

Loving God in the Real World (Part 2)
Matthew 11:28-30
(GCF – September 13, 2009)

I. Introduction

[Testimony from last week's passage?]

Scripture for this week – Galatians 5:22-25

“One of the teachers of religious law was standing there listening to the debate. He realized that Jesus had answered well, so he asked, ‘Of all the commandments, which is the most important?’ 29 Jesus replied, ‘The most important commandment is this: “Listen, O Israel! The LORD our God is the one and only LORD. 30 And you must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength.” 31 The second is equally important: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” No other commandment is greater than these.’” (Mark 12:28-31, NLT)

“Love the Lord your God with *all* your heart, *all* your soul, *all* your mind, and *all* your strength.”

Beautiful words and something we quote and talk about a lot.

But what does it really mean to love God in this way? How do we love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength in the real world of day-to-day living?

Two weeks ago, I spoke about loving God with all our heart.

To briefly summarize: to love God with all our heart means that we love Him from the administrative center of our being.

It means that the ultimate intention of our lives is to worship, love and serve God. At the very core of who I am, I am determined to yield to God in every decision I make in this life.

This is what it means to be born again, and from this transformation of my heart – a heart that was previously dead to God and steeped in the pursuit of only pleasing myself to a heart that is alive to God and determined to please Him – I begin to work out my salvation.

It is the heart that must change first and then the soul (my thoughts and actions) will follow.

Today, I want to talk about loving God with all our soul.

II. Loving God with all my soul

If the heart is where it all begins, the soul is where it is all lived out.

The soul is also difficult to define.

Many would simply define the soul as the mind, will, and emotions. While I think this is a fairly good definition, I think there are other ways to think of the soul.

Dallas Willard in his book “Renovation of the Heart” describes the soul as follows: “The soul is that aspect of your whole being that correlates, integrates, and enlivens everything going on in the various dimensions of the self. It regulates whatever is occurring in each of those dimensions and how they interact with each other and respond to surrounding events in the overall governance of your life.”

The soul is the **sum total** of who you are and it is what will live on eternally.

“The rich man also died and was buried, 23 and his soul went to the place of the dead.” (Luke 16:22-23, NLT)

People who “guard the heart as the well spring of life” (Proverbs 4:23), will find their soul properly ordered under God and in harmony with reality. [Expound a bit on this]

When the soul has brought itself under the **lordship** of Christ and the teaching of Scripture (which can only be done with God’s help through the renewed heart), the outcome will be a person who is prepared for and capable of responding to the situations of life in ways that are good and right.

The whole of our thinking (which Jesus says we must also love God with), our emotions, our relationships, even our bodies then come into agreement with God’s truth and purpose for our lives.

A. The problem of the ruined soul

The problem is that we all come to Christ in a state of being **ruined** – our lives are a mess.

We have been hurt and are emotionally devastated.

We have believed lies about ourselves, others and God, and we are deceived.

We have ingrained patterns of behavior and we are addicted.

It is this ruined state of the soul that causes so much difficulty in our lives even after we have experienced the grace of God and been “born again” in our heart or spirit.

This means we may still be going to heaven, but our lives (our souls) are a mess; even as Christians. It is the state of the soul that causes some to lose heart and give up.

The ruined soul is the result of a heart that has turned away from **God**. It begins with a state of denial.

“They know the truth about God because he has made it obvious to them. 20 For ever since the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky. Through everything God made, they can clearly see his invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature. So they have no excuse for not knowing God. 21 Yes, they knew God, but they wouldn't worship him as God or even give him thanks. And they began to think up foolish ideas of what God was like. As a result, their minds became dark and confused.” (Romans 1:19-22, NLT)

In this state of denial we become confused and our minds become darkened. We lose our sense of self and begin to look to other things in the search for self.

Much of this search centers on the sensual. Listen to the progression in Romans 1: *“Claiming to be wise, they instead became utter fools. 23 And instead of worshiping the glorious, ever-living God, they worshiped idols...As a result, they did vile and degrading things with each other's bodies. 25 They traded the truth about God for a lie. So they worshiped and served the things God created instead of the Creator himself, who is worthy of eternal praise! Amen. 26 That is why God abandoned them to their shameful desires. Even the women turned against the natural way to have sex and instead indulged in sex with each other. 27 And the men, instead of having normal sexual relations with women, burned with lust for each other...28 Since they thought it foolish to acknowledge God, he abandoned them to their foolish thinking and let them do things that should never be done. 29 Their lives became full of every kind of wickedness, sin, greed, hate, envy, murder, quarreling, deception, malicious behavior, and gossip... [here the list goes on].” (verses 22-29)*

This is the state of the ruined soul.

Along these same lines, Paul says, *“With the Lord's authority I say this: Live no longer as the Gentiles do, for they are hopelessly confused. 18 Their minds are full of darkness; they wander far from the life God gives because they have closed their minds and hardened their hearts against him.19 They have no sense of shame. They live for lustful pleasure and eagerly practice every kind of impurity.” (Ephesians 4:17-19, NLT)*

But sensuality is not just sexual – the quest for more and “better” drugs, the lust for things – all of these are the result of the ruined soul looking for meaning and life.

In our quest for meaning we become obsessed with our performance at work, we fanatically attach ourselves to a political party, religious movement, or even a sports team.

We think that if we just wear these certain designer clothes, have the most beautiful girl or boy, or graduate at the top of our class at school that we will somehow attain that missing piece that will bring meaning to our meaningless lives.

It is to the ruined soul that lashes out in anger at a perceived or real hurt when the Lord says, “Love your enemies” and “bless those who persecute you.”

It is the ruined soul that holds on to a hurt and grows in bitterness when the Scriptures clearly state that we are to constantly live in a state of forgiveness.

Let's watch a clip that speaks to the ruined state of our soul. (3:10 to Yuma)

I could go on and on about the ruined soul, but I think we are all too painfully aware of our own state of being ruined – you probably don't need me to point it out any further. The point is that the Scriptures clearly recognize the state of the ruined soul.

Not only does Scripture recognize this state, but it also clearly expresses God's heart to bring **wholeness** back to the ruined soul.

*“Then Jesus said, ‘Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find **rest for your souls**. 30 For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light.’” (Matthew 11:28-30, NLT)*

B. What does the soul at rest look like?

“Lord, my heart is not proud; my eyes are not haughty. I don't concern myself with matters too great or too awesome for me to grasp. 2 Instead, I have calmed and quieted myself, like a weaned child who no longer cries for its mother's milk. Yes, like a weaned child is my soul within me. 3 O Israel, put your hope in the Lord—now and always.” (Psalms 131, NLT)

“But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things! 24 Those who belong to Christ Jesus have nailed the passions and desires of their sinful nature to his cross and crucified them there. 25 Since we are living by the Spirit, let us follow the Spirit's leading in every part of our lives.” (Galatians 5:22-25)

III. Conclusion

Today, we have looked at the soul in its ruined state and begun to get a glimpse of what God wants to do in our lives to bring rest to our souls.

But the question remains, how do I experience this healing for my soul? How do I actually love God with all my soul?

This is what we will talk about next week.

Additional Scriptures to Study: Deuteronomy 13:1-4; Psalm 31:7; Mark 8:36-37

The ruined soul: Deuteronomy 28:64-67; Job 7:11 & 10:1; Psalm 13:2; Matthew 16:26

The healing soul: Deuteronomy 30:1-6; Joshua 22:5; 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24