studied Scripture in the last month? How did that discovery impact the way you lived in the following days? How is it continuing to have an impact now?

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**?** How do you know if you are doing something “in the name of the Lord Jesus”? How would you explain it to someone seeking to apply this passage?

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To do something “in the name of” a deity was a common idea for the ancient believers. With the proliferation of pagan gods for every conceivable cause, carrying out an act as a dedication to a god with the desired end of bringing about a specific result was a familiar practice. Still, for the believers, doing something in the name of the Lord Jesus meant more than just ascribing His name to the act. Doing everything in the name of the Lord Jesus meant doing everything, whether in word or in deed, in a manner that was congruent with the character of Christ.

The overarching qualifier was important for the new believers because there was no exhaustive list of do's and don'ts for those that followed Christ so that one could know exactly the right thing to do in every specific scenario. If, then, it were vitally important for the first century believer, it would be equally important for the modern believer, as the biblical writers could not have possibly imagined the different ethical complexities that would face believers 2,000 years in the future.

## 2. Loving God with the Soul in Key Relationships (Colossians 3:18-22)

Verse 17's "whatever you do, do everything" statement formed an inclusio of sorts with the same phrase in verse 23. That literary construct served as book ends, so to speak, sectioning off the content in between the two occurrences with heightened emphasis. Interestingly, what Paul placed in that sectioned off segment was his address of the key relationships a person would find themselves in. These relationships would serve as the laboratory within which the loving of God with all one's soul would be tested and proved throughout a person's regular daily experience.

The relationships that Paul mentioned in his letter "included all who were under the authority of its head. In New Testament times the head of a household might be a woman, like Lydia of Philippi, Chloe of Corinth, who may not have been a Christian, and Nympha of the Lycus valley. But usually the head of the household was a man, who exercised within it the authority of a husband, a father, and a master," according to F.F. Bruce.<sup>3</sup> That being the case, the key issue within each of the relationships as Paul presented them was submission. The submission, however, was a type of mutual deference that was peculiar to Christ-followers. The reason for its appearance among Christ-followers was precisely because of the servant model Jesus demonstrated.



What about familial relationships make them formidable testing grounds for loving God with all one's soul? How would you describe the impact of the heightened intimacy in familial relationships?

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How does Paul’s inclusion of the qualifiers “in the Lord” and “pleases the Lord” raise the level of accountability for those addressed? Why would this make loving the Lord with one’s soul all the more important?

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Commentaries on social constructs were common in Paul’s day and most of them included instructions on husband/wife and parent/child relationships. These were not all written from a Christian perspective; most were written from a philosophical perspective by Stoics. The landmark difference in the Christian statements was the appearance of qualifiers such as “in the Lord.” The existence of such phrases raised the accountability of those addressed beyond their fellow man to their Creator.

What was more remarkable still was that in Paul’s letter to the Colossians, each of the parties had a responsibility to the other. Husbands had responsibilities to their wives just as the wives did to their husbands. Even more incredibly, parents had responsibilities to their children as well. This was unheard of in Paul’s day. Masters were to show deference (4:1) just as slaves were to show conscientious work ethic to God by way of their masters. All of this existed in the grander context of the believing community loving God with their souls, evidenced by the unity and forbearance extended to one another.

### 3. Loving God in Everything Done (Colossians 3:23-24)

Having addressed the three critical relationships in the stereotypical household, Paul returned to the directive from earlier: “Whatever you do, do it from the heart...” As he finished this verse, Paul made yet another appeal to believers being mindful of their ultimate accountability. All of what was to be done was to be done ultimately to God.

It is important to clarify that it was never Paul’s intent to qualify his statement according to just how heavy a burden and how scrutinizing a taskmaster the believers labored under. To believe such would be to skip over multiple key words in the Apostle’s carefully worded letter. Paul spoke of “doing it from the heart,” with regard to the tasks performed under the immediate supervision of even harsh taskmasters. The clear implication was that, even in harsh conditions, the believer’s work ethic was an act of worship to the God he or she loved. There was prudence and diligence in the disciple’s work, not out of compulsion or fear, but out of a joyous love for his or her Savior.

**?** Describe a time when you worked in an environment in which working as worship seemed impossible. What did you find to be the most effective way to maintain a spirit of thanksgiving and soul love for God?

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**?** Who in your life comes to mind when you think of joyfully serving God through their occupation? What does that indicate to you about their relationship with Christ?

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Paul's final word was regarding the payoff, so to speak, of work that reflected a soul love for God. Those whose love of God with the soul was reflected in their diligence and occupational worship would receive a reward for their faithfulness. Paul's encouragement addressed the likelihood that those who struggled to worship in their duties were also poorly compensated. It was as if Paul was anticipating questions from his readers; if they worked harder for a harsh taskmaster, knowing they would make no more money, what was the point? Paul clarified, saying that their reward, though delayed, would be much greater than anything even the most magnanimous of bosses could provide. Because their faithfulness was an overflow of their faith in Christ, their reward would be sharing in His inheritance. Their reward would be eternity with Christ.

## Conclusion

Loving God with all one's soul sounds like a robust and mighty endeavor, which it is indeed. However, if pressed on how exactly to go about loving God with all one's soul, most believers would be left wanting an immediate answer. Thankfully, Paul's letter to the Colossians offers some concrete direction on how to pursue this worthy goal.

First, believers must resist the compartmentalization of their relationship with God. In other words, to love God with one's soul, Christianity cannot be something that a believer is serious about only from 9-noon on a Sunday

morning. Instead, loving God with one's whole soul demands viewing life in such a way that acknowledges that everything is spiritual. Every decision, task, and interaction carries the opportunity of bringing glory to God as the joy and gratitude of one's life with Christ spills out through those opportunities.

Second, work ethic is holy business. In this brief passage, Paul mentioned twice the importance of doing all things as unto the Lord. One of those mentions specifically pointed out the application of work ethic. Part of the believer's greatest opportunity in loving God with his or her whole soul is being the best worker he or she can possibly be. Doing so is not simply gritting one's teeth from 8am – 5pm, determining to elevate his or her professional standing by working harder. Rather, it is a conscious decision, made from a grateful heart that acknowledges God's gift of work and the capacity to do it. The book of Proverbs is filled with verses that speak of the shame of laziness and the disrepute that is typically associated with it.

Third, unity and peace in relationships—especially familial ones—can only be an outflow of the indwelling Spirit of Christ. Because all people are flawed and bent toward selfishness, conflict is going to happen. For relationships to exist in the condition that Paul addressed so that God receives glory, believers must ruthlessly eradicate disunity, bitterness, and resentment. This is hard work. It is much easier to hold a grudge, decide to never speak to someone again, and refuse to go home for Christmas. It is easier, but it is not of God. When believers do the hard work of seeking reconciliation and restoring harmony, God is glorified. This is an incredible means of loving God with the soul.

Fourth, to love God with all one's soul, one must increasingly be learning about who God is. The preaching and teaching of God's Word coupled with application is of paramount importance. Being steeped in right teaching and application of God's Word conditions the soul to love God. When believers settle for moralisms and 30-second devotions on the way to the office, the soul remains malnourished. To love God with one's soul, the Word of God must be allowed to permeate the soul and convict the heart. There are no shortcuts.



❓ How would you describe your work ethic? If you were your supervisor, how much joy and godliness would you be exposed to day in and day out? How would you like that answer to change in the next six months? What should be your first step?

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❓ How often during a typical week do you benefit from an infusion of God's Word? What differences do you notice when you miss those regular appointments?

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❓ What relationships in your life would benefit the most from your pursuing harmony and reconciliation? What particular factors would make you hesitant to do so? How would pursuing that restoration mirror Christ?

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**CHRIST CONNECTION:** Jesus demonstrated His love for the Father in His faithfulness to accomplish the Father's will in precisely the way the Father prescribed and without compromise.

**MISSIONAL APPLICATION:** Loving God with one's soul is one of the more immediate ways believers can live with missional focus. Every daily function becomes an opportunity to reflect God's love and holiness and, thus, bring Him glory.



# FOR NEXT WEEK

## Living a Whole Life the Whole Way: Loving God With All My Mind

### Main Passages

- Matthew 22:37; Romans 12:1-2

### Session Outline

1. Respond to God's Grace with True Worship (Romans 12:1)
2. Transformation from a Renewed Mind (Romans 12:2a)
3. Loving God with All the Mind Brings Discernment (Romans 12:2b)

### Memorize

*Let the word of Christ dwell richly among you, in all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another through psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts.*

-Colossians 3:16

### Daily Readings

- Monday - Proverbs 1:7
- Tuesday - Proverbs 2:6
- Wednesday - Philippians 1:9-11
- Thursday - 1 Peter 3:15
- Friday - Proverbs 18:15
- Saturday - Colossians 4:5-6

### References

<sup>1</sup>Ortberg, John. *Soul Keeping: Caring for the Most Important Part of You*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Bruce F. F. *The Epistle to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*. NICNT. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Group, 1984.