Love Is the Point Q&A Guide

Oct 27, 2026

About this guide: anyone is welcome to use this guide, including members of the Intercessor Church Community Groups. Read it before class or on your own so you come prepared and well versed in the passage. It follows the Discover section of the group outline, section by section. For each question it gathers what trusted commentaries and the ICCEC Catechism say, then adds a Summary that pulls it together and a Deep Dive with background and passages to read ahead of time.

How to read this guide: each question is labeled to match the outline, so A1 is the first question in section A, A2 is the second, and so on. The questions are written for this guide. Each one covers the same ground as the matching outline question and takes it a step further. The linked passage after each question is the one the outline points to, so you can click it and read it in class. Anything after the word "also" is a wider range or an extra passage this guide adds. Every line under Commentary and ICCEC Catechism is quoted word for word from the source named in parentheses after it. The **Summary** and **Deep Dive** under each question are written for this guide, drawing on those quotes and the other sources listed at the end. Scripture quoted in the summaries and deep dives is from the New King James Version, and Q-numbers are question numbers in the ICCEC Catechism.

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This guide follows the Intercessor Church Community Group outline "Rooted Together, Week 4: Love Is the Point."

A. More Than a Binder (Matthew 22:34-36)

A1. The Pharisees sent their legal expert right after Jesus silenced the Sadducees. What was he hoping to prove by asking Jesus to rank one commandment above all the others? (Matthew 22:34-36)

Commentary

- "put forward the lawyer, not desiring to learn, but making a trial of Him" (John Chrysostom, Homily 71 on Matthew)
- "The Rabbins reckoned up 613 commandments of the law; and distinguished them into the greater and the lesser. These later they thought might be neglected or violated with little or no guilt." (John Trapp, as quoted in David Guzik, Enduring Word on Matthew 22)
- "In asking Jesus to choose one great commandment, they hoped to make Jesus show neglect for another area of the law." (David Guzik, Enduring Word on Matthew 22)
- "Some taught that if a man rightly selected some great precept to observe, he might safely disregard the rest of the Law" (Pulpit Commentary on Matthew 22:36)
- "It was in view of this kind of distinction that the scribe asked the question; not as desiring a declaration as to which commandment was greatest, but as wanting to know the principle upon which a commandment was to be regarded as a great commandment." (Vincent's Word Studies on Matthew 22:36)

ICCEC Catechism

- "Jesus summarized the two divisions of the Commandments in the following Scriptures: Matthew 22:36-40." (Q-284)

Summary

The lawyer was not asking out of curiosity. He came right after the Sadducees had been silenced, sent to test Jesus rather than to learn from Him (Chrysostom). The rabbis counted 613 commandments and sorted them into greater and lesser ones, and some thought the lesser ones could be broken with little guilt (Trapp, quoted by Guzik). If Jesus picked one, He could be accused of neglecting the rest (Guzik). Some teachers even claimed that keeping one great precept could make up for ignoring the others (Pulpit Commentary). Underneath was a deeper question about what makes any commandment great in the first place (Vincent). Jesus answered by going to the root: love God, and love your neighbor. The Ten Commandments are arranged the same way, and Jesus summed up both halves in this very passage (Q-283, Q-284).

Deep Dive

Matthew 22:34-46 is the Gospel reading for Proper 25, Year A (October 25, 2026). This was the third group in a row to test Jesus, after the Herodians and the Sadducees (Barnes). The scribes counted 248 positive commands and 365 negative ones, 613 in all (Vincent). Jesus answered from Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18, and both answers were widely accepted by the teachers of His day (Schaser). Mark records that the scribe agreed, and

Jesus told him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God" (Mark 12:34). Luke records a lawyer asking a similar question, which led to the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). After answering, Jesus asked them whose Son the Christ is, and from that day no one dared to question Him again (Matthew 22:41-46).

Read before class: Matthew 22:34-46; Mark 12:28-34; Luke 10:25-37

A2. Where have you seen faith shrunk down to a checklist, and what does that version of faith tend to leave out? (also Matthew 23:4, 23)

Commentary

- "Both the Pharisees of Christ's day and today's many versions create a whole system of rules and regulations for people to live by and yet are guilty of breaking the most important commandments of all" (GotQuestions.org, What is the greatest commandment?)
- "The rigorous precepts, the high-flown morality were for others, not themselves. Professing to guide, they neither helped nor sympathised with the troubles of those they taught." (Ellicott's Commentary on Matthew 23:4)
- "a Hebrew word whose most fundamental meaning is not 'law' but 'teaching' or 'instruction.'" (Nicholas J. Schaser, Working Preacher on Matthew 22:34-46, on the word Torah)
- "because he overlooked low things, and embraced the first principle of virtue. For indeed all those are for the sake of this, as well the Sabbath as the rest." (John Chrysostom, Homily 71 on Matthew, on the scribe in Mark 12)
- "The true target of the whole discourse is the crowds and disciples who need to break free from Pharisaic legalism." (R.T. France, as quoted in David Guzik, Enduring Word on Matthew 23)

ICCEC Catechism

- "First the knowledge of the true God through right faith in Him; Second, a life lived by grace through faith expressing itself in good works." (Q-7)

Summary

This is an application question. Common answers: treating church attendance or Bible reading as a score, long lists of things Christians do not do, judging others by outward standards, giving out of guilt, and treating faith as a performance. What gets left out is the heart: love for God and for the people right in front of us. Jesus said the scribes and Pharisees tied heavy burdens on others without lifting a finger to help (Matthew 23:4).

Their high standards were for other people, and they offered no help or sympathy to the people they taught (Ellicott). The same thing happens today whenever a system of rules grows up while the greatest commandments are ignored (GotQuestions). The word Torah itself means teaching or instruction, not only law (Schaser). The rest of the commands were always meant to serve love (Chrysostom). Faith does show itself in good works, but it begins with knowing the true God (Q-7).

Deep Dive

In the next chapter Jesus says the scribes and Pharisees "bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men's shoulders" (Matthew 23:4). He also says they tithed mint and anise and cummin but neglected "justice and mercy and faith" (Matthew 23:23). The tithing was not wrong; the problem was leaving out the weightier things. The Talmud describes seven kinds of Pharisees, including one who counted up his good deeds as if God owed him (Barclay, as summarized by Guzik). Micah put it simply long before: "to do justly, To love mercy, And to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8). Jesus aimed His warning at the crowds and disciples so they could break free from that kind of legalism (France, quoted by Guzik).

Read before class: Matthew 23:1-12; Matthew 23:23-24; Micah 6:6-8

A3. Why does trying to keep the rules without first knowing the Father's love wear people out, and what does Jesus offer the weary instead? (also Matthew 11:28-30)

Commentary

- "Israel's obedience was not to spring from a barren legalism based on necessity and duty. It was to arise from a relationship based on love." (Thompson, as quoted in David Guzik, Enduring Word on Deuteronomy 6)
- "The Fearful Pharisee, who did good because he was terrified that God would strike him with judgment if he did not." (David Guzik, Enduring Word on Matthew 23, summarizing William Barclay)
- "the thought that was most prominent in them at the time was that of the burdens grievous to be borne, the yoke of traditions and ordinances which the Pharisees and scribes had imposed on the consciences of men." (Ellicott's Commentary on Matthew 11:28)
- "The yoke is easy and the burden is light because He bears it with us." (David Guzik, Enduring Word on Matthew 11)

- "Jesus' yoke is easy, not because it makes lighter demands, but because it represents entering into a disciple-relationship." (R.T. France, as quoted in David Guzik, Enduring Word on Matthew 11)

ICCEC Catechism

- "This is a free gift of God given to us in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ who lived in loving obedience to the will of His Father." (Q-103)
- "By faith we must respond to the grace of God freely given in Jesus Christ and in His atoning work." (Q-105)

Summary

Rules can tell us what to do, but they cannot give us the love or the strength to do it, so trying harder eventually wears people out. People keep score, never know if they have done enough, and end up serving out of fear. One kind of Pharisee did good only because he was terrified God would judge him if he did not (Barclay, as summarized by Guzik). God never meant obedience to come from a barren legalism; it was meant to grow out of a relationship of love (Thompson, quoted by Guzik). Jesus' call to the weary and heavy laden was spoken first to people worn down by the yoke of traditions the Pharisees and scribes had put on them (Ellicott). His yoke is easy because He carries it with us (Guzik), and taking it means becoming His disciple (France, quoted by Guzik). Salvation is a free gift we receive by faith (Q-103, Q-105), not a wage we earn by keeping a binder.

Deep Dive

Jesus' invitation is "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). Labor may point to burdens we take on ourselves, and heavy laden to burdens others put on us (Carson, as summarized by Guzik). The ancient Jews spoke of the yoke of the law, the yoke of the command, and other yokes (Clarke, as summarized by Guzik), and Jesus offers one yoke, His own. Farmers often yoked a young animal to an older, stronger one that carried the load and guided it (Guzik). At the council in Jerusalem, Peter called the law a yoke "which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear" (Acts 15:10). Paul says the same to the Galatians: "do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage" (Galatians 5:1).

Read before class: Matthew 11:28-30; Acts 15:6-11; Galatians 5:1-6

B. Love for God Comes First (Deuteronomy 6:4-5)

B1. Jesus called loving God with all your heart, soul, and mind the first and great commandment. What would it look like for your affections, your choices, and your thinking to belong to Him on an ordinary day? (Matthew 22:37-38)

Commentary

- "To love him with all the heart is to fix the affections supremely on him, more strongly than on anything else, and to be willing to give up all that we hold dear at his command" (Barnes' Notes on Matthew 22:37)
- "Our love of God must be sincere, not in word and tongue only. All our love is too little to bestow upon him, therefore all the powers of the soul must be engaged for him, and carried out toward him." (Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary on Matthew 22)
- "What God most wants from humanity is love. It is easy to think that God is more interested in many other things: time, money, effort, will, submission, and so forth. But what God really wants from humanity is their love." (David Guzik, Enduring Word on Deuteronomy 6)
- "There was never an earthly prince or king whom I have heard of in whose statute-book it was written, 'Thou shalt love the king.'" (Charles Spurgeon, as quoted in David Guzik, Enduring Word on Deuteronomy 6)
- "It is better to have one fountain than a thousand cisterns; one all-sufficient God than a thousand insufficient friends." (Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary on Deuteronomy 6)

ICCEC Catechism

- "We must love Christ more than ourselves and all others." (Q-323)
- "Prayer is a response to God's love, forgiveness, grace and mercy" (Q-219)

Summary

To love God with all your heart, soul, and mind means He gets all of you: your affections, your life, and your thinking. Loving Him with all the heart means setting your affections on Him above anything else, even what you hold most dear (Barnes). This love has to be sincere and not only words, and every power we have should be engaged in it (Matthew Henry). It is easy to think God mainly wants our time, money, or effort, but what He wants most is our love, and when He has that, the rest follows (Guzik). No earthly king ever wrote a law commanding his people to love him (Spurgeon, quoted by Guzik). On an ordinary day this can look like starting with prayer, choosing Him when something else

competes for first place, thinking about what He has said, and doing small tasks as for Him. One all-sufficient God is better than a thousand lesser things we lean on (Matthew Henry). Disciples love Christ more than themselves and all others (Q-323).

Deep Dive

Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 6:5, and Mark adds the opening line of the Shema: "Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one" (Mark 12:29). Moses says heart, soul, and strength, Matthew says heart, soul, and mind, and Mark includes all four. The point is not to divide a person into parts but to say that God is to be loved with all our powers and faculties (Pulpit Commentary). The answer came from the same chapter Jesus used to answer the tempter in the wilderness (Ellicott). David shows what this love sounds like: "O God, You are my God; Early will I seek You; My soul thirsts for You" (Psalm 63:1). This love was asked for from the beginning, and the gospel supplies new reasons and new help to live it (Barnes).

Read before class: Deuteronomy 6:1-9; Mark 12:28-34; Psalm 63:1-8

B2. The Shema was prayed morning and evening and even worn on the body. What simple daily habits keep God's Word in front of us, and how do we keep those habits from turning into one more rule? (Deuteronomy 6:4-5; also verses 6-9)

Commentary

- "So much so did the centrality of this confession find root in the Jewish consciousness that to this very day the observant Jew will recite the Shema at least twice daily." (Merrill, as quoted in David Guzik, Enduring Word on Deuteronomy 6)
- "This great command must first live in the heart. Then it must be communicated to the children, the next generation." (David Guzik, Enduring Word on Deuteronomy 6)
- "Here are means for maintaining and keeping up religion in our hearts and houses. 1. Meditation. God's words must be laid up in our hearts, that our thoughts may be daily employed about them." (Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary on Deuteronomy 6)
- "A text hung up in your houses may often speak when you are silent." (Charles Spurgeon, as quoted in David Guzik, Enduring Word on Deuteronomy 6)
- "Jesus condemned the abuse of the wearing of phylacteries among the Pharisees; they would sometimes make their phylactery boxes large and ostentatious to show off their supposedly greater spirituality" (David Guzik, Enduring Word on Deuteronomy 6)

ICCEC Catechism

- "We should read Holy Scripture prayerfully seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit, understanding it within the life of the faith community throughout all ages, and with a desire to obey God's will in accordance with His ways." (Q-41)
- "The name signifies that these sacred books deserve attention before all others." (Q-16)

Summary

This is an application question. Deuteronomy 6:4-5 is the Shema. Faithful Jews prayed it morning and evening, and many still recite it at least twice a day (Merrill, quoted by Guzik). The command was meant to live in the heart first and then be passed on to children (Guzik). Habits people mention: reading a short passage before checking the phone, praying the Lord's Prayer or a psalm morning and night, a verse on the fridge or a doorframe, memorizing a weekly verse like 1 John 4:19, listening to Scripture on a commute, and talking about God's Word at meals. A verse posted in the house can speak when we are silent (Spurgeon, quoted by Guzik). The danger is turning these habits into another binder. Some Pharisees made their phylacteries large to look more spiritual (Guzik). The aim is that our thoughts are daily occupied with God's words (Matthew Henry). Scripture is read best prayerfully, with the Holy Spirit's guidance and a desire to obey (Q-41).

Deep Dive

The Shema continues: "these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children" (Deuteronomy 6:6-7). Israel was to talk about them at home, on the road, at bedtime, and on waking. From verse 8 came the tephillin, small boxes of Scripture bound on the head or arm for prayer (Ellicott), and from verse 9 the mezuzah, a small case of Scripture fixed to the doorpost (Barnes). The word "write" in verse 9 carries the sense of engraving, so the words are there to stay (Guzik). Joshua was told to meditate on the Book of the Law "day and night" (Joshua 1:8). The goal of every habit is a heart that loves God, so a short daily habit kept with love is worth more than a long one kept for show.

Read before class: Deuteronomy 6:4-9; Deuteronomy 11:18-21; Joshua 1:8-9

B3. If love is mostly a feeling, or something we get, what do we end up expecting from God, and how does Scripture describe love differently? (also 1 John 5:3; 1 Corinthians 13:4-5)

Commentary

- "Love is not a feeling that comes and goes. It is a choice, made again and again, in the direction of someone else's good." (Zina Jacque, Working Preacher on Matthew 22:34-46)
- "Charity is an utter enemy to selfishness; it does not desire or seek its own praise, or honour, or profit, or pleasure." (Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary on 1 Corinthians 13)
- "genuine love to God is something which cannot be explained by the mere fact that we have received favors from Him." (Barnes' Notes on 1 John 4:19)
- "When people really love the LORD with all the heart, soul, and mind, then all else is freely given to the LORD." (David Guzik, Enduring Word on Deuteronomy 6)
- "It is easy to obey God when the heart is right; and those who endeavor in sincerity to keep his commandments do not complain that they are hard." (Barnes' Notes on 1 John 5:3)

ICCEC Catechism

- "God is Spirit, eternal, all good, all knowing, all just, almighty, all present, unchangeable, all sufficient unto Himself, all blessed; God is love." (Q-54)

Summary

This is an application question. If love is mostly a feeling, we may expect God always to feel close and decide something is wrong when He does not. If love is something we get, we may treat God as a provider of blessings and drift away when life is hard. Scripture describes love as a choice, made again and again, for someone else's good (Jacque). Love is the opposite of selfishness and does not seek its own praise or profit (Matthew Henry). Real love for God goes deeper than thanks for favors received (Barnes). God is love and is all sufficient in Himself (Q-54), so His love is a gift and not a trade. When we love Him with the whole heart, everything else is given freely (Guzik), and His commands stop feeling heavy (1 John 5:3). Obeying God is easy when the heart is right (Barnes).

Deep Dive

Paul describes love mostly by what it does and refuses to do: love "suffers long and is kind," "does not seek its own," and "is not provoked" (1 Corinthians 13:4-5). John defines love for God by action: "this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome" (1 John 5:3). Jesus said the same: "If you love Me, keep My commandments" (John 14:15). The word Jesus uses for love in Matthew 22 points

to love from the highest moral reasons, without self-interest, not a passing affection (Pulpit Commentary). Feelings come and go, but love keeps choosing the other person's good (Jacque).

Read before class: 1 Corinthians 13:1-7; 1 John 5:1-3; John 14:15-21

C. He First Loved Us (1 John 4:19)

C1. John says we love because He first loved us. Why does our love for people run dry when it is not first filled by God's love? (1 John 4:19; also verses 10-11)

Commentary

- "Our love for God is always in response to His love for us; He initiates, and we respond." (David Guzik, Enduring Word on 1 John 4)
- "His is the fountain love, ours but the stream: his love the inducement, the pattern, and the effective cause of ours." (Matthew Poole, as quoted in David Guzik, Enduring Word on 1 John 4)
- "We are not commanded to love one another to earn or become worthy of God's love. We love one another because we are loved by God, and have received that love, and live in light of it." (David Guzik, Enduring Word on 1 John 4)
- "Without a right relationship with God, our relationships with others will not be right, either." (GotQuestions.org, What is the greatest commandment?)
- "Since this is God's kind of love, it comes into our life through our relationship with Him. If we want to love one another more, we need to draw closer to God." (David Guzik, Enduring Word on 1 John 4)

ICCEC Catechism

- "The petition asks that the love of the Father for humanity and all creation be worked in us by the Holy Spirit, so that we are made into the image of Christ" (Q-233)

Summary

Love has a source. "We love Him because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19). Our love for God is always a response: He starts it, and we answer (Guzik). His love is the fountain, and ours is the stream (Poole, quoted by Guzik). Without a right relationship with God, our relationships with others will not be right either (GotQuestions). When we try to love people out of our own supply, it runs dry the moment someone is difficult. We are not told

to love others in order to earn God's love; we love because we have already been loved (Guzik). So the way to love people more is to draw closer to God (Guzik). The Holy Spirit works the Father's love into us and shapes us into the image of Christ (Q-233).

Deep Dive

1 John 4:19 is this week's memory verse, and its eight words were the text of five sermons by Spurgeon (Guzik). The verses before it explain how God loved first: "In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 4:10). John then draws the conclusion: "Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another" (1 John 4:11). Paul says God showed His love "in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). John's earlier call, "Beloved, let us love," can be read "those who are loved, let us love" (Guzik). Loving others starts with receiving.

Read before class: 1 John 4:7-21; Romans 5:6-8; Ephesians 3:14-19

C2. What changes in our obedience when it grows out of being loved instead of trying to earn love? (also 2 Corinthians 5:14-15)

Commentary

- "Obedience and good works, done from the principle of love, are not like the servile toil of one who unwillingly labours from dread of a master's anger. They are like that of a dutiful child, who does services to a beloved father, which benefit his brethren, and are done willingly." (Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary on 1 John 4)
- "The Gospel differs from the Law not so much in replacing an external and carnal service of God by an inward and spiritual one, as in supplying new motives and special assistances for the attainment of that divine love which was, from the first and all along, enjoined as 'the first and great commandment.'" (Barnes' Notes on Deuteronomy 6:5)
- "It was the Apostle's sense of the love that Christ had shown to him and to all men that was acting as a constraining power, directing every act of every spiritual state to the good of others, restraining him from every self-seeking purpose." (Ellicott's Commentary on 2 Corinthians 5:14)
- "Love believed is the mother of love returned." (Charles Spurgeon, as quoted in David Guzik, Enduring Word on 1 John 4)

ICCEC Catechism

- "We obey all of God's commandments by loving and obeying Jesus, thus becoming his disciples." (Q-322)
- "To be meek is to have a heart and soul that has by faith received God's grace to live a life disciplined and controlled by His love." (Q-265)

Summary

Rules push from the outside, but love pulls from the inside. Obedience that flows from love is not the forced labor of a servant afraid of his master; it is like a child who gladly serves a father he loves (Matthew Henry). The gospel did not swap a hard law for an easy one. It gave new motives and new help to love God the way He always asked (Barnes). Paul said the love of Christ compelled him (2 Corinthians 5:14). That love drove everything he did toward the good of others and away from self-seeking (Ellicott). Love that is believed produces love in return (Spurgeon, quoted by Guzik). We obey every commandment by loving and obeying Jesus (Q-322), and a meek life is one disciplined and controlled by His love (Q-265).

Deep Dive

Paul wrote, "For the love of Christ compels us" (2 Corinthians 5:14). The phrase most likely means Christ's love for us, not our love for Him (Ellicott). He goes on to say that those who live "should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again" (2 Corinthians 5:15). Jesus tied love and obedience together: "If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love" (John 15:10). Paul described the change this way: "it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me" (Galatians 2:20). The commandments did not disappear. The reason for keeping them changed, from earning love to returning it.

Read before class: 2 Corinthians 5:14-17; John 15:9-12; Galatians 2:20

C3. Where are you still trying to clean yourself up before coming to God, and what would it look like to let Him love you as you are today? (also Romans 5:8; Luke 15:20)

Commentary

- "Every man that ever was saved had to come to God not as a lover of God, but as a sinner, and then believe in God's love to him as a sinner." (Charles Spurgeon, as quoted in David Guzik, Enduring Word on 1 John 4)
- "Now remember, we never make ourselves love Christ more by flogging ourselves for not loving him more. We come to love those better whom we love by knowing them better" (Charles Spurgeon, as quoted in David Guzik, Enduring Word on 1 John 4)

- "The love and joy of the old man were so great that he hastened to meet him and welcome him to his home." (Barnes' Notes on Luke 15:20)
- "The liberty is our freedom from the tyranny of having to earn our own way to God, the freedom from sin and guilt and condemnation" (David Guzik, Enduring Word on Galatians 5)

ICCEC Catechism

- "Jesus has come because the Father's love for His people, is so great that He desires that we not perish but have eternal life with Him." (Q-232)
- "The Father in His love and mercy sent Jesus Christ to dwell among us and share our human nature, to live and die as one of us and to reconcile us to the Father of us all." (Q-117)

Summary

This is an application question. Many believers trust that God loves them in general but still act as if they must earn His approval each day. Letting Him love you as you are might look like praying honestly instead of cleaning yourself up first, resting in forgiveness instead of replaying old failures, and believing His love on a bad day as much as on a good one. Everyone who is saved comes to God first as a sinner and trusts His love for a sinner (Spurgeon, quoted by Guzik). We do not grow in love by beating ourselves up for not loving more; we grow by getting to know Him better (Spurgeon, quoted by Guzik). In the parable the son walked home slowly, but the father ran to meet him (Luke 15:20; Barnes). The Father sent His Son because His love is so great (Q-232, Q-117). Christ frees us from having to earn our own way to God (Guzik).

Deep Dive

In the parable of the lost son, the son rehearsed a speech asking to be taken back as a hired servant. But "when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him" (Luke 15:20). The father cut the speech short and called for the best robe, a ring, and sandals. Even while the son was far off, the father's love found him (Ellicott). Paul says salvation is "not of works, lest anyone should boast" (Ephesians 2:9). If your love for Him feels too small, stop measuring it and think about His love for you instead (Spurgeon, quoted by Guzik). Letting God love you starts with believing He means it.

Read before class: Luke 15:11-24; Romans 5:6-11; Ephesians 2:4-10

D. Love for Our Neighbor Proves It (Matthew 22:39-40; 1 John 4:20)

D1. Jesus was asked for one commandment and gave two. How are love for God and love for neighbor alike, and why does everything in the Law and the Prophets hang on them? (Matthew 22:39-40; also Leviticus 19:18)

Commentary

- "But wherefore 'like unto this?' Because this makes the way for that, and by it is again established" (John Chrysostom, Homily 71 on Matthew)
- "Christ is not satisfied with propounding an abstract proposition; he shows how this great precept is to be made practical, how one command involves and leads to the other." (Pulpit Commentary on Matthew 22:39)
- "What they have said has been to endeavor to win people to love God and to love each other. Love to God and man comprehends the whole of religion, and to produce this has been the design of Moses, the prophets, the Saviour, and the apostles." (Barnes' Notes on Matthew 22:40)
- "The two great commandments lay at the root of all. The rest did but expand and apply them" (Ellicott's Commentary on Matthew 22:40)
- "Moses summed up all in the ten commandments, to which, truly interpreted, all the precepts of Scripture are reducible. Christ here brings the ten to two." (Matthew Poole, as quoted in David Guzik, Enduring Word on Matthew 22)

ICCEC Catechism

- "Commandments 1-4 show us the love of God and are sometimes referred to as the First Table of the Law, and Commandments 5-10 show us love for our neighbor and are referred to as the Second Table of the Law." (Q-283)

Summary

The second commandment is like the first because the two belong together. Love for God makes the way for love of neighbor, and love of neighbor confirms it (Chrysostom). Jesus was asked for one commandment and gave two, showing how the great command becomes practical (Pulpit Commentary). Moses and the prophets were always trying to win people to love God and love each other (Barnes). These two are the root, and everything else expands and applies them (Ellicott). Moses summed up the law in ten commandments, and Christ brought the ten down to two (Poole, quoted by Guzik). Loving

your neighbor as yourself means caring about their interests the way you naturally care about your own (Guzik). The Ten Commandments follow the same pattern: the first four show love for God, and the last six show love for neighbor (Q-283).

Deep Dive

The second command comes from Leviticus 19:18: "You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD." It sits in a book that is mostly ceremonial, and the Pharisees deserve credit for drawing it out (Ellicott). A generation before Jesus, the sage Hillel summed up the whole Torah for a gentile with a version of this command (Schaser). Paul writes that "love is the fulfillment of the law" (Romans 13:10) and that "all the law is fulfilled in one word" (Galatians 5:14). Jesus does not set the two commandments side by side as equals in every way. Love for God comes first, and love for neighbor flows from it.

Read before class: Leviticus 19:17-18; Romans 13:8-10; Galatians 5:13-14

D2. John calls it a lie to claim love for God while hating a brother. Why is the way we treat people we can see the test of our love for a God we cannot see? (1 John 4:20; also verse 21)

Commentary

- "It is often easier for someone to proclaim his love for God, because that regards a private relationship with an invisible God. But John rightly insists that our claim of loving God is false if we do not also love our brother, and that this love must be seen." (David Guzik, Enduring Word on 1 John 4)
- "If a professed Christian, therefore, does not love one who bears the divine image, whom he sees and knows, how can he love that God whose image he bears, whom he has not seen?" (Barnes' Notes on 1 John 4:20)
- "God would say to us, 'Learn to love Me, Whom you cannot see, by loving My children, whom you can see.'" (David Guzik, Enduring Word on 1 John 4)
- "If a man professes to love God, and yet indulges anger or revenge, or shows a selfish disposition, he gives his profession the lie." (Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary on 1 John 4)
- "He is to be loved because he is God's image and likeness, heir of the same hope as we ourselves, and presented to us as the object on and by which we are to show the reality of our love to God." (Pulpit Commentary on Matthew 22:39)

ICCEC Catechism

- "We must be known for our love for other believers, loving them, sacrificially and unconditionally, as Jesus does." (Q-323)
- "As God is Father, so we are his children, and our relationship with each other is as brothers and sisters." (Q-224)

Summary

John says our claim to love God is tested by how we treat people. Love for an invisible God can stay private, but love for a brother or sister has to be seen (Guzik). If we will not love a person we can see, who bears God's image, it makes no sense to claim we love the God whose image they bear (Barnes). God teaches us to love Him by loving His children (Guzik). Anyone who professes love for God while holding on to anger, revenge, or selfishness contradicts his own words (Matthew Henry). Our neighbor is to be loved because he bears God's image, and he is where our love for God becomes real (Pulpit Commentary). Disciples are to be known for their love for other believers (Q-323), because we are the Father's children and brothers and sisters to each other (Q-224).

Deep Dive

John wrote, "If someone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar" (1 John 4:20), and then, "he who loves God must love his brother also" (1 John 4:21). He had already said, "let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth" (1 John 3:18). Jesus made love the sign the world would see: "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35). Jesus also said to leave a gift at the altar and first be reconciled with a brother (Matthew 5:23-24), because God is more pleased when we make things right with each other (Guzik). Love for God and love for people cannot be pulled apart.

Read before class: 1 John 4:19-21; 1 John 3:16-18; John 13:34-35

D3. Think of someone who has hurt you or whose choices you disagree with. What does it look like to want their good without excusing the wrong or letting bitterness take root? (also Ephesians 4:31-32; Romans 12:21)

Commentary

- "It is a forgiveness which in us, as in Him, does not imply condonation of evil, or even the withholding of needful chastisement, but which absolutely ignores self, conquers man's selfish anger, and knows no limit" (Ellicott's Commentary on Ephesians 4:32)
- "an acerbity of temper, ready to take offence and break out in anger" (Ellicott's Commentary on Ephesians 4:31, describing bitterness)

- "The infliction of vengeance is not a sign of strength, but of weakness. To repress the desire for revenge is to gain a victory over self, which is not only nobler in itself, but will also be much more effectual." (Ellicott's Commentary on Romans 12:21)
- "Because of this, the excuse 'I just can't love that person' (or other such excuses) is invalid. If we are born of Him and are abiding in Him then the resources for love are there." (David Guzik, Enduring Word on 1 John 4)
- "Mark how God's forgiveness causes us to forgive. God forgives us, though we had no cause to sin against him. We must forgive, as he has forgiven us." (Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary on Ephesians 4)

ICCEC Catechism

- "These words absolutely require that we should bear no malice or hatred toward others but be at peace, loving all people as much as we are able to do on our part." (Q-246)
- "To be merciful is to love and forgive others as we have been forgiven and loved by Christ Jesus." (Q-270)

Summary

This is an application question. Love seeks a person's good; it does not mean calling wrong right. Biblical forgiveness does not excuse evil or remove needed consequences, but it sets self aside, overcomes selfish anger, and has no limit (Ellicott). Bitterness is a sharp temper that is quick to take offense (Ellicott), and it grows when we keep replaying the hurt. Steps people often name: praying for the person by name, refusing to retell the story to others, setting healthy boundaries, doing one kind thing, and talking with a pastor when the hurt runs deep. Taking revenge is a sign of weakness, while overcoming the urge for it is a victory over self (Ellicott). God forgave us when we had no excuse, and that is why we forgive (Matthew Henry). Praying "as we forgive" means bearing no malice and living at peace with all as far as it depends on us (Q-246).

Deep Dive

Paul lists what to put away: "Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice" (Ephesians 4:31). Then he gives the replacement: "be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you" (Ephesians 4:32). Hebrews warns about a "root of bitterness" that springs up and troubles many (Hebrews 12:15). Romans 12 says, "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (Romans 12:21). Jesus told us to "pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you" (Matthew 5:44). Praying for someone by name is one of the hardest and best ways to keep bitterness from taking root.

Read before class: Ephesians 4:29-32; Romans 12:14-21; Hebrews 12:14-15

E. Sharing Our Lives (1 Thessalonians 2:7-8)

E1. Paul refused flattery, greed, and the praise of people. How do our motives help or hurt the message when we talk to others about Jesus? (1 Thessalonians 2:3-6)

Commentary

- "Most of these missionaries were opportunists, who took everything they could from their listeners, and then moved on to find someone else to support them." (David Guzik, Enduring Word on 1 Thessalonians 2)
- "charlatans who flattered people for financial gain, reputation, or other self-indulgent purposes" (David Carr, Working Preacher on 1 Thessalonians 2:1-8)
- "The Greek term has rather the idea of using fair words as a means of gaining one's own ends." (Leon Morris, as quoted in David Guzik, Enduring Word on 1 Thessalonians 2)
- "The evidences of the apostle's sincerity were, that he avoided flattery and covetousness. He avoided ambition and vain-glory." (Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary on 1 Thessalonians 2)
- "Paul didn't seek glory from men because his needs for security and acceptance were met primarily in Jesus." (David Guzik, Enduring Word on 1 Thessalonians 2)

ICCEC Catechism

- "It is a conviction that we can do nothing good without God's help and grace, thus counting ourselves as nothing without Him" (Q-257)

Summary

Thessalonica was full of traveling religious teachers, and most of them were opportunists who took what they could and moved on (Guzik). They flattered people for money, reputation, or other selfish gain (Carr). Flattery in Paul's sense means using nice words to get your own way (Morris, quoted by Guzik). Paul avoided flattery and greed, ambition and vainglory (Matthew Henry), and he could do that because his security and acceptance came from Jesus, not from his listeners (Guzik). Motives matter because people can tell when they are a project, a number, or a means to an end, and that can close them to the message. Sharing the gospel well starts with humility, knowing we can do nothing good without God's help and grace (Q-257).

Deep Dive

1 Thessalonians 2:1-8 is this week's epistle reading. Thessalonica sat on the Egnatian Way, a major highway through Macedonia, and it was a port city crowded with competing religions (Guzik). Paul says his message did not come "from error or uncleanness, nor was it in deceit" (1 Thessalonians 2:3), and that he spoke "not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts" (1 Thessalonians 2:4). The word for "approved" was used for testing a person's fitness for public office (Hiebert, quoted by Guzik). Paul asked the Galatians, "do I seek to please men?" (Galatians 1:10). He could point to what the Thessalonians had seen for themselves, so they did not have to take his word for it (Carr).

Read before class: 1 Thessalonians 2:1-6; Galatians 1:10; 2 Corinthians 4:1-6

E2. Paul says his team was gentle among them, like a nursing mother caring for her own children. What would that kind of patient, tender care look like toward the people God has put near us? (1 Thessalonians 2:7)

Commentary

- "Mildness and tenderness greatly recommend religion, and are most conformable to God's gracious dealing with sinners, in and by the gospel. This is the way to win people." (Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary on 1 Thessalonians 2)
- "Instead of using authority, we used only the most kind and gentle methods to win you and to promote your peace and order." (Barnes' Notes on 1 Thessalonians 2:7)
- "the Apostles, sitting familiarly like mothers amidst a group of their own children, folding them for warmth to their bosoms" (Ellicott's Commentary on 1 Thessalonians 2:7)
- "Paul was like a nursing mother, who only looks to give to her child." (David Guzik, Enduring Word on 1 Thessalonians 2)
- "this passage reveals some values that Paul believes he shares with his audience, namely, sincerity and gentleness, in contrast to greed or abuse of power." (David Carr, Working Preacher on 1 Thessalonians 2:1-8)

ICCEC Catechism

- "Saint Paul lists the fruit of the Spirit as love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, kindness, faith, humility and discipline." (Q-158)

Summary

A nursing mother does not make demands; she gives. Paul could have used his authority as an apostle, but he chose the kindest and gentlest ways to win people (Barnes). The picture is of mothers sitting among their own children and holding them close for warmth

(Ellicott). Gentleness and tenderness win people and match the way God deals with sinners (Matthew Henry). Paul's care showed the sincerity and gentleness he hoped the church would share, in contrast to greed or abuse of power (Carr). For us that can mean patience with people who grow slowly, meeting needs before giving advice, listening more than talking, and making people feel safe. Gentleness is part of the fruit of the Spirit (Q-158).

Deep Dive

Some early manuscripts read "babes" instead of "gentle" in verse 7, so Paul may first call his team infants and then a nursing mother (Vincent; Carr). Either way, he is describing humble, voluntary care (Calvin, quoted by Guzik). The word "cherishes" originally meant to warm (Vincent). Jesus looked at the crowds and "was moved with compassion for them" (Matthew 9:36), and Isaiah pictures God gathering the lambs in His arms and gently leading those with young (Isaiah 40:11). A few verses later Paul switches to a father's care, exhorting and comforting the believers "as a father does his own children" (1 Thessalonians 2:11). Love needs both tenderness and steady guidance.

Read before class: 1 Thessalonians 2:7-12; Matthew 9:35-38; Isaiah 40:11

E3. Paul gave the Thessalonians the gospel and his own life along with it. What changes when we share our lives with people and not just information? (1 Thessalonians 2:8)

Commentary

- "Paul's preaching was effective because he gave not only the Gospel, but himself as well (also our own lives), and he gave because of love (you had become dear to us)." (David Guzik, Enduring Word on 1 Thessalonians 2)
- "It has been said that people don't care how much you know until they know how much you care. Paul gave both his care and his knowledge to the Thessalonians." (David Guzik, Enduring Word on 1 Thessalonians 2)
- "The gospel was, as it were, the milk given to the young converts; but the nursing mothers were ready to let them draw their very life away, so dearly did they love them." (Ellicott's Commentary on 1 Thessalonians 2:8)
- "The sense here is, that Paul was so strongly attached to them that he would have been willing to lay down his life for them." (Barnes' Notes on 1 Thessalonians 2:8)
- "it denotes the warm affection and tender yearning that the missionaries felt for their spiritual babes at Thessalonica." (D. Edmond Hiebert, as quoted in David Guzik, Enduring Word on 1 Thessalonians 2)

ICCEC Catechism

- "The spiritual works of mercy are: 1. Evangelizing and exhorting" (Q-272)
- "We are called to pick up our cross and deny ourselves daily by living a sacrificial life through the physical and spiritual works of mercy and grace toward others." (Q-270)

Summary

This is an application question. Handing someone a message can take a minute and cost nothing. Sharing your life takes time, presence, meals, listening, and letting yourself be known. Paul's preaching worked because he gave himself along with the gospel, and he did it because the Thessalonians had become dear to him (Guzik). The gospel was like milk for new believers, but Paul's team was ready to give their very lives (Ellicott). Paul was so attached to them that he would have died for them (Barnes). People rarely care how much you know until they know how much you care (Guzik). In practice this might look like inviting someone to dinner, showing up at the hospital, or helping someone move, and then telling them why you follow Jesus. Sharing the gospel is itself a work of mercy (Q-272), part of the sacrificial life we are called to (Q-270).

Deep Dive

Paul writes that they were "well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us" (1 Thessalonians 2:8). The word for "affectionately longing" is very rare and may come from the language of the nursery (Hiebert, quoted by Guzik). Paul worked night and day so he would not be a burden to them (1 Thessalonians 2:9). He later reminded the Ephesian elders of Jesus' words, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). John adds, "By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us" (1 John 3:16). Sharing your life usually starts with something as small as a meal or a phone call, which is just what this week's Practice asks.

Read before class: 1 Thessalonians 2:8-12; Acts 20:31-35; 1 John 3:16-18

F. Building a Culture of Love (Psalm 1:1-3)

F1. Psalm 1 shows two paths: drifting toward the scornful, or delighting in God's Word. How does what we enjoy most shape who we turn into over time? (Psalm 1:1-3)

Commentary

- "What makes you happy? What gets you excited? This is a good way to see what is important to you." (David Guzik, Enduring Word on Psalm 1)
- "Man must have some delight, some supreme pleasure. His heart was never meant to be a vacuum. If not filled with the best things, it will be filled with the unworthy and disappointing." (Charles Spurgeon, as quoted in David Guzik, Enduring Word on Psalm 1)
- "sin is progressive; one evil propensity or act leads to another." (Adam Clarke, as quoted in David Guzik, Enduring Word on Psalm 1)
- "Instead of finding his happiness in the society and the occupations of the wicked, he finds it in the truth of God." (Barnes' Notes on Psalm 1:2)
- "If a person delights in something, you don't have to beg him to do it or to like it. He will do it all by himself." (David Guzik, Enduring Word on Psalm 1)

ICCEC Catechism

- "To 'hunger and thirst after righteousness' is to live a life that desires loving fellowship with Christ and with one another." (Q-268)

Summary

What we delight in becomes what we think about, and what we think about shapes who we become. Psalm 1 describes a slide: walking in the counsel of the ungodly, then standing in the path of sinners, then sitting with the scornful. Sin is progressive, one step leading to the next (Clarke, quoted by Guzik). The blessed person finds happiness in God's truth instead of in the company of the wicked (Barnes). Our hearts were never meant to be empty; if they are not filled with the best things, they will be filled with lesser ones (Spurgeon, quoted by Guzik). A simple test is to ask what makes you happy or excited (Guzik). When we delight in God's Word, no one has to beg us to read it (Guzik), and we grow like a tree by the water. A righteous life longs for loving fellowship with Christ and with one another (Q-268).

Deep Dive

Psalm 1 is this week's psalm, and it opens the whole book of Psalms. The word for "delight" in verse 2 can also be read as inclination, from a root meaning "to bend" (Ellicott). To "meditate" literally means to murmur (Ellicott). The blessed person "shall be like a tree Planted by the rivers of water" (Psalm 1:3). Jeremiah uses the same picture for the one "who trusts in the LORD" (Jeremiah 17:7-8). The fruit comes "in its season" (Psalm 1:3), so growth can take time (Guzik). Psalm 119 shows the same delight: "Oh, how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day" (Psalm 119:97).

Read before class: Psalm 1; Jeremiah 17:7-8; Psalm 119:97-104

F2. Picture two groups, one built on rules and one built on the Father's love. What would a newcomer notice in each, and which one would make them want to stay? (also Galatians 5:13-14)

Commentary

- "It is worth asking if people see us as people of freedom and liberty. Often, Christians are seen as people more bound up and hung up than anyone else is." (David Guzik, Enduring Word on Galatians 5)
- "He is saying that freedom is of the essence of being Christian; it is the fundamental basis of all Christian living." (Leon Morris, as quoted in David Guzik, Enduring Word on Galatians 5)
- "The flesh expects others to conform to us, and doesn't care much about others. But when we through love serve one another, we conquer the flesh." (David Guzik, Enduring Word on Galatians 5)
- "The failure has never been informational. The failure is always somewhere between the knowing and the doing" (Zina Jacque, Working Preacher on Matthew 22:34-46)

ICCEC Catechism

- "According to His merciful nature, He set them before us, not as commandments, but as blessings we receive when we freely enter into and fulfill them." (Q-256, on the Beatitudes)
- "The Church is a divinely instituted community of believers united by faith in Jesus Christ, and by the love and law of God." (Q-160)

Summary

This is an application question. A group built on rules tends to grow comparison, performance, gossip, guilt, and people who hide their struggles. A group built on the Father's love tends to grow honesty, welcome, patience, service, and people who stay. Christians are often seen as more bound up than anyone else (Guzik), even though freedom is at the heart of being a Christian (Morris, quoted by Guzik). That freedom is not for ourselves but for serving one another in love, which fulfills the whole law (Galatians 5:13-14), and serving others is how we overcome the flesh (Guzik). Most groups already know what love requires; the gap is between the knowing and the doing (Jacque). Jesus gave the Beatitudes not as commandments but as blessings to enter into (Q-256), and the Church is united by faith in Christ and by the love and law of God (Q-160).

Deep Dive

Paul writes, "you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another" (Galatians 5:13). He follows it with a warning: "if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another!" (Galatians 5:15). A culture of rules tends to bite, and a culture of love tends to serve. The fruit of the Spirit he lists next begins with love (Galatians 5:22). Colossians adds, "above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection" (Colossians 3:14). The first believers were known for the apostles' teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread, and prayer (Acts 2:42).

Read before class: Galatians 5:13-26; Colossians 3:12-17; Acts 2:42-47

F3. The outline names four values: simple, adaptable, welcoming, and excellence. Which one could most help our group love people where they are and point them to Jesus, and what is one step we could take? (also Romans 15:7)

Commentary

- "Acknowledge one another as Christians, and treat one another as such, though you may differ in opinion about many smaller matters" (Barnes' Notes on Romans 15:7)
- "The duty of Christians to show cordiality to each other is now based upon the comprehensiveness of the love of Christ" (Ellicott's Commentary on Romans 15:7)
- "Christ's whole life was a self-denying, self-displeasing life." (Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary on Romans 15)
- "Paul tried to make the Gospel as attractive as possible, but he never changed its central character or focus." (David Guzik, Enduring Word on 1 Thessalonians 2)

ICCEC Catechism

- "Showing hospitality to strangers." (Q-271, from the physical works of mercy)
- "Jesus teaches us that we are the Father's family." (Q-224)

Summary

This is an application question. Simple can mean keeping the focus on loving God and loving people instead of adding rules. Adaptable can mean meeting people where they are without changing the message; Paul made the gospel as attractive as he could but never changed its center (Guzik). Welcoming means receiving one another as Christ received us (Romans 15:7), even when we differ on smaller matters (Barnes), because Christ's love reached everyone (Ellicott). Excellence can mean doing ordinary things well for the sake of others, the way Christ's whole life was given for others (Matthew Henry). One step

might be inviting someone new, following up with someone who has missed a few weeks, or keeping the meeting simple enough that a newcomer feels at home. Showing hospitality to strangers is one of the works of mercy (Q-271), and Jesus teaches us that we are the Father's family (Q-224).

Deep Dive

Paul's version of adaptable was "I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some" (1 Corinthians 9:22). He adjusted his customs and manner of life to the people he was reaching (Barnes), but not the message (Guzik). Welcoming is Romans 15:7: "receive one another, just as Christ also received us, to the glory of God." Hebrews adds, "Do not forget to entertain strangers" (Hebrews 13:2). The first believers met in homes and ate together "with gladness and simplicity of heart," and the Lord added to their number daily (Acts 2:46-47). Love is easiest to see when it is simple, close, and shared.

Read before class: Romans 15:5-7; 1 Corinthians 9:19-23; Acts 2:42-47

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