

There's a scene in the Gospel of John where Jesus is being questioned by Jewish leaders, whether it was the Sadducees or the Pharisees. As Jesus, at this point in his career, was gaining traction with people, there were healings on the Sabbath, miracle feedings, and so on that had started to spread throughout the region, with most of these taking place on the Sabbath. The religious establishment was not too keen on breaking Sabbath law, so the Pharisees and the Sadducees took issue. John, the gospel writer, narrates that the tipping point had been reached, and they had decided that they were going to seek to kill Jesus.

In chapter 5, John records this dialogue of what is going on. But in the middle of that, Jesus looked at the religious establishment and said, *"You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life"* (John 5:39-40). This is a strong indictment. This is a tense moment in which Jesus claims that, essentially, those who held the scriptures in the highest regard had completely missed the point. This is troubling for us for a few reasons.

First, it seems clear that to Jesus, there is an entirely wrong way of reading the scriptures. The Pharisees and the Sadducees seem to have been doing this. But maybe even more troubling, you can read the scriptures and miss Jesus himself. They diligently studied the scriptures, but they missed the fact that the scriptures pointed to Jesus. So you see this connection between the love of God and the love of scriptures. And while the love of God necessitates a love of scriptures, it doesn't always work the other way around. A love of scripture does not inherently guarantee a love of God.

This should be as alarming for us as it was for those religious establishments of that day. We live in an age where the scriptures have fallen out of favor in the broader culture. Tragically, they've been caught up in the culture wars where sparring sides continue to evoke the scriptures as their authority on whatever their particular issue is. So, while we hear these words of Jesus and like to think that they're from an era past, the problem with that is history repeats itself.

Mark Noll, an American historian who specializes in the history of Christianity in the United States, released a book in 2006 called *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis*. In the book, he examines that during the Civil War, both white and black Christians from the North, the South, and across America, held the scriptures as authoritative, yet both read them with radically different conclusions. Put simply, the Civil War was fought with scripture on both sides. Each side believed and affirmed the authoritative view of scripture, yet their individual interpretations of slavery and race from the scriptures came to radically different conclusions. Noll's introduction to his book states,

Since the dawn of time, warring combatants have regularly reached for whatever religious support they could find to nerve their own side for battle. Especially in our postmodern age, we think we know all about the way that interests dictate interpretations. Noll

What he's saying is we tend to believe we come to our convictions through a rational reading of scripture. But his point in this book is to say it's quite the opposite. We tend to have convictions and then run to the scriptures to justify them. It's not that old of a problem. It's the same one that we had with the Sadducees and the Pharisees.

A couple of months ago, a sociologist named Samuel Perry released an article called "In Our Own Image" on how Americans rate Jesus on the ideological spectrum. His point is essentially Noll's point that rather than seeing ourselves as created in the image of God, we actually create God in our own image. The point is the same: when we hold certain convictions, particularly about social issues that have polarized the time in which we live, we tend to hold a position and then go in search of a Jesus that matches that as opposed to allowing a love for Jesus to flow outward and begin to shape our worldview. He writes this,

Our findings lend more support to the theory that Americans' ideological identities and views on Christianity's role in government influence where they place Jesus ideologically rather than their commitment to following Jesus' teaching, influencing their own politics. Perry

To put it in the words of Jesus, "You study the scriptures diligently because you think in them they have eternal life, but these are the very scriptures that testify about me. Yet you refuse to come to me to have life." What are we to make of this? We live in a world where we tend to believe we let the love for Jesus in the scriptures lead, and everything else flows from that. But it appears through history dating all the way back to the time of Jesus that it's more common for us as humans to do quite the opposite.

Now, at any point in history, whether you're talking about the Pharisees or the Sadducees, or the antebellum South, or even now, based on Samuel Perry's work, none of us would admit that we do this. None of us believe we created God in our own image, yet we do. It's what you would call a blind spot, which the reason it's called a blind spot is because you can't see it; that's why it's a blind spot.

So how do we come to read the scriptures in such a way where we do not put the cart before the horse, but we actually come to them to follow Jesus? These are the questions that I want us to approach as we wrap up this series on *The Habit of Scripture* because, for a church like

ours, which I'm so incredibly grateful for, that holds such a high regard for the scriptures, Jesus' teaching should startle us. It should awaken us. It should perk our ears to hope that we don't make the same mistakes as past generations. How do we approach the scriptures? What is the guiding principle in which we could almost evaluate our habit of scripture, allowing Jesus to be that horse in front of the cart?

Turn in your Bible to Matthew 22. Jesus is having an argument between the Pharisees and the Sadducees. They weren't too fond of this Jesus' character, so they turned to one of the experts in the law. *"Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: 'Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?'"* (Matthew 22:34-36). The law is the word Torah. It means the first five books of the Bible—Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. So, it isn't just the laws, but the law has laws in them. This is the Pharisees' way of asking, "What is the most important thing?"

There were over 613 laws within the Torah. There were 248 positive commands, meaning do this, and then instructions. There were 365 negative commands, don't do this, one for every day of the year. You can imagine it gets a little difficult to try to keep everything straight. What's the point of all this? This is a lot of commands! The natural question is exactly what this teacher of the law asks. He comes to Jesus, a well-known rabbi, with his set of teachings and asks, "What is the most important thing?" What is of the highest value? This expert in the law is asking the question that would have been familiar to most rabbis. Certainly, all rabbis would have had an answer to this question.

A lot of the rabbis in that age would have a tradition that would talk about the different laws as being heavy or light. These experts in the law held the scriptures in the highest regard. So, to say one is greater than another would assume that you're ranking scripture against itself. They like to talk about it as what are the heavy commandments. What weighs on us the most versus what are the lighter commandments?

This question is really getting at the centrality of all of God's vision of the world. What is the vision of human flourishing? What's the target, the telos that we're pursuing? Let's look at how Jesus responds. "Jesus replied: *"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'"* (vv. 37-38).

You may notice some quotations in your Bible here because he's actually just quoting scripture. When he says, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart," notice the quote that sends us all the way back to Deuteronomy 6. This text that Jesus cites is what has been known as the Shema, and it comes from the very first word in Deuteronomy 6:4, which is "to hear" as in listen. But the Shema "to hear" is much more than just hearing the sounds coming out of someone's mouth. The idea of "to hear" has much more to it. It's more like "Listen and obey." The example I've used before is like when you tell your kids, "You're not listening to me." They hear you, but they still haven't done the dishes. They are not shema me.

Jesus begins to quote this Shema, but this Shema is more than just the command. It was really the orienting center of the Hebrew people. It became a prayer and a command that they would recite numerous times throughout the day. They would have obviously had it put to memory, but as we'll see, they would have had it around their houses and literally carried this text around. This is in the context of someone asking Jesus what the point of all of it is. What is the center, the most important commandment?

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates. Deut. 6:4-9

The commandment was to love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul and your strength. Jesus' answer is just quoting what they would have already known. And to break this down a little bit further, the Shema is summarizing the various aspects of what it means to be human, and it begins with the heart.

Heart

In the modern world, we have a view of the heart that is much more of the emotive center of the person. That's different from the biblical worldview. The biblical worldview relates the heart more to the executive center of the person. It's probably what we in the modern world would call our brain. They understood that there was something in our chest that was pulsing blood through our bodies. But what they extrapolated from that was that the heart was the center of the person. So when it says to love the Lord your God with all your heart, it's the imagery of saying the very core of what it means to be human. You are to love God with that core.

Soul

Then it says all your soul. Now, we have to do some work on the soul because we've been shaped far more by Plato than we have by the New Testament regarding what the soul is. Remember that Pixar movie from not too long ago called *Soul*? It was a beautiful movie; I really enjoyed it. But that's the image of the soul that we have, like some disembodied, floaty thing that drifts off into the netherworld. That's not a biblical view of the soul. A soul is really the life force, the thing that holds all the parts of a human together. It's not some immaterial part of you. You are the soul. In the modern world, we tend to divorce it from the view of the body. We like to separate body and soul, but that separation is not a New Testament perspective. You don't have a body; you are a body. You don't have a soul; you are a soul. Both of those things are in union together. It says to love the Lord your God with all your soul. It's a way of saying love God with your entire life force. Bring everything you are into a loving relationship with God.

Love

Then it says, love the Lord your God with all your strength. Strength isn't your ability to lift weights. It's not that sort of strength. It's the Hebrew word *me'od*. Maybe a better translation, although it wouldn't make any sense, is your muchness, the gusto you bring to life. It's love the Lord your God with muchness, ambition, volition, and drive.

Jesus' response to—what is the most important commandment to which all of the scriptures hang, how are we to read all of the Old Testament? How are we to read this Bible? —was to love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. It's to take the inner being and the outer being, everything about who you are, and bring this in a loving connection before God.

For the follower of Jesus, any habit or reading of scripture is to engage in an act of learning to love God. How are we to read the scriptures? As a way of learning to love God. What is the greatest commandment? Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength.

Now, go back to Matthew because Jesus doesn't end there. When he was asked, he didn't just give one; he actually gave two commandments, which, when you're Jesus, you can do that! Right after he says, *"This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself'. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments"* (vv. 38-40). Love your neighbor as yourself. If you're paying attention, you'll notice that you have quotations here, meaning Jesus is also quoting from another place within the law.

Leviticus 19 is where Jesus is quoting from. It is part of a much larger discussion. Most of us are comfortable with loving our neighbor. We at least get that in theory that this is what we're supposed to do. But Leviticus, the place in which Jesus is pulling this quotation, is part of a five-verse section in which the Levitical code is telling us what it looks like to love our neighbor. So Jesus, when he quotes this part, is evoking all of it. It's shorthand for him to say this, but the Pharisees and the Sadducees were well-versed in the scriptures. They studied them diligently, and they would have known exactly the section to which Jesus was pointing.

“Do not defraud or rob your neighbor. “Do not hold back the wages of a hired worker overnight. “Do not curse the deaf or put a stumbling block in front of the blind, but fear your God. I am the Lord. “Do not pervert justice; do not show partiality to the poor or favoritism to the great, but judge your neighbor fairly. “Do not go about spreading slander among your people. “Do not do anything that endangers your neighbor's life. I am the Lord. “Do not hate a fellow Israelite in your heart. Rebuke your neighbor frankly so you will not share in their guilt. “Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord. Leviticus 19:13-18

Do you notice that when Jesus says to love your neighbor as yourself, as he evokes all of that text, that it has a very practical output? It has

everything from not defrauding your neighbor to seeking justice for the neighbors around you to also not hating your fellow Israelite. It's this holistic view of what it means to love the other. It's a picture that means we love in action, not just in thought. It's easier to love our ethereal neighbor. It might be a little trickier to love your actual neighbor. It's easy to love humanity. No one's going to wake up and say, “I hate humanity.” It's a little trickier to love your co-worker, your family member, or your neighbor. When Jesus says, love your neighbor as yourself, we like to spiritualize this because it's easy to love people; it's harder to love a person. Do you see the difference?

Jesus is asked what the greatest of all the scriptures is. If we were to read all of the Torah, the Bible of Jesus' day, what does everything hang on? Jesus says, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself.”

Here's the point. For Jesus, all reading of scripture is for the purpose of becoming a person of love. One who loves God and loves others. So, I return to the questions we talked about at the beginning. How do we avoid reading through this lens that maybe projects more of ourselves into God than it allows God to dictate who we are and how we are operating in the world? Well, Jesus' answer is that when you read scripture, you cultivate a habit of scripture to increasingly become a person of love. One who loves God and then learns to love others.

The easy question to evaluate is are you becoming a more loving person? It's a simple question. Maybe a harder question would be for you to ask your spouse, neighbor, or friends if you are becoming more and more of a person of love. What guides our understanding of the scriptures is becoming a person of love.

Now, love is a popular word, one we throw around a lot. There are a lot of different definitions in our world. There are a lot of different ways of understanding exactly what love is. In my opinion, love has been reduced more to acceptance than it has been an active sort of love that we see in the New Testament. So, a natural question out of that is, what does it mean to love? What does it mean as love defined by Jesus in the New Testament? Jesus is a master teacher. He doesn't leave us alone in trying to understand what it means to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength and love our neighbor as ourselves. Let's look at this in a different text. Turn over to John 14:15.

“If you love me, keep my commands. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and 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. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them.” John 14:15-21

There's an intrinsic link that Jesus makes here between love and obedience. He links those two concepts. It sounds quite similar to Shema: listen and obey. If you love me, you will obey my commandments.

A few things in here that Jesus does brilliantly are that we cannot escape that intrinsic connection. That's the first. But the second is, did you notice that we're not left on our own to figure this out? Jesus talks about the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, who will assist in this process. To link this into the teaching on a habit of scripture there is a way in which we can read the scriptures void of the Holy Spirit that can foster and develop not a love for God and for others, but even a love for truth that doesn't sink into who we are and begin to transform us.

Remember, in the biblical understanding, we do not transform our hearts into people of love. Our task is to open ourselves up to the work of the Holy Spirit, who then does the transformative work within us. That is not to say we don't have a role. We can tend to make that mistake when we say that the Holy Spirit does all the transformative work. We have this propensity to just sit back and then be like, "Lord, I'm ready. Do it. Do the thing." That's not the task. It's not passive. Obedience is an active thing. And we tend to think of obedience in moralistic terms where it's purely do this or don't do this. That's a big part of it.

Jesus has a lot of instructions. He wants to change our behavior. He wants to lead us in ways that lead to life and away from death. That's part of all of that. However, part of obedience is also learning to take on the life that Jesus had. It's what we around here have called those spiritual disciplines or habits. But when we get this in the wrong order, it falls apart. It is not that we participate in something like silent solitude, sabbath, scripture, and fasting to earn the love of God. We do those to open up our lives to the Advocate. It's a way that is something within our control.

I can't necessarily control the depths of my heart, but I can control my schedule. I can create in me a rhythm of life that brings me before the presence of the Holy Spirit and says, "God, I'm ready, and I will fight to create that space to follow you." We will try to follow his commands, but we need help and assistance in those things. We will fail if we do these things on our own. So, we come habitually before the presence of the Holy Spirit to ask the Lord to help us to love him. To help us follow his commands. He said that if we love him, we will obey his commands, but we are not left alone in this.

Then Judas (not Judas Iscariot) said, "But, Lord, why do you intend to show yourself to us and not to the world?" Jesus replied, "Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. Anyone who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me. "All this I have spoken while still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give

to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. John 14:22-27

Jesus is about to leave. He's about to go to the cross, and then he will depart and ascend up into the presence of God. There's this transition time that's happening, and Judas is asking why Jesus is showing himself to them and not the others. Jesus' follow-up to this teaching is to reemphasize the link between love and obedience. The life of a disciple is learning to live in the direction of Jesus. But did you notice in verse 25 that he says, "You are not alone. I will leave this Advocate with you, and the Advocate will teach you everything."

I often talk with people who, when they have a hunger for the scriptures, get frustrated because they say they don't know Greek and Hebrew and don't know how to study the scriptures like they want. That's okay, you don't have to know. A person doesn't have to have gone to seminary because, as we looked at last week, anyone can contemplate scripture, come before the text and open themselves and meet God. This is where we lean into the Holy Spirit, and attune ourselves to the Spirit. Jesus said that he would give us an advocate, and the Advocate would teach us all that we need to know.

We bring that relationship to the importance of reading scripture within the community. It's because at times it can be hard to differentiate between the Advocate or our own propensity, our own thoughts. As I talked about earlier, the Civil War was fought with scripture on both sides. Both believed they were attuned to the Holy Spirit.

We read in the thick history of the church where we have 2,000 years of followers of Jesus who have cultivated the truths of scripture that have stood the test of time. Tradition does not usurp the scriptures, but it affirms and provides guardrails for our own reading. That way, when we're with the Holy Spirit, we don't just get to think and say whatever we want about the scriptures, but rather we allow the Holy Spirit to teach us. Does it align with the way that tradition is understood? Does it align with wisdom that is given to us by a gift of God? If those things are in alignment, we can be certain that the Holy Spirit is active in that teaching. I don't get to be the Holy Spirit. Jesus said that he would give us the Holy Spirit, and he would teach us what is going on. We don't do this endeavor alone.

Jesus is asked what the greatest law is when there are all of the laws and the prophets of the Bible in Jesus' time. The answer is to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength and love your neighbor as yourself. In John he says that love and obedience go together. The problem is we tend to think of loving God as stirring up emotions. Emotions are a good thing. They're gifts given to us by God. There are moments and seasons in which we can be caught up emotionally with the Lord. I'm not down on that at all, but it doesn't sustain love for a lifetime.

The easiest imagery is often marriage. We can feel deeper emotions for our spouse, and other times, we don't, but that doesn't dictate how much we love them. There's a difference in the maturity of the relationship. And for us, when we approach God and the scriptures, what we

learn is there's a deeper love that abides and holds onto the presence of God even when it doesn't make sense.

Because here's the trick with obedience. Most of us are really good with obeying Jesus when it aligns with all of our preset convictions. But that's not obedience. That's just doing a thing that Jesus agrees with. Do we obey Jesus when he doesn't agree with us? That's a hard question. And I would suggest that if Jesus hasn't disrupted our status quo in a few years, I wonder if there's a humbling that we need to come back to the scriptures.

Have you wrestled with Jesus? Have you disagreed with him at times? If not, I worry that we will get caught in these silos. It's easier than ever in our world to be broken into these different factions and allow those to dictate the way we read scripture. But what happens when we are siloed into one particular way of understanding the world? It's hard to become a person of love because if you never encountered differences, it's hard to learn how to love. But all reading of scripture, according to Jesus, is about becoming a person of love, learning to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and our neighbor as ourselves.

So, do you listen and obey Jesus when you might disagree with him? That feels like obedience because what happens in there is you begin to hold more loosely to those preconceived convictions. You submit to him. What happens over time is that the war of love that is in your heart will either bend you toward the things against God, or you will begin to lay those down before him. The Advocate comes and slowly begins to work within our hearts, transforming us. I believe that over time, the things of sin begin to lose their appeal.

And what we find is maybe Jesus was right all along. He's come to bring life and life to the fullest. It didn't make sense. It's confusing. It's hard. It seems to cut against the way all of culture is going. I wrestle with this. But he's come to bring life and life to the full. Slowly, we learn, and our love matures. What I have found over my short time of following Jesus is that my loves do change. As I mature, I also find deeper, darker corners of my heart that are more bent away from God than I realized. There are more ways in which I've built a whole trust structure of my own being, not on God, but on the approval of others, which has been covered up by behavior. But deeper beneath that, it's like I actually ache more for people to think well of me than I do just to be loved as who I am by God. So it isn't that we arrive and at some point, our loves are perfected. What I find is that Jesus gently guides us into deeper, broken areas of our hearts, and we learn to love more and more.

Resist Siloed Reading

To get a little more practical there are a few things that I want to close with that may help us to come before the scriptures with honesty and vulnerability, but also that resists the sorts of things that push us into these siloed kinds of readings.

Compartmentalization

The first we need to resist is compartmentalization. What I mean by that is that we can tend to read the Bible for our "spiritual life." We can read it in one area of our life, but we exclude it from all other aspects of

our life. This is often a problem I find on the religious right, which holds an incredibly high view of scripture. They hold this deep view of individual holiness, which is a beautiful gift. However, it tends to separate it from the social dimensions. Jesus said, love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength and your neighbor as yourself. Sometimes, in these circles, the individual love of God can consume all of it, and we forget that Jesus couldn't separate those two commands.

It's a seductive trap because when we compartmentalize God. We go really deep in one area of our life but do not allow it to permeate every area of our life. So, what does it look like to resist compartmentalization? It means we continually come before God and lay every part of our life before him in surrender. We lay down our political agenda. We lay down the areas of our career that we desire and want to see. We lay down our relationships before God. We systematically go through all the different areas of our lives and ask the Lord where are the spaces in which we are blind to our own arrogance. Where are we leading and reading him into our life as opposed to allowing us to see Jesus lead in all those areas of life? We must resist compartmentalization.

There's freedom in that. This has been a big journey for me and my own following of Jesus, where I had created, at a younger age, this façade. I knew what to say at church. I knew what to say in front of church friends and pastor friends, and yet I could live entirely differently. There was a fear that permeated my life that those two worlds would collide. What if they saw this or that? I have found that when you begin to lay all of that before Jesus, there's a whole lot of freedom in not having to play the game—but we can tend to play the game. For those of you who've been in church a long time, it's easier to do that. I don't remember a time before I grew up in churches. It was very easy to play a part. We have to resist this compartmentalization, or else Jesus eerily looks more and more like me than he does the actual Jesus of scripture.

Accommodation

Secondly, we must resist accommodation. Accommodation is a problem I see on the religious left, on the more liberal and progressive sides of the world, in which they take offense to the individual call to holiness that the right holds up really well. Instead, they take whatever teaching and think that Jesus might have meant this, and they diminish the authority of scripture. They allow all the sweeping ideological moves of our world to reshape scripture because it just seems to fit our lives better. So we must resist accommodation.

Jesus said to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. Lay every part of you down. Not imposing your perspective on who God is, quite the opposite. To resist accommodation is to not just look at the social implications of Jesus' teaching but to hold up the individual call to holiness in high regard.

Most easily, we see this often happening with the sexual ethic of Jesus. That becomes almost a more liberal compartmentalization where they just take Jesus, but they sever that out because it doesn't seem to fit. It's hard. It's difficult. So we accommodate the teaching of the world, and we malform the scriptures to fit and suit our needs. It radically

misshapes the teaching of Jesus to construct, in our own image, a view of the scriptures and God. We must resist accommodation. Resist compartmentalization.

Pursue Integration

We have to pursue integration. We have to begin to see the whole of our life, both our love of God and our love of neighbor, as an integrated whole. Not things we do separately and apart from one another, but we begin to become the same person in any place that you find us.

I've talked about this idea of integration before. It is really one of the deepest longings of my heart. I know how easy it is to stand on a stage week after week and become a facade to who I truly am. I have been in danger of this happening because it's easy for me to project an image. I know the right things to say. I know the stories. I've got letters after my name that tell me I know how to say the right thing.

It's easy to get disintegrated, to allow one part of your life to go in a different direction, to allow your character to diminish as your charisma takes over. But that is not the way of freedom. There's no freedom in that. To live an integrated life is one of my deepest longings. I want my daughters to be able to say that their dad was the same person at home as he was on stage as he was at the grocery store.

That is something that's becoming increasingly hard and foreign in our day in which we can and have access to project images into the world in our online life, in our corporate life, in whatever capacity, where you're one person there and a different person here. It's so exhausting. It is not the way of love. The way of love is a way of integration in which you become comfortable with your own flaws and weaknesses, and you hold those open before people and before God because you're not trying to project something you're not. You're simply coming and recognizing that you are beloved by God as you are, and he wants to shape you, form you, and change you into Christ-likeness.

Of course, that's the agenda that Jesus has for all of us because that is where we find life and life to the fullest. Pursuing integration, as we come before the scriptures, is opening ourselves up humbly and say, "Lord, change me in all the ways that I see and I don't see. I confess before you the ways in which I've created a dual life." Really, it is about making love the trajectory of our life. To love anyone is to be honest before them. If you are going to love God, you cannot play the game any longer. You must accept who you are and where you are and say, "Lord, can we journey this together so I can increasingly become a person of love?"

Are you on that path toward becoming a person of love? Would your neighbors say that? Would your friends say that? Would your boss and your co-workers say you, over the course of the past few years, are increasing in love? Maybe not perfect. The goal isn't perfection.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

Love also means honesty and a willingness to say sorry and to accept when you're wrong. But are you moving in that direction? Is there a commitment within you as you come before the scriptures to gain truth and access to this not to wield it at others and beat them and win the culture war, but asking God to help us conquer the world within our own deceptive heart before we conquer the world out there. That's a much harder battle to wage.

So we humbly come before the scriptures. We ask the Lord to change us, transform us, and create in us a trajectory of life that loves him with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength and loves our neighbor as ourselves. That's the goal. All the law and the prophets hang on that.

Church may that never be so of us that we study the scriptures diligently, but we have missed it. May we hold an incredibly high view of this gift of scripture that God has given us, but may we also become a person who loves Jesus and others more. That's the invitation for all of us.

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