

# Loyalties<sup>1</sup>



**MEMORY VERSE:** “ ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and most important commandment’ ” (Matthew 22:37, 38, TEV).

**SAB  
PM**

**“I HAD TRAVELED EIGHT THOUSAND** miles around the American continent. But here I was, back on Times Square (in New York City) right in the middle of a rush hour. I watched New York with its millions and millions of people. They were rushing among themselves, the mad grabbing, taking, giving, sighing, dying, just so they could be buried in those awful cemetery cities beyond Long Island City.”—Adapted from Jack Kerouac, *On the Road* (New York: New American Library, 1957), pp. 89, 90.

Life does not have to be so hopeless. God offers us a much better end than what Kerouac described here. God can make this life full of meaning and purpose.

But God does not force us to accept the better life He has to offer. We have to choose that life every day by the little things we do. These little things show where our loyalties really lie.

This week, we will look at the loyalties we have. Are we loyal (faithful) to God or to other things? This is a very important question. No matter what our other loyalties are, one thing is sure: In the end, any one or any thing other than Jesus can lead only to one of those awful “cemetery cities.”

**THE WEEK AT A GLANCE:** What is the most important commandment, and why? Why can we not serve two masters? Why is loyalty (faithfulness) to God so important? What are some of the other things that try to win our loyalty?

\*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 24.

<sup>1</sup>loyalties—the things or people we are faithful to because we think they are important.

**SUN THE TRUTH ABOUT LOYALTY  
(FAITHFULNESS).**

**“I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt, where you were slaves. Worship no god but me” (Exodus 20:2, 3, TEV).**

The first commandment is not the Sabbath commandment. It is not the commandment against adultery, murder, or covetousness (jealousy). The first commandment is to have no other gods before the Lord.

What is God saying in Exodus 20:2, 3? Is He saying, “Well, there are other gods out there. But I want you to put Me first”? Some Bible experts have tried to argue that this is what God is saying. This is because the Israelites were so involved in idol worship (Exodus 32:4) that He needed to put it in words they would understand.

The real point of Exodus 20:2, 3 seems to be not that there are other gods, but that Israel should not have other gods in their lives. Only the true God must come first.

It is no different today. Any other god may claim the first affection of our hearts. We may try to divide our loyalty between the God of heaven and the gods of this earth. We may let any favorite idol or sin share the throne of our hearts with the only true God. If so, we will have some other god before the Lord. Then we are breaking the first commandment. Then there is no question that we will break many of the other commandments too.

**Why is obedience to the first commandment so important? Why can we have no other god before the Lord?**

Read carefully Matthew 6:24, where Jesus repeats the message of the first commandment. The wording may be different, but Jesus is clearly showing why obedience to the first commandment is so important. He does not leave any excuses for us. There is no room for compromise<sup>2</sup> or half-loyalty. Jesus takes the position that our loyalty should be to the Lord and nothing else.

**Why is it not possible to serve two masters? What examples can you find from the Bible, or from personal experience, that show it is not possible to serve two masters? Have you ever tried to divide your loyalties between God and something else? If so, what happened?**

**MON WHOLEHEARTED LOYALTY  
(FAITHFULNESS).**

**“And one of them, a teacher of the Law, tried to trap him [Jesus] with a question. ‘Teacher [Jesus]’ he [the teacher of the law] asked, ‘which is the greatest commandment in the Law?’ Jesus answered, ‘“Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.” This is the greatest and the most important commandment’” (Matthew 22:35-38, TEV).**

<sup>2</sup>compromise—to give up what you believe to gain something you want.

A teacher of the law asks Jesus to name the greatest commandment in the law. Jesus' answer does not include any of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5). But He calls His answer the "first and great commandment."

**To understand better what Jesus was saying, we need to look at the background of Matthew 22:35-38. Read Deuteronomy 6:1-10. What is God saying to Israel there? Why would Jesus quote Deuteronomy 6:5 as the greatest and most important commandment? How does Deuteronomy 6:5 repeat the idea found in the first commandment in the Ten Commandments?**

We are to love God with all our heart, all our soul, and all our mind.



**What do we love more than God?**

<sup>3</sup>undivided—not divided.

This does not leave us much room to play with. But that is the point! Love for God has to come first in our lives. If there is something we love more than God, then that thing becomes an idol to us, and Satan can use it to control us. That is why our loyalty to God has to be complete, undivided,<sup>3</sup> and total. When we love God with all our heart, soul, and mind, we have given all of ourselves to Him. Then He can work in us to make us the people He wants us to be.

**If love for God is the greatest and most important commandment, how would you answer someone who asks, "Please explain to me what it means to love God. How do you love a god you have never seen, felt, touched, or heard?"**

## **TUE MONEY AND GOD.**

**Read Matthew 19:16-22 and Luke 12:15-23.**

American author Mark Twain once wrote: "Some people worship rank (position), some people worship heroes, some people worship God . . . but all people worship money" (adapted).

Maybe Mark Twain went too far with these words. But his point helps explain why Jesus said the things He did in Matthew 19 and Luke 12.

**How are the two men in Matthew 19:16-22 and Luke 12:15-23 the same?**

What the rich young ruler did is not much different from what “that certain rich man” did. Both men were so greedy with their money that they forgot what is really important. Both of them loved their money and wealth more than God. They were loyal (faithful) to their money. In the end, both stories seem to show that both men lost eternal<sup>4</sup> life. They sold their place in eternity<sup>5</sup> for a few worldly pleasures.



“Tonight you will die. Then who will get all you have kept for yourself?”

No one ever bought their way into the kingdom of heaven. There is not enough money to get a soul in heaven. Jesus already has paid the price. But it does not take much money to keep a person out. Millions of dollars is just a pile of rubbish when we think of heaven. And souls will be lost for a lot less than millions of dollars.

Money is important and has its place if we use it properly. The problem is that money can so easily get out of its place

and into places it does not belong. Jesus said, “Watch out and guard yourselves from every kind of greed; because a person’s true life is not made up of the things he owns, no matter how rich he may be’” (Luke 12:15, TEV). We all say we believe. We try to live out that belief. But money is a powerful trap. Money can blind us from seeing what we really need to see.



List things money can buy then list things people often think money can buy but really cannot. Now list things money cannot buy. Compare<sup>6</sup> your lists. What have you decided about what money can and cannot buy?

### **WED** OTHER GODS.

“The Lord says, ‘Wise men should not boast of their wisdom, nor strong men of their strength, nor rich men of their wealth. If anyone wants to boast, he should boast that he knows and understands me [the Lord], be-

<sup>4</sup>eternal—forever; without beginning or end; lasting forever.

<sup>5</sup>eternity—life without end; forever.

<sup>6</sup>compare—show how things are the same.

**cause my [the Lord's] love is constant [always the same], and I [the Lord] do what is just [fair] and right. These are the things that please me. I, the Lord, have spoken'” (Jeremiah 9:23, 24, TEV).**

Jeremiah 9:23, 24 are some of the most beautiful and deepest verses in the whole Bible. They talk about wisdom, might (power), and riches. Wisdom, might, and riches are not in themselves evil. God is not saying we should not have wisdom, might, and riches. He is not saying we should not enjoy them. He is saying that we should not let wisdom, might, and riches make us blind to what is really important.

**What characteristics<sup>7</sup> of God does Jeremiah 9:23, 24 tell us to honor? Why are these characteristics important?**

Jeremiah's words were important to Israel. But they are just as important today, because people worship success in science, industry, and education.

But of all the things we can learn from science, industry, and education, what is still the most important thing to learn? The most important thing is that Jesus died for our sins. Through faith in what Jesus has done for us at the Cross, we have the promise of eternal life. What

is really more important than that (Matthew 16:26)?

But how do we know what Jesus has done for us? Do we learn what He has done from pure reason alone? Or from science or industry? Can a study of mathematics lead us to learn about salvation? Can nature teach us about the Cross and forgiveness of sin through Jesus' sacrifice for us? Can we, by ourselves, figure out the great truth of salvation by faith in Jesus?

No! The truth about Jesus is something that had to be given to us through the Bible and the Holy Spirit's leading.

**What does the Bible say about the limits of human knowledge and wisdom? Then why would it make no sense to worship or make a god out of what cannot even answer the most important question of all. The most important question of all is: How are we saved?**



**“LOVERS.”**

**“But mark<sup>8</sup> this: There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient<sup>9</sup> to their parents, ungrateful,<sup>10</sup> unholy,<sup>11</sup> without love, unforgiving,<sup>12</sup> slanderous [lying], without**

<sup>7</sup>characteristics—what the character is made of, such as patience, kindness, hatred, and jealousy.

<sup>8</sup>mark—pay attention to; remember.

<sup>9</sup>disobedient—not obeying.

<sup>10</sup>ungrateful—not grateful; not thankful.

<sup>11</sup>unholy—not holy.

<sup>12</sup>unforgiving—not forgiving.

**self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous,<sup>13</sup> rash,<sup>14</sup> conceited [boastful], lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God—having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them” (2 Timothy 3:1-5, NIV).**

In 2 Timothy 3:1-5, Paul says the last days will be “terrible times.” He is not talking about physical danger such as a nuclear weapon. Paul is warning us about spiritual danger.

**Whom is Paul talking about in 2 Timothy 3:1-5? That answer might help explain what he meant by “terrible times.” What does it mean to have the “form of godliness”?**

Paul talks about “lovers”: lovers of themselves and lovers of pleasure.

It is not wrong to love oneself (Matthew 22:39). There is nothing wrong with loving pleasure. God created us with physical desires. And He created ways of satisfying those desires.

Paul is talking about what we have been studying all week: the danger of letting things get out of control. There is danger in letting even good things get out of control so that we make gods out of them. Jesus made it clear that we cannot serve two gods. Whatever we love too much becomes our god.

When people become lovers of themselves while other people suffer, they make themselves their own gods (Genesis 3:5). Then evil follows.

Look at the list of how people will be in the last days. It is not hard to see how selfish people can be this way. Jesus says, the problem will become so bad that people who claim to love God will invent religious excuses (“forms of godliness”) for selfish actions and attitudes.<sup>15</sup>

**What does Jesus say in Matthew 16:24 that can save someone from these “terrible times”? How can a person accept what He says in Matthew 16:24 and make use of it in his or her own life?**

**FRI** **ADDITIONAL STUDY:** “A person needs to give up anything that pulls her or him from the heart of God. Mammon (money) is the idol of many people. The love of money, the desire for wealth, is the golden chain that ties them to Satan. Fame and worldly honor are worshiped by non-believers. The easy and irresponsible<sup>16</sup> life is the idol of other people. But these worldly ties must be broken. We cannot be half the Lord’s and half the world’s. We are not God’s children if we hold on to worldly pleasures.” —Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ* [Jesus], p. 44.

<sup>13</sup>treacherous—not to be trusted; not faithful; not loyal.

<sup>14</sup>rash—taking too many chances.

<sup>15</sup>attitudes—how a person thinks or feels about something.

<sup>16</sup>irresponsible—not being responsible.

“No man can serve two masters.’ We cannot serve God with a divided heart. Bible religion is not just one influence among many other influences. The Bible’s influence is to be the greatest in controlling one’s life. The Bible’s influence is not to be like a stroke of color brushed here and there upon the canvas. The Bible is to influence the whole life, the same as the whole canvas being dipped into the color.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 312.



**We cannot serve two masters.**

“No outward temples may be seen. There may be no idol for the eye to look upon. But we may be practicing idol worship. It is as easy to make an idol of a

favorite idea or thing as it is to make idols of wood or stone. Thousands of people have a false idea of God and His character. These false ideas are false gods. Are we worshiping the true God as He is shown in the Bible, in Jesus, in nature? Or are we worshiping some idol? God is a God of truth. Justice (fairness) and mercy<sup>17</sup> are the positive characteristics of His throne. He is a God of love, pity, and mercy. God is shown in His Son, our Savior. He is a God of patience and long-suffering. If He is the God whom we choose to honor and whose character we are trying to copy, we are worshiping the true God.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, pp. 173, 174.

#### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

1. How does Jesus’ advice in Matthew 6:33 help solve the problems discussed in this week’s lesson?
2. Wealth, wisdom, and might (power) are not wrong if a person who has them faithfully serves God. But how can a person tell when wealth, wisdom, and might have gotten out of control?

<sup>17</sup>mercy—kindness we do not deserve.