

# GLORIFYING GOD IN ALL OF LIFE

## INTRODUCTION

Many people live as though life were divided into two separate, perhaps even unrelated, "compartments": a "sacred" (religious) compartment and a "secular" (non-religious) compartment. The "sacred" compartment includes such things as God, the Bible, church, etc., and is often relegated to a few hours on Sunday - if given any time at all. In contrast, the "secular" compartment includes the rest of life - family, workplace, leisure, sports, "free time," education, social activities, science, government, etc. - the things most people do, six (or more) days of the week.

Yet God does not divide life this way. He says we are to do EVERY activity in a way that brings glory and honor to him. Even eating and drinking! (1 Corinthians 10:31)

## FAILURE TO APPLY THE BIBLE TO ALL OF LIFE

### *Ignorance*

Many people don't know how to apply the Bible to the majority of life's activities - or don't even realize that it should be done. If asked about it, they may respond with questions, such as, "How can 'religion' affect activities such as cooking hamburgers at a restaurant, or changing a tire, or taking out the trash? Can't a non-Christian do it just as well as a Christian can?"

### *Avoidance*

Others may believe that it can be done, but see no need for doing so. In extreme cases, they may even insist that application of the Bible *must be avoided*, if one wants to have a successful career! They may say something like, "It is impossible to be a success in [my occupation], unless I *do* cheat or lie. I *need* to do things 'under the table,' or the competition will get ahead. A person cannot be in [my occupation] and be honest."

## ***Misguided Attempts***

Still others may try to "integrate" the Bible with life, without really understanding what it is all about. This person knows that the Bible tells us to "seek first the kingdom of God," and he wants to do so. But he still sees life as being divided into two "compartments." And so he tries to justify his "secular" activities, by doing "religious" activities during them.

Some aspects of this practice might not necessarily be wrong. But if not careful, the person may actually end-up sinning - thus accomplishing the opposite of what he intends. A person may, for instance, stand around at work, not working but "witnessing" to people, telling them that they need to be saved. He may spend half his day not working - and disrupting those who are trying to work. Yet he writes down the full number of hours on his time sheet! Not only is he bearing false witness (lying about how much time he worked) and stealing (getting paid for what he didn't do), but most often, he is turning people away from the Christ he is claiming to follow! (Unfortunately, if he gets fired from his job because of these things, he may claim he is being "persecuted," because he cannot see that he is simply reaping the consequences of his actions!)

## **OBLIGATIONS & VALUES**

### ***Two Basic Obligations***

Scripture tells us that we have two obligations in life. The first is to love God with all our heart, soul, strength and mind (Matthew 22:37-38). The second is to love our neighbor as ourselves (Matthew 22:39). Of course, we are reminded that our "neighbor" includes the people we would prefer to *not* call our neighbor: our enemies (Matthew 5:43-48; example in Luke 10:29-37).

These are our two obligations. Every other command in the Bible is based on these two (Matthew 22:40). Is there any aspect of our lives in which we do *not* have to follow these commands? Scripture mentions no exceptions.

To say that Scripture applies to all of life does not mean that we think Scripture makes *direct* statements about everything - especially about things which did not exist back then, such as cars and computers. Scripture does *not* have to make direct statements about everything, for instead, it provides us with a *framework* by which we can determine the value of all things - the rightness or wrongness of anything we may do. When *direct* statements are not present, Scripture speaks *indirectly* on the subject, by means of the values and moral principles it teaches.

### ***Life as an Expression of Values***

People tend to forget that everything we do occurs within a context. All the activities of life - all our choices, as well as the attitudes and motives which influence the way we do these activities - are a reflection of values.

When we are free to choose what things we will do, our choices will be based on the values we consider most important. Sometimes these values may be consciously expressed; other times they may be hidden even from our own awareness - unconscious expressions of the heart.

Our values will be expressed even when we are *not* free to choose what we want. When we do things unwillingly or out of necessity, the way we do them, as well as the attitude we have toward doing them, are expressions of values that are hidden in our hearts - or sometimes visible to all. Even the "routine" matters in life - those that might appear to be "non-religious" - will be done in ways that express our values.

It is possible for a person to temporarily hide or conceal his values and motives. A person may act like something he isn't. But even if he does successfully conceal the thoughts of his heart from people, God sees them. And at the Day of Justice, God will expose them for all to see. (Compare to Luke 12:2-3.)

### ***How Scripture Applies to Life***

The Bible gives many direct commands, as well as principles, that can be applied to the way we interact with other people. These statements will have application to all areas of life, but will do so in different ways.

In addition to the specific commands that pertain to specific activities, Scripture also contains many general statements, such as instructions about attitudes and lifestyles. For example, the book of Proverbs teaches us many things about both good and bad attitudes - such as the contrast between diligence and laziness. Another example: many principles about injustice and abuse can be found - and these apply to *any* situation in which people are being wrongfully treated.

Sometimes, the Bible will deal with one specific issue, but the principle that is taught will be applicable to other issues of a similar nature. For example, the apostle Paul's instructions to slaves and masters - Ephesians 6:5-9 and Colossians 3:22-4:1 - teach us principles that apply to *any* situation in which one person works for another person.

There are three different ways in which these Scriptural commands and principles may apply to people.

1) Some principles and statements in Scripture will have direct application to all people, and at all times. For instance, "Do not commit adultery" allows no exceptions.

2) Other principles may or may not be applicable, depending on the circumstances. In these matters, there may be instances in which something may be wrong (sinful) for one person, but because of different circumstances, perfectly legitimate for another. Note that this is not a matter of personal preferences and opinions, in which a person calls something "wrong" because he doesn't want to do it... and doesn't want anyone else to do it, either. Rather, it is a matter of something being genuine sin for a person, whether or not he wants to do it.

One Old Testament example involves certain ceremonial practices that the Jews were obligated to do. Since they had made a covenant - a promise with God - to do them, it was sin if they didn't fulfil their obligations. Yet God-fearing Gentiles (non-Jews) were not under obligation to comply with those practices, unless they *voluntarily* chose to commit themselves to them. There was one exception to the Jew's obligation: Love for God and love for neighbor (including one's enemies) had *precedence* over the practice of ceremonial obligations, if a circumstance occurred in which *both* couldn't be done.

3) There are other issues in which a person is free to choose whether or not to participate. *Either* choice will be good, though at times, one of the choices may be better than the other. An example of this is seen in 1 Corinthians 7, in which the apostle Paul tells us that it is good to get married, but it is better to remain unmarried (if one is able to do so without yielding to sexual sin).

In some instances, one's "free" choices may be associated with *additional* values, and those other values may influence the rightness or wrongness of the choice. For instance, it was perfectly legitimate for the Corinthians to eat meat that had been sacrificed to idols. However, if a circumstance arose, in which doing so would cause another person to sin, the principle of "love for neighbor" would take precedence over the principle of "freedom to eat sacrificed meat."

## **APPLICATION**

### ***Love to Neighbor***

To illustrate some of the ways we can express love for neighbor, we will attempt to answer some of the questions that were raised earlier.

Our values will influence everything we do - even the way we cook hamburgers. We can choose to honor God by cooking them properly, by taking care of the way we fill the orders, and by the things we think, say, and do, as we are cooking them. Or, we can hate our neighbor (we can show that love is absent), and dishonor God, by being careless, undercooking some and burning others, dropping some on the floor and then putting them back on the hamburger buns, etc. We can show love by encouraging and showing kindness to other workers, or we can show hate (lack of love) by grumbling and complaining, and making everyone in the kitchen area miserable and grumpy.

If a person is working in a chemical laboratory, developing a new product, he can show love to his neighbor (and honor to God) by attempting to develop a product of the highest possible quality (given the resources he has available). He can try to minimize waste and pollution as much as possible - realizing, however, that in a world corrupted by sin, total "environmental perfection" will never be completely attained.

A lawyer, applying God's Word to his profession, would refuse to twist the truth or "redefine" right and wrong, so as to enable his client to get away with sin. He would refuse to distort justice. He would defend the

oppressed, and not take advantage of them. He would not show favoritism - neither to the rich nor to the poor (Leviticus 19:15).

In any occupation, a person can show love to his neighbor, and can honor and glorify God, by encouraging and building-up others, rather than talking behind their backs and tearing them down. He can avoid taking advantage of others, or destroying them, in his attempt to get advancements or promotions for himself. He can serve his employer as though Jesus were his employer - not only when he is being watched by his supervisor, but also when he is alone by himself. (The person who belongs to Jesus *does* work for Jesus!) And if he has authority over others, he can avoid being cruel and harsh, or taking advantage of them.

A person with genuine love will be concerned about his "neighbor's" well-being. And this concern will not limit itself only to the person's *physical* well-being, but also to his *spiritual* well-being. Love will show concern for the other person's relationship to God - not only his *eternal* relationship to God (the person's existence in heaven or hell), but also his relationship to God in this *present* life (the person's spiritual growth, his trust in God and obedience to him, etc.). A person who loves his neighbor will encourage him in his spiritual growth. And he will remember him and will appeal to God for him, as he talks to God in prayer.

### ***Love to God***

The above examples focus on the expression of love for one's neighbor, but they also show love for God, because it is he (God) who gave us the command to love our neighbor. However, love for God *cannot* stop there, for we must also "confess" God: We must acknowledge God's place in our lives.

Even in the workplace, God must be a part of our lives. We must not forget, however, that we are being paid to *work*, not to stand around "witnessing." Our "job description" *isn't* to push our views on others, and to embarrass them in front of other people. Rather, it is our duty to perform our work with integrity, and to acknowledge God's place in our lives (as appropriate). It is God, not we, who changes people's hearts. And he will do so, as he sees fit without us sinning and calling it "evangelism."

As a disciple of Jesus, integrity and faithfulness (trustworthiness) must be important parts of one's life. The person who has bowed to Jesus' control must stand for what is right, even when everyone else is unwilling to do so. At times, such a stand may be wrongly interpreted by those who do not give God first place in their lives... and he may be accused of being "unloving," or even "un-Christian"! In such situations, his loyalty to God may be severely tested. But it is his duty - and privilege - to remain faithful and willing to suffer for doing what is good (following the example of Jesus, his master - 1 Peter 4:12+). God will remember his troubles at the Day of Justice, and his faithfulness will not have been in vain.

### ***The need for both***

All people have an obligation to have *both* love for God and love for neighbor.

Claiming to "not believe" in God does not excuse a person for not loving God, for a person has to *suppress* his already-existing awareness of God, before he can make such a foolish claim (Psalm 14:1).

All creation is revelatory of God, in one way or another. Everywhere, a basic understanding of God's power and nature can be seen (Romans 1:20; Psalm 19:1-4). Even within ourselves, God has placed an innate comprehension of good and bad, and a conscious awareness that wrongdoing will result in judgment (Romans 1:32; 2:14-15). Furthermore, our very beings are a reflection of God's "image" (Genesis 1:26-27). And even though sin has damaged some aspects of that expression, what remains is sufficient to leave us without excuse. The only reason we don't accept this testimony that surrounds us - and permeates our very beings - is because our sin makes us unwilling to accept it. It is not that God has failed in any way!

A person *cannot* have a genuine love for God, and yet be unwilling to show love to his neighbors (which includes his enemies - Luke 10:29-37). In fact, God calls the person who claims to love God, yet hates (doesn't show love for) his brother, a liar (1 John 4:20)! Those who are God's children love even their enemies (Matthew 5:43-48).

In the same way, a person *cannot* have a genuine love for his neighbor and refuse to show love to God. God not only defines what "love for neighbor" is (contrasted with the many false definitions in the world), but he tells us that love for God must have *precedence* over love for neighbor. Our love and devotion for God must be so great that, if there ever was a "conflict" between God and neighbor, we would choose God first - even if that "neighbor" were a family member. Our love for the other person would still be present, but, compared to our love for God, it would look like "hate" (Luke 14:26-27). To love our neighbor more than we love God is a great offense to God, the one who made us and who has a right to our supreme allegiance. It is a form of idolatry to love *anything* - neighbors, possessions, *or even self* - more than we love God.

There is a sense in which a non-Christian *can* express love for neighbor, even though he does not love God. There is a sense in which a non-Christian can do good things - at least things that look good to other people. But God sees the heart and the motives; he sees the context - the unwillingness of that person to give him (God) the honor that is due him. Such a person owes his very existence to God - the Creator - yet chooses to ignore him and to give greater honor to the things that he created (often refusing even to acknowledge that he created them). And in such a context, the "good" he does becomes evil in God's eyes. It becomes an expression of rebellion and idolatry.

It is important to understand that these two commandments are so interrelated that they cannot be separated.