

THE LOVE OF GOD

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Pharisee love

It seems like there has been a lot of conversation recently about the two central commands Jesus gives us in Scripture. Love God and love people. When you think about it, it is amazing how much of Scripture comes back to or hinges on these two points.

Sometimes even students of the Word become so distracted by things in this world that we forget these two basic points. Actually, we can become so distracted by our own study of the Bible that we forget these two basic points. Now, before you reach for the rocks to stone the false prophet, hear me out.

The Pharisees of Jesus' day were the most astute Bible students you could ever imagine. They knew the Scriptures in intimate detail, or you might say they knew every little jot and tittle. Yet as you read through the gospels you will see that Jesus reserves His strongest rebukes for them. Why? Jesus' point is very plain, they were unloving. All of His charges, all of His rebukes seem to come back to this one point, they loved themselves instead of loving God and loving people. It is the central charge in Jesus' rebuke recorded in Matthew 23.

However, Jesus never accuses them of not being students of the Word. "Woe to you Pharisees! You should have done your Bible study" isn't recorded in the gospels. No, they studied and searched the Scriptures carefully (John 5:39-47). Instead Jesus says two things that should strike fear into the heart of every bible student.

- **They did not have the love of God (John 5:42)**

Their study of the Scriptures did not lead to love. They did not have the love of God in them. For some it is a bit too easy to discount this warning. "Well of course not, they did not have the love of God in them! They were not Christians." But, that is not the context of the passage. The context makes it clear they should have loved as God does.

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Their study of the Word should have matured them into lovers of God and of people but, instead they were lovers of self. Something went desperately wrong as they studied and though they got into the Word, it seems the Word did not get into them.

- **They did not believe the Word (John 5:46-47)**

Jesus said they did not believe the Scriptures. They searched them and studied them, they memorized and recited them, they discussed and argued them but they did not believe them. It sounds almost impossible. How can someone know the Word so well and yet not believe it? What went wrong?

Well, obviously, they must have believed something about the Scriptures. They ordered their lives around the Jewish festivals and the sacrificial system. They believed enough to frame their world view around the need to follow the law. But, they did not believe that Jesus was the Messiah.

What happened?

Let me share an opinion here, and feel free to disagree. I believe their failure to exhibit the love of God, their failure to believe Jesus, their failure to believe Moses (John 5:46) was because of a failure to let the Word dominate their lives. I think they controlled their study of the Scripture instead of letting their study of the Scripture dominate and control them. Or you might say they studied for mastery of the Word, instead of studying so as to be mastered by the Word. I realized the topic is complex and this opinion is very simplistic. But, I believe self was the problem. Their pride or self was the controlling factor and not God. They loved themselves, it was Pharisee love.

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What about us?

We face the same danger. Our bible study must lead to submission of our lives, our very being, to the Word of God and the God of the Word. When it does, we die to self by loving God and loving people. It is the inevitable outcome of submission. Death to pride or self brings life to a love for God and others.

Our Bible study must not be for the purpose of mastering the Word, but that we might fully understand the Word and be mastered by it. Our submission to the Word is not seen in our willingness to correct and condemn every teacher, preacher, or student who might disagree with us, but it is seen in our eagerness to love kindness and show mercy.

The Pharisees might have been technically correct but they were devotionally perverted. They knew what the Word said, but their heart wasn't in it. Their devotion was perverted from praising God to lauding self.

Questions to think about:

Are you judgmental or loving?

Do you find yourself loving the strictness of the letter of the law or the amazing grace of God?

Does your time in the Word drive you to love God and love people? Or, do you walk away impressed with how well you are doing?

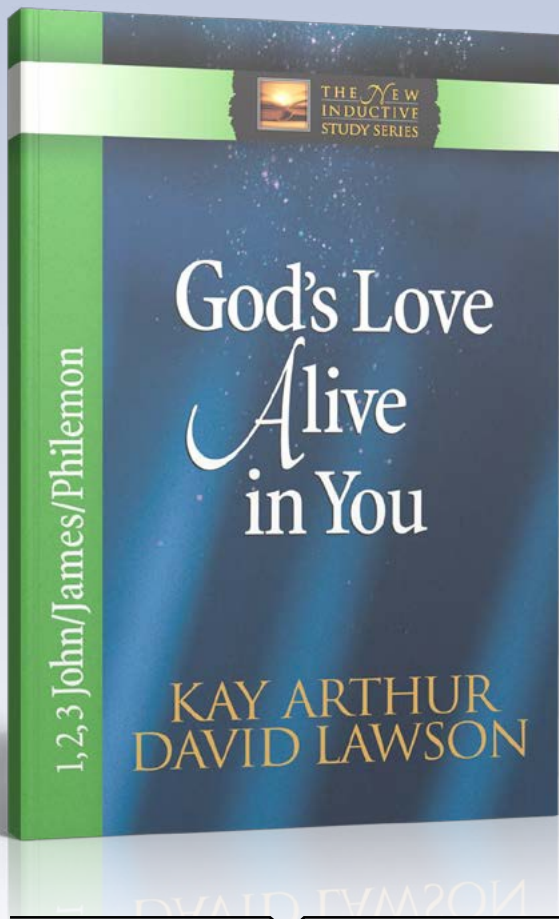
Spend some time today with the Lord asking Him to reveal to you both the attitudes of your heart and the way people around you perceive you.

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by Kay Arthur and David Lawson

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