



The Great Decision

Mark 12:30 NIV

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.'

What Is Your Great Decision?

My first time teaching in Russia, I was with several of my students and fellow professors and we were about to cross a Moscow street. The light turned green and I started across. From behind me came a scream and a couple of the students grabbed me as I headed out into the street and yanked me back onto the sidewalk. Although the light was green in our direction, they insisted I wait until the cars turning right on the green had their way before we went into the crosswalk. With my American knowledge base and insight, I could have insisted that I would go ahead out into that street and force those cars wanting to turn right to wait for me as I passed. I had the opportunity of declaring myself "lord of the road", and I may or may not have survived that day. Instead, I decided that I would bow before Russian culture and let my "street sense" friends decide when I should cross and when I should stay on the sidewalk.

Each day we have our lord moments when we declare our sovereignty over various circumstances. It may be how much homework we do, when we show up to work, the food we decide to prepare or whether or not to put on make-up. The Bible is insistent that all ultimate authority is in God's hands; that the LORD is to be at the center of all we do and how we live. When asked which of the commandments were the most important to keep, Jesus pointed to something recorded in the ancient book of Deuteronomy, that it was true then and still true. **Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment.** (Matthew 22:37-38 NIV) All of Christianity is built on this premise that there is one God who is Lord and He is to be loved and obeyed. Throughout the Bible you see examples of people either doing this or not, choosing to love Him with all their heart, soul and mind or carelessly ignoring Him. The decisions made have had monumental ramifications at times like when the Israelites decided not to cross into the Promised Land and the whole generation of them was killed off before the nation was given a second opportunity at it. Of course, there is the account of Uzzah who carelessly disregarded the commands of God on how to take care of the ark of the covenant. **When they came to the threshing floor of Kidon, Uzzah reached out his hand to steady the ark, because the oxen stumbled. The Lord's anger burned against Uzzah, and he struck him down because he had put his hand on the ark. So he died there before God.** (1 Chronicles 13:9-10 NIV) The ark contained the tablets inscribed by the hand of God with the commandments and law on them.

Absolute devotion to God and obedience to His commands is the expectation He has for those who have eternal life. Remember that command to love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your mind was Jesus' answer to the "expert in the law" who wanted to know what was expected of those who want to inherit eternal life. Few realize just how crucial it is for them to be completely aligned with God

so that their devotion to Him is thoroughly ingrained within their personality. Many, even Christians, think it doesn't matter what they do, that God accepts it all and gives us a pass. Quoting the book of Deuteronomy, the New Testament declares, **Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our "God is a consuming fire."** (Hebrews 12:28-29 NIV) How many of us worship God with reverence and awe? Is there an electric anticipation within us that God, the Lord Almighty is near, that He is watching how we act toward Him?

There is wonderful picture in the book of Exodus of what God expects of us and this life with Him. The entire time the people having left Egypt and moved along, sometimes at a snail's pace toward their new home, God was in a great cloud that became a blazing fire at night. That cloud guided the Israelites, showed them when to go forward, when to stop, where to camp and when to travel onward. The cloud and God's people were completely aligned; at least as much as sin and individuality did not wreck the union of God and His people. It was like a cat, tracking with a laser pointer, wherever the beam of light goes, the cat lands there too. That is how the Lord intends for it to be with us and Him. There is no hesitation on our part, no flinching at His word. When He says to worship Him, you do. When He says to obey Him, you do. When He tells you to stop what you are doing and follow Him, you do.

We cannot make the declaration that we love God if we don't back up those words with obedience to Him. The Bible makes it clear that love for God is not a warm, fuzzy feeling; it is a heart and mind so aligned with Him that the separation between God and self becomes imperceptible. God and His direction become united in your heart. Jesus demands obedience, not independence that calls itself love. He made this clear when He insisted, **"If you love me, you will obey what I command."** (John 14:15 NIV) Two parts of this declaration of Jesus need to be underscored. "Obey" means to do exactly what one is told, and command reminds you that Jesus does not just pass along suggestions; He tells you what to do and when to do it. In this passage, Jesus then promises that His people will be given someone new, God will become a part of them like never before. **And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.** (John 14:16-17 NIV)

The translation of the Greek term, "parakletos" is unfortunate as it leaves the impression that God in you is your advisor, your therapist who helps you along. What we have now with the Holy Spirit is precisely what the Israelites had with the cloud in the wilderness. God is a part of you, directing your life. He is not offering suggestions; He is showing you the way to go, and to disregard Him or disobey Him outright is just as evil as when Israel would not enter the promised land and perhaps just as disastrous. We now have God in us and that is not to be taken lightly. In a time and age when Satan has great influence and authority in the world and his corruption has led to the downfall of many, it is crucial for you to pay attention to the Holy Spirit and do exactly what He tells you to do.

God does not expect those who have eternal life to ignore Him, not if they really do love Him. Listen precisely to what Jesus had to say about obedience. **"Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say? I will show you what he is like who comes to me and hears my words and puts them into practice. He is like a man building a house, who dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock. When a flood came, the torrent struck that house but could not shake it, because it was well built. But the one who hears my words and does not put them into practice is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. The moment the torrent struck that house, it collapsed, and its destruction was complete."** (Luke 6:46-49 NIV) It is no small matter when God tells you exactly what to do and you make a decision which way you will go on it. Many are impacted...not just you. So, be careful!