

# What God Wants

There are some people who believe that in order to be saved, all they have to do is repeat some magic words and then they're good to go. They believe that if they go to the front of the church and repeat whatever the pastor tells them to repeat, they will surely be saved. They think that they don't have to believe anything in particular, or change their life, or repent of anything. As long as they've said whatever the pastor told them to say, they're going to Heaven.

All those who think that are *not* saved. Salvation does *not* come by blindly repeating whatever someone else told you to say and then going back to your life. This is true even if the actual words that you uttered were all the truth of the gospel. *Repeating something that you don't believe won't save you.*

Some people believe that in order to be saved, you just have to believe in Jesus. As long as you believe that He existed, that He's both God and man, that He died for our sins, and that He rose from the dead on the third day, you're good to go. While it's true that you *do* have to believe those things to be saved, you actually need *more* than that. It turns out that even demons believe those things, and they're not saved at all:

**James 2:19:** “Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble.”

We *absolutely* need to believe in Jesus. However, we also need to *repent*. This means asking God to forgive our sins, and then seeking His grace to live a life free from sin. John the Baptist preached repentance:

**Matthew 3:1-2:** “In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea,

And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

Jesus preached repentance:

**Matthew 4:17:** "From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

The apostles preached repentance:

**Acts 2:38:** "Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost."

Those who believe in Jesus *and* repent of their sins will be saved. If you've never sought forgiveness of your sins and repented of them then you're not saved. It's impossible to be saved by telling God that you expect Him to bring you to Heaven when you die even though you love your sins and will never turn away from them. It's true that we're saved by grace through faith and not of works, but God won't forgive those who aren't sorry and who have no intention of giving their life to Him.

All of that should be obvious. It should be immediately apparent that all those who stubbornly refuse to obey God are the children of the devil (1 John 3:10). They are functionally no different from demons, and will suffer the same fate (which is to be tormented forever in the Lake of Fire). Those who reject God's mercy and refuse to seek His forgiveness for their sins will face His everlasting wrath.

There are some people who understand that obedience isn't optional for Christians. After all, Jesus repeatedly told us that we must obey His commands:

**John 14:15:** "If ye love me, keep my

commandments."

**John 14:21:** "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him."

**John 15:10:** "If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love."

Although we're not saved by our works, it's vital to understand that our works reveal whether we're saved. If we're not obeying God's commands then we're not saved at all:

**1 John 2:3-5:** "And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him."

Those who keep God's commandments are saved. The reason they keep God's commandments is *because* they're saved. Likewise, those who do *not* keep God's commandments are *not* saved. The reason they don't keep them is because they aren't saved. You don't gain salvation by keeping them, and you don't lose salvation by breaking them. This test reveals your true nature. It doesn't change it.

There are some Christians who look at this and think that Christianity is about keeping God's commandments. They live as they please, but they remain within the bounds of what Jesus commanded. These people believe that as long as they aren't doing anything sinful (like stealing, or murdering, or committing adultery), then they must be pleasing God. After all, they're not

sinning! What more could God want?

The problem is that although God does indeed want us to keep His commandments, this covers more ground than some people realize. You see, God requires us to *love Him*:

**Mark 12:30:** “And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment.”

It's entirely possible to obey someone without loving them. Those are two different things. Christians ought to obey Christ out of a love for him – but not everyone does.

The commandment to love God with all of our heart is extremely broad. God didn't say to love Him with part of our heart, and we could keep the rest of our heart and do whatever we wanted with it. God also didn't say that we should add Him to the list of things we care about, and as long as He's there somewhere then He's content. No, God requires *all* of our heart. This is how the apostle Paul put it:

**Romans 12:1:** “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.”

In the Old Testament there was a sacrifice called the burnt offering. In that offering, the entire animal was burned on the altar. Nothing was left. The entire sacrifice was given to God and nothing was held back.

That's the picture here. God requires *all* of our heart. This means we must sacrifice *all* of the things we want, and instead only pursue the things that God wants. We can't divide our life between pursuing the things that we desire and the things God desires. God doesn't want us to just make sure we don't sin as we pursue the things we want in life. That's not nearly enough!

Instead we must wholly pursue the things God wants, *and nothing else*. He must have *all* of our heart.

Being a living sacrifice means that we can't have our own will. We can't have our own desires. Jesus taught that no one can serve two masters:

**Matthew 6:24:** "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon."

We can't serve both God *and* ourselves. We have to make a choice. We will either serve God with all our lives and be wholly devoted to Him, or else we will serve ourselves. It's one or the other. God forces us to pick a side.

There are many things in this world that people pursue. Some of them are wicked and sinful, but others aren't. God doesn't allow Christians to love *any* of the things of this world:

**1 John 2:15-17:** "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever."

There are many things in this world that our flesh desires. There are many things that our eyes desire. Some of those things are evil, but many of them aren't sinful at all. Either way, *we must not love them*. They must never gain control of our heart! If they do then we will become unfruitful:

**Mark 4:18-19:** "And these are they which are

sown among thorns; such as hear the word, And the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful.”

The problem is that we pursue something other than God (even if that thing isn't a sin), then we've already gone astray. God called us to be a living sacrifice, not a part-time laborer. What He wants is for us to put all of our desires to death, and to replace them with Him and Him alone. He wants us to cast aside the desires of our heart, and instead desire *Him* with all of our heart.

There's a lot that goes with this command. God has called us to love our families, so we must do that. God commands us to love our neighbor as ourselves, so we must do that. God requires us to take care of the poor and needy, so we must do that. There are a lot of responsibilities that come with loving God with all of our heart, and many of them deal with our relationships with other people.

But the *reason* we must do these things is *out of love for God*. This matters a lot! Jesus must be first – even ahead of our own families:

**Matthew 10:37:** “He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.”

Either God has all of our heart, or He doesn't. If the reason we love others is *because* we love God, then it becomes possible to put God first.

There are some Christians who never take that step. They'll believe in Jesus, repent of their sins, seek forgiveness, and obey God's commands, but putting Him first is a step they're unwilling to take. They won't take that leap to become a living sacrifice who's wholly dedicated to God. They won't put Him first above all else.

Instead they're like the ancient Israelites, who were willing to do *some* of what God wanted but not *all* of it. For example, the Lord required the Israelites to offer all of their sacrifices at the temple in Jerusalem. The Israelites weren't allowed to offer their sacrifices wherever they wanted, and yet that's exactly what they did. God kept rebuking them for sacrificing in the “high places” they had built, but they never listened:

**1 Kings 22:43:** “And he walked in all the ways of Asa his father; he turned not aside from it, doing that which was right in the eyes of the Lord: nevertheless the high places were not taken away; for the people offered and burnt incense yet in the high places.”

**2 Kings 12:3:** “But the high places were not taken away: the people still sacrificed and burnt incense in the high places.”

**2 Kings 14:4:** “Howbeit the high places were not taken away: as yet the people did sacrifice and burnt incense on the high places.”

**2 Kings 15:4:** “Save that the high places were not removed: the people sacrificed and burnt incense still on the high places.”

**2 Kings 15:35:** “Howbeit the high places were not removed: the people sacrificed and burned incense still in the high places. He built the higher gate of the house of the Lord.”

The Israelites were willing to serve God, but they did it *their* way and not God's way. They would only serve God so far and no farther. Their faithfulness had limits.

Does our faithfulness have limits? How far are we willing

to serve God? Now, I'm not saying that people whose heart isn't fully set on God are lost. All Christians in this world are imperfect and fall short in some way. This, though, is a big deal. Jesus called this the greatest of all the commandments. Are we willing to follow it?

In this life it may not seem like that big a deal. If we're keeping all of God's other commandments in a world that's saturated with sin, then it may seem like we're far ahead of the curve. This may seem to be a step that isn't really necessary. However, the apostle Paul warns us that one day all Christians will stand before the judgment seat of Christ:

**2 Corinthians 5:10:** “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.”

It's true that in this judgment our salvation isn't at stake. This is a judgment of rewards, not damnation – but the person who's going to judge us is Jesus Himself. The One who shed His blood and died for us is going to look at us on that day and hold us accountable for *how much we loved Him*. In that day it will matter a *great deal* whether we fully gave our heart to Him or not. Do you really want to tell Him that you were only willing to give Him some things, and not all things? Do you want to tell the One who died to save you that He was, in your evaluation, only worthy of part of your love but not all of it?

There's also a reward at stake:

**James 1:12:** “Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.”

Those who endure temptation and don't sin will be given



the crown of life. Why? Because those are the people who truly loved God. They demonstrated their love by obeying God – and we already know what the greatest commandment actually is.

This crown isn't figurative. It's a real, actual crown. Some people will receive this, but others won't. Those who are given this crown will use it in Heaven to worship Jesus (which you can only do if it's a literal crown):

**Revelation 4:10:** “The four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying,”

Since these Christians loved Jesus, they obeyed Him. Since they obeyed Him, Jesus gave them the crown of life. Since they had the crown of life, they were able to cast it at His feet and use it to worship Him. *That's what it's for.* You can't cast at the feet of Jesus a crown that you never earned. In that day you will *not* want to stand there empty-handed, wishing you had something to give to Him and knowing that *the reason you have nothing is because you chose to love other things instead of Jesus.* But once that day comes it's too late.

What does God want? He wants us to love Him. He wants *all* of our heart, *forever*. If we haven't given Him all of our heart, and all of our desires, and all of our will, then we've fallen short of what He's called us to do.