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SERMON TITLE: The Power of Unfailing Love
SCRIPTURE: Mark 12:28-34
DATE: July 18, 2021
View online service at www.fpcd.org/live-stream

Read also Deuteronomy 6:4-12.

What would change you into a more loving human being?

That's an odd question, I know. But, what would help you to love your spouse the way you want to, or your children, or all these others with whom you are sitting this morning? Most Christians want to love others well. Or at least be considerate and respectful.

Capt. Ron Pettigrew spoke last week about the early church being of one mind and heart, open to each other, sharing, praying, and testifying to their city with much grace.

We aspire to the same kind of integrity. We aspire to “be whom we say we are—God’s people.”

But sometimes it gets hard. Circumstances are not always what we wish and this challenges us.

Like me, Capt. Pettigrew lost his wife of many years. He said, “I had a choice. We all do in times of hardship. We can become bitter or better. We have the choice of holding back or giving all; living with integrity and encouragement—or distancing ourselves from God.”

The question is, what would help you grow in that right direction? What would help you to love your spouse, your family, and the others in this room more deeply?

Jesus had been talking about marriage, widowhood, and heaven when a scribe (a Sunday School teacher) asked him a most important question. He had been listening to Jesus’ discussion with other spiritual teachers and he loved what Jesus said. So he asked him a sincere question.

It is really important to question the Lord—don’t just read the Bible. We owe it to him and ourselves to ask questions. Hear the man’s question. READ Mark 12:28-31

Jesus was referring to something Moses taught, the most important command. The Shema:

“Hear. O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord alone.

And you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your strength” (Deut 6:4-5).

“Listen,” Moses said. Did you ever say something so important that you prefaced it with “Listen to me?”

You are to “love God with your whole heart, whole life, whole mind, and whole strength.”

This means commit yourselves wholeheartedly.

- *Teach your children*
- *Remember it through the day*
- *Remind yourself*
- *Put pictures and symbols around your house or office*

The heart means in Hebrew (לֵבָב) “the control center” or “the seat of the intellect.” In Greek, καρδιά means “the center and source of the whole inner life.”

It’s not like a mushy feeling. God’s love involves tenderness and emotional attachment—God loves you, the Psalmist says, like *a mother nursing her child* (Is 66:11-13). Jesus said on the road to Jerusalem *how I long to draw you under my wings like a mother hen* (Mt 23:37).

But the power of unfailing love is the Wholehearted Decision to Love God. That’s how God loves us.

We think it is optional whether we are going to participate or not. We are not so connected to God and so we hold back.

How much are you getting out of your faith? How much are you loving it and valuing God’s love? That depends on how much you hold back, as opposed to giving all.

Think of a marriage or a family with lukewarm love. Think of not caring that much about your spouse or children or parents or siblings or friends, if you live alone. How would it feel to live without cherishing someone or being cherished by someone? Sort of lonely, right?

God reaches through that to help us love by giving this command because God needs to love. God’s whole being is filled with love. Look around at the beauty of this world, this place that has so lovingly been provided for us. That’s a reflection of God’s love.

We need to love. We need to love God with deep gratitude.

God was about to fulfill his longtime promise to Israel of land when he gave them the command to love him. Faithfulness is an act of love.

Remember, loving someone is not about a mushy feeling; but about commitment, integrity, unselfishness, giving, and the intention to love fully.

God’s provision was huge and overriding:

- Large, prosperous cities that *they did not build*;

- houses richly stocked with goods that *they did not produce*;
- water from cisterns that *they did not dig*;
- food from vineyards and trees that *they did not plant*.

Remembering to love God is everything to God. Being ALL IN is everything to God. One-sided relationships are a hindrance to love.

So Jesus says:

“This is the **NUMBER ONE COMMANDMENT.**”

When you love God it helps you to love others.

Rev. Jim Witherow, who is a friend of this church, says

THE CHURCH IS TO LEAD IN LOVE.

This command is not just for the people who lived at the time of Moses. It was not written only for the people in Jesus' time. It was written for First Presbyterian Church Duncanville and for our future.

What does that look like? Let's read on:

The teacher of religious law replied [to Jesus], “Well said, Teacher. You have spoken the truth by saying that there is only one God and no other. And I know it is important to love him with all my heart and all my understanding and all my strength, and to love my neighbor as myself. *This is more important than to offer all of the burnt offerings and sacrifices required in the law.*” Realizing how much the man understood, Jesus said to him, “You are not far from the Kingdom of God.” And after that, no one dared to ask him any more questions (Mark 12:32-34).

Let your heart, mind, soul love God. Do it with all your strength. Do not reduce your relationship with God to duty, as they did in OT times.

Paul said: If I speak in tongues of angels or make prophetic declarations or have powers to heal and am really smart about the mysteries of knowledge . . . but I don't have love, i am nothing.

Jesus said, “That's right. Love is the answer. Love contains the power.”

Perhaps that is why God makes a covenant with us. God makes a marriage with us.

Imagine a marriage where there is no faithfulness. Imagine a marriage where there's no rule about love and faithfulness, but instead, lackluster love—no humble devotion; no trust; no intimacy; no commitment to the family. Just lethargy; ho humness.

The willingness to love takes that away. Are you willing to step up to a higher level? God's way of love involves your whole being and all your resources. Yes, it makes you vulnerable. But the gain is tremendous.

The gain in trusting God is that God provides when you give. God blesses with abundance when it flows through your hands to others.

There is no other God that can fill the heart. Out of His love flows the love for your family and neighbors. For the first “neighbor” you are to love is your spouse, your children, and your grandchildren. Then that flourishing love flows to each other in this sanctuary and out to the world.

Have you experienced love from this church in the last year?
The Church must lead in LOVE.

AMEN