# Deuteronomy 4-11: Love the Lord Your God Part 2: How We Love God

By
Peter Martin
October 18th 2026

*“Now this is the commandment, and these are the statutes and judgments which the LORD your God has commanded to teach you, that you may observe them in the land which you are crossing over to possess, “that you may fear the LORD your God, to keep all His statutes and His commandments which I command you, you and your son and your grandson, all the days of your life, and that your days may be prolonged. “Therefore hear, O Israel, and be careful to observe it, that it may be well with you, and that you may multiply greatly as the LORD God of your fathers has promised you—‘a land flowing with milk and honey.’ “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one! “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.”*

*-Deuteronomy 6:1-5*

Last week we began studying the next large section of the book of Deuteronomy which spans from chapter 4 to 11. In this section Moses repeats the ten commandments and gives more basic exhortations to the people of Israel to be faithful to God. He predominantly focuses on the sin of idolatry by referencing the sin of Israel in Numbers 25 when they started to worship a Midianite god named Baal of Peor, and the idolatry of the golden calf in Exodus 32.

By doing this, Moses is trying to impress upon the people of Israel the nature of their relationship with God. They are not to serve Him as a pagan deity, treating him merely as a king of sovereign, but instead, God desires for His people to worship Him by loving Him. This kind of love doesn’t exclude the nation from seeing God as their Lord and King, but it is emphasizing the fact that God doesn’t desire *mere* obedience, but instead He desires love and devotion. Which why at the center of this section, Moses says one of the most important statements in the entirety of Scripture, a statement that many Jews today call the “Shema”, which means “hear” and is derived from the beginning of this statement:

*“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one! “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.”*

*-Deuteronomy 6:5*

This statement is so important in Judaism, that observant Jews will repeat this twice a day, once in the morning and once at night. Beyond this, when Jesus is asked what the greatest commandment is within the Law He repeats the Shema:

*“Then one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, and saying, “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?” Jesus said to him, “‘You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ “This is the first and great commandment. “And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ “On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.”*

*-Matthew 22:35-40*

According to Christ this commandment, in conjunction with the command to “love your neighbor as yourself”, encapsulates perfectly the entirety of the Law and the wisdom of the prophets. This is more than Moses instructing his people *what* they must do in order to honor God, but more importantly, the kind of heart that God will accept. We are told in Scripture that without this heart of love, God will not receive the obedience of His people. Last week we discussed the various reasons that Moses gives for the people of Israel to love God. And now this week we will talk about how this commandment is actually carried out. Or to put this point a different way, what is actually being commanded of us and why this commandment to love God is posed in three different ways concerning our heart, our soul, and our strength.

# The Lord is One

*“Then you came near and stood at the foot of the mountain, and the mountain burned with fire to the midst of heaven, with darkness, cloud, and thick darkness. “And the LORD spoke to you out of the midst of the fire. You heard the sound of the words, but saw no form; you only heard a voice. “So He declared to you His covenant which He commanded you to perform, the Ten Commandments; and He wrote them on two tablets of stone. “And the LORD commanded me at that time to teach you statutes and judgments, that you might observe them in the land which you cross over to possess.”*

*-Deuteronomy 4:11-14*

However, before we receive the command to love God, we are given an interesting preamble, that the Lord our God is one. This seems to be a re-phrasing of the first commandment:

*"'I am the LORD your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. 'You shall have no other gods before Me."*
*-Deuteronomy 5:6-7*

In the pagan world that the Israelites were emerging from, basically every culture, including the Egyptians, had a pantheon of deities that the people were expected to worship. This type of polytheistic religions actually *required* the people to worship and pay reverence to every deity in the pantheon and not just one. The Israelites are now being introduced to monotheism:

*"Therefore know this day, and consider it in your heart, that the LORD Himself is God in heaven above and on the earth beneath; there is no other."*
*-Deuteronomy 4:39*

To have no other gods before Him means that the Israelites are recognizing God's unique divinity within the creation. There are no other true gods to be worshipped and so God alone should be the only source of supreme adoration. Though we will have to respect human authorities, God alone is worthy of our worship. This is why Moses begins the most important commandment by reminding the nation of Israel that God is one.

Meaning that His divinity is unified, it isn't spread out amongst various other deities, He alone is God, and therefore He alone ought to be worshipped. This re-enforces for us the type of love that God is asking His people for. The love that I have for friends can be dispersed equivalently among many different friends. The love that I have for my parents can be done in the same way, and even the respect and adoration I might have for a particular leader or "boss" in my life can also be distributed among a couple sources. It is only in marriage where exclusivity is not only expected, but the cornerstone for the relationship itself. If I could disperse my romantic love among several women, it wouldn't be the true one flesh unity that the Bible speaks of. It is only when that love is pure and given to only one person that it can properly be a true marital relationship.

This is why the commandment to love God is actually more stringent than the command to obey God. Many Christians misread this commandment as a *softer* or less stringent version of our command to obey God. After all, obedience sounds rigid and authoritative, but to love sounds soft and almost optional. As such, many Christians today approach the God of Scripture with a casual mindset, leaning on the eternal and infinite love of God to excuse all their faults. But anyone who has actually been in love would know that the call to love is far higher than the call to obey. There are many

authorities in my life that I am called to obey, the government being the prime example. But it is with this authority that I have a more casual relationship. With most laws I don't think about them, because I agree with them, and the laws that I disagree with, usually traffic laws, I do the bare minimum necessary to not get into trouble. This also doesn't have the weight of exclusivity. There are many authorities that I balance, the authority of the government, the place I work, and even family obligations.

But the relationship with my wife is completely different. This casual attitude would never work in a functional marriage and would all but guarantee a failed marriage given enough time. In order for marriage to work, devotion has to be absolute. I have to cherish my wife above all other women and relationships. When we discuss things, I have to actually give attention and care to her words, and when we come to a conclusion on a topic, I can't just phone in my behavior, I really have to put my heart into what I am doing.

God works the same way. The call to obey God can compel our bodies, but the call to love God calls even our hearts and our souls. What makes this level of devotion bearable, and even enjoyable, is the love that motivates the behavior, and the fact that this love is mutual between us and God, that He has indeed loved us with all His heart, soul, and strength, allows the Christian to bear our cross with joy and delight, even when it is most difficult.

*"For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again."*

*-2 Corinthians 5:14-15*

In this commandment God is saying that we can't have any devotion or loyalty to anyone that surpasses Him, or that even rises to His level. The type of affection, thanksgiving, and trust that we have for God equally has to surpass all others. God is one. However, Moses anticipates a human frailty that makes this kind of devotion very difficult for human beings:

*"Take careful heed to yourselves, for you saw no form when the LORD spoke to you at Horeb out of the midst of the fire, "lest you act corruptly and make for yourselves a carved image in the form of any figure: the likeness of male or female, "the likeness of any animal that is on the earth or the likeness of any winged bird that flies in the air, "the likeness of anything that creeps on the ground or the likeness of any fish that is in the water beneath the earth. "And take heed, lest you lift your eyes to heaven, and when you see the sun, the moon, and the stars, all the host of heaven, you feel driven to*

*worship them and serve them, which the LORD your God has given to all the peoples under the whole heaven as a heritage."*

*-Deuteronomy 4:15-19*

Because God's being transcends earthly categories and therefore can't be contained in an image, it is difficult for us to give Him our total devotion and trust. It is far easier for us to trust and have affection for things that *can* be contained in symbols or images. The infinite and holy nature of God intimidates us and is an obstacle to us being able to draw near to God. It is because of this difficulty that it seems as though, from the above passage, that God allowed the pagan nations to worship celestial bodies and images of nature. This remained true until the incarnation, at which point God could be known through the person of Jesus Christ, who in turn invites all peoples to know God through Him. This doesn't mean that God was happy about this, as the apostle Paul tells us:

*"Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen."*

*-Romans 1:24-25*

It merely means that He allowed it to be so.

*"Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man's devising. "Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, "because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead."*

*-Acts 17:29-31*

But for the Israelites, they were the only people group asked to carry this burden, and God recognizes the difficulty present in this command. Which is why God also allowed for His people to have intermediate structures of worship represented in men like Moses and ritualistic worship contained in the tabernacle and later the temple:

*"And you said: 'Surely the LORD our God has shown us His glory and His greatness, and we have heard His voice from the midst of the fire. We have seen this day that God speaks with man; yet he still lives. 'Now therefore, why should we die? For this great fire will consume us; if we hear the voice of the LORD our God anymore, then we shall die."*

*-Deuteronomy 5:24-25*

The holiness of our God is an awesome thing and it is certainly a fearful thing. For the Israelites God solves the problem through their high ritualistic worship in the temple, which is why God's glory filled the temple. But for us today, we are able to draw near through Jesus Christ. He is the fullest expression of God's divinity, and because of His immense love for us, demonstrated on the cross, we can approach Him with equal amounts of fear and bold adoration.

*"God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they."*

*-Hebrews 1:1-4*

But for both Jews of the old covenant and Christians of the new covenant, this commandment must be kept with equal reverence. We must remember that God alone is to be worshipped and loved with all our hearts, souls, and strength, and God is one.

# With All Our Hearts

The commandment is then broken into three parts, to love the Lord with all our hearts, souls, and strength. Side note, when Jesus quotes this passage in the New Testament, He adds the word "mind" to this, which, when we explore these words deeper, is a re-emphasis on the point. For the rest of this paper we will discuss what it means to love God with each of these three components of ourselves. But as we go through this you will see that, in essence what this is commanding us to do is to love God with all that we are. There is no part of our lives or our being that is meant to be untouched by the love of God. We are to devote ourselves fully to Him and allow Him to transform our desires, our ambitions, our attitudes, and our very identity to love Him properly. But let's begin with the first part, to love God with all our heart.

*"Therefore circumcise the foreskin of your heart, and be stiff-necked no longer.*

*-Deuteronomy 10:16*

For the English speaker, we tend to think of the heart as being juxtaposed against the mind. Making the heart the center of our emotions and the mind the center of our rational will. While this isn't completely separate from the Hebrew view, it is a

simplification and therefore if we understand it this way we are missing a large component of what God is commanding us to do.

For the ancient person, the heart was more than the center of our emotions, though they did believe that emotions resided within the heart, the heart for the ancient person was the center of the individual. It was the seat of their deepest desires, affections, passions, and will. It wasn't a mere facet of our personality, it was the very center of it. We should understand this even in English. When we speak of "getting to the heart of a matter" or when we talk about "the heart of a society" we aren't talking about the emotions of a matter or a city, we are talking about the center.

Think about the solar system and this might make more sense. While each planet has its own identity, they maintain their place in relationship to the center, which is the sun. It is the center of the system that causes correct orbit and orientation. This is what our hearts are responsible for as well. Since our hearts are the center of our person, all other elements of who we are and how we behave naturally "orbit" the center of our being and our personality. Consider the following Proverb:

*"My son, give attention to my words; incline your ear to my sayings. Do not let them depart from your eyes; Keep them in the midst of your heart; For they are life to those who find them, And health to all their flesh. Keep your heart with all diligence, For out of it spring the issues of life."*

*-Proverbs 4:20-23*

The wisdom here is not merely to learn to control our emotions, but it is to maintain the center of our being. In other words it is to pay attention to the center of our orientation, what are our desires, our passions, our will, and our ambitions pointing to? What all these things share in common is what is at the center of our identity. While there is a connection between our behavior and our hearts, these are not the same thing, which is why the commandment begins where it does.

If we are to truly love God, we can't begin by loving Him with all our might, the love that we have for Him must originate in our hearts. Notice again what the Proverb teaches us. It isn't out of the body that all behavior flows, but out of the heart. We will talk more about this in a second, but although our behavior can reinforce, or contradict, what is in our heart, our behavior can't *create* an attitude of the heart, the body usually follows what is in the heart.

This seems to be one of the main contentions that Christ had with the doctrine of the Pharisees:

*“Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying: ‘These people draw near to Me with their mouth, And honor Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me.”*
*-Matthew 15:7-8*

*“Do you not yet understand that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and is eliminated? “But those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile a man. “For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. “These are the things which defile a man, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile a man.”*
*-Matthew 15:17-20*

The doctrine of the Pharisees was so action oriented, that they all but forgot about the importance of the heart. They believed that if one performed the right rituals, in exactly the right way, then we can become righteous before God regardless of the state of their heart. For them this meant that even if the heart wasn’t fully on board, as long as the actions were correct, the person was “sinless”. Jesus rebukes this ideology at multiple points but most famously in the Sermon on the Mount:

*“You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ “But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”*
*-Matthew 5:27-28*

Just as love begins with the heart, so lust and iniquity have the same origin. The Christian author and theologian C.S. Lewis saw a similar problem forming in western education, though for a different purpose than that of the Pharisees:

*“In Wordsworth ‘the heart’ can be favourably contrasted with ‘the head’. In some nineteenth-century fiction one particular system of feelings, the domestic affections, seem not only to inspire but to constitute morality… The belief that to recognise a duty was to perceive a truth—not because you had a good heart but because you were an intellectual being—had roots in antiquity. Plato preserved the Socratic idea that morality was an affair of knowledge; bad men were bad because they did not know what was good. Aristotle, while attacking this view and giving an important place to upbringing and habituation, still made ‘right reason’ (ὀρθὸς λόγος) essential to good conduct. The Stoics believed in a Natural Law which all rational men, in virtue of their rationality, saw to be binding on them. St Paul has a curious function in this story. His statement in Romans (ii. 14 sq.) that there is a law ‘written in the hearts’ even of Gentiles who do not know ‘the law’, is in full conformity with the Stoic conception, and would for centuries be*

*so understood. Nor, during those centuries, would the word hearts have had merely emotional associations. The Hebrew word which St Paul represents by καρδία would be more nearly translated 'Mind'; and in Latin, one who is cordatus is not a man of feeling but a man of sense."*

*-C.S. Lewis - "The Discarded Image"*

Even though this is a more academic quote, the point is very important. Lewis is saying that in the modern west, we have worshiped reason and knowledge to such a high extent that we really believe that knowledge is the center of morality, and not our affections. As such, whenever there is a moral problem in the west, we tend to address the issue with more education, believing that right ideas lead directly to right behavior. This is also why we have a tendency to ridicule people we don't like as being "stupid" or "ignorant" instead of using words like "corrupt", "sinful", or "wicked".

This idea has unfortunately come to the church in that we can see right doctrine or right thinking as a substitute for right morality or behavior. In our elevation of the intellect above all else, we have made an equivalent error to the Pharisees in that we have ignored the heart in training ourselves towards righteousness.

This is not to downplay the importance of the mind or behavior, these are contained in the exhortations to love God with all our souls and strength. But we can't elevate any of these elements of ourselves to the detriment of others. Lewis called the subsequent generations created by this ideology "men without chests". These would be cynical individuals who are deprived of their affections for their home, nation, family, or God. They are intelligent, but without heart or conviction. This passive generation would allow for the degradation of all these things because they lacked the heart to defend them.

This prophetic message has obviously been vindicated in recent history as we have seen the destruction of all these institutions. While there have been nefarious forces who have fought against them, they were, unfortunately, met with little to no resistance because we have forgotten how to train the heart towards right affections and devotion. We instead view the heart as a passive organ that *can't* be shaped, it can merely be followed, hence the modern idiom "follow your heart."

## The Stubbornness of the Heart

But if we are called to love God with all our heart, it should make us ask, how can we train our hearts to properly adore God? The prophet Jeremiah reckoned with this problem as he tried to minister to a corrupt nation:

“*And if you say in your heart, “Why have these things come upon me?” For the greatness of your iniquity Your skirts have been uncovered, Your heels made bare. Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard its spots? Then may you also do good who are accustomed to do evil.”*

*-Jeremiah 13:22-23*

Even if the nation *wanted* to do what was right, their hearts were trained towards rebellion and therefore their very natures were against God. The early church father Augustine wrestled with this very problem in his own attempts to honor God and he says this about his attempts to attain chastity:

*“But I wretched, most wretched, in the very commencement of my early youth, had begged chastity of Thee, and said, "Give me chastity and continency, only not yet." For I feared lest Thou shouldest hear me soon, and soon cure me of the disease of concupiscence, which I wished to have satisfied, rather than extinguished.”*

*-Augustine of Hippo - “Confessions”*

Though he desired to avoid sexual sin, there was a significant part of his heart that genuinely *loved* his sin and therefore didn't want to change. This is the very internal contradiction that we all feel. We desire to do good, but we also desire to do wrong. Our hearts are divided and therefore our conscience is conflicted. This is how the apostle Paul describes this dilemma:

*“For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.”*

*-Romans 7:22-25*

So if this is the problem, what is the solution? I'll break this into three parts, but understand this is a lifelong battle, not something that will end right away. But this is the true Biblical definition for what we call repentance. While the goal of repentance is to change the behavior, its origins are in the heart and descend from our love for God. Which is why Paul describes repentance this way:

“*For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death.”*

*-2 Corinthians 7:10*

While repentance saves the soul and the body, it always and rightly originates in the heart with proper sorrow. This shows us the first principle necessary to change our hearts, we must believe that they can be changed. What this means is we have to believe, fundamentally, that there are right and wrong ways to feel and have affection. This has gotten so muddled in our culture that we literally define ourselves sexually based on our desires, whereas the Bible teaches that there are indeed right and wrong affections.

## Cherishing the Law

This is why the parent is not merely trying to adjust the behavior of their child, they are genuinely trying to change the heart. The problem with a selfish child is not that they hoard a toy that they don't even like, it is the fact that they *want* to do this, that they see this behavior as *right,* which is why they resent any type of correction.

As a parent I can certainly stop my child from doing this, but if I can't instruct the heart towards proper obedience and selfless behavior, I haven't actually helped them. It isn't enough that they stop doing the behavior, they have to *love* the commandment.

"*And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. "You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. "You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. "You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates."*

*-Deuteronomy 6:6-9*

This is not a command to remember the commandments, it is a command to cherish them. To surround ourselves with the commandments and learn to adore the commands of God. Until a child learns to *hate* their selfishness and genuinely *desire* to be selfless, the law is a cruel task master and not a loving instructor. But if we find agreement in our hearts with what the Law has told us, then we will find that the Law is not some impersonal list of do's and don't's, but we will find that the person of Christ stands behind each precept and that in challenging our affections towards the Law, we will find more of Him. Which is why Moses tells his people that even if they fall away from God there is a way back:

*"I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day, that you will soon utterly perish from the land which you cross over the Jordan to possess; you will not prolong your days in it, but will be utterly destroyed. "And the LORD will scatter you among the peoples, and you will be left few in number among the nations where the LORD will drive you. "And there you will serve gods, the work of men's hands, wood and stone,*

*which neither see nor hear nor eat nor smell. “But from there you will seek the LORD your God, and you will find Him if you seek Him with all your heart and with all your soul.” “When you are in distress, and all these things come upon you in the latter days, when you turn to the LORD your God and obey His voice “(for the LORD your God is a merciful God), He will not forsake you nor destroy you, nor forget the covenant of your fathers which He swore to them.”*

*-Deuteronomy 4:26-29*

When we search for God with our hearts, we are told we will find Him. This again is not less than searching for God in our obedience, but it is more than this. Obedience can indeed reinforce and strengthen the heart, just as disobedience can weaken the heart and draw us away from our affections as it sears our conscience. But it isn’t the center of the Law or the intent of the commandments:

*“Now the purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith…”*

*-1 Timothy 1:5*

To seek God with all our hearts means that we are desiring to have the same heart as God’s. To see sin and righteousness the same way that He does. This is why David, in spite of all his faults, is called a “man after God’s own heart”. This doesn’t mean that he always fulfilled God’s Law, he did have some pretty spectacular failures, but it just means that he cherished God and His law. When he sinned against God, the greatest punishment that David received was knowing that he had sinned against God and done harm to Him.

*“If I regard iniquity in my heart, The Lord will not hear.”*

*-Psalm 66:18*

## Affection and Worship

Which leads to the final point, affection is tied to worship:

*“Take heed to yourselves, lest you forget the covenant of the LORD your God which He made with you, and make for yourselves a carved image in the form of anything which the LORD your God has forbidden you. “For the LORD your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God.”*

*-Deuteronomy 4:23-24*

One of the reasons that God forbids idolatry is because idols are false gods. But the other reason is because when we behold an image, we are worshiping it, and when we

worship an image our affections are moved away from God. This is similar to how pornography works in the heart, and why Jesus points out that adultery begins in the heart with lustful affection. When someone views a pornographic image, they are lusting after that image. That lustful adoration is now filling that person's heart with affection for that image. But this can't rightly be called love. Love after all is personal, intimate, and mutual, which is why it is impossible to "love" a mere image of another person, just as it is impossible to actually love an idol. What happens is that we merely project our own preferences on a dead image, and therefore we are actually falling in love with ourselves.

So while we can't love an image, by adoring, or "worshiping" an image, we can certainly lose love and affection for those that we are trying to love as we are swallowed up in our own self-indulgent passions. When God calls His people to worship Him, it is a call to meditate on Him, to "behold" Him the best we can on this earth. And as we do so, our hearts will be lifted to Him and will learn to delight in Him truly. This is why our church services begin and end with worship; they are primarily about education, but about lifting our hearts to God so that we might learn to love Him with all our hearts.

# With All Our Souls

*And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.*

*-Genesis 2:7*

To love God with all our souls is a little more straightforward once we understand what the soul is. For the ancient person, the soul was more than a "ghost in the machine" or some spiritual essence within the body. However, we can see from the above verse, that the soul is distinct from the body and is juxtaposed with the body. The soul and the spirit functioned as the animating principle behind life itself. This is why the Latin word for spirit was "anima", but in the Hebrew and Greek the words that most directly link to this word would be "ruach" in Hebrew and "pneuma" in the Greek, which are usually translated as "spirit".

The soul on the other hand, which would be a little more than that which animates us, or gives our body life. It is instead the principle behind identity, it is who we are in our deepest, most hidden self, and it also constitutes our rational will. Which is why in the Hebrew this word is usually rendered as "nephesh" or "neshama", but in the Greek the word is "psyche". It is important to note that all these words have something to do with "breath" or "wind", which means that there is so much overlap between these terms that it is hard to figure out where one term begins and the other ends.

This is why in the book of Hebrews we are told that the Bible is a sharp two-edged sword that divides the soul and spirit. Meaning that these things are so intertwined that only something as sharp and precise as the word of God can reveal the distinctions between them. Also when Jesus reiterates Deuteronomy 6:4 in the gospels, He adds the word “mind”, which is the Greek word “psyche”, meaning that we should see all these categories as being present in this commandment.

But we also notice that the “spirit” and the “soul” are usually juxtaposed with the “body” or the “flesh”:

“*I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish.”*

*-Galatians 5:16-17*

And we especially see this distinction in the creation account of Adam in which Adam is formed from the earth, flesh or matter, and then God breathes His Spirit *into* Adam which animates him and makes him a rational being instead of dead matter. So a way that we can think about it, is that the command to love God with all our strength is meant to be juxtaposed with the command to love God with all our soul, and both of these principles are brought into harmony by the command to love God with all our heart.

As Paul says in the above passage, since the soul comes from God, it naturally inclines itself *towards* God. This is how the ancient people understood the movement of the stars and the planets. Since they didn’t explain the movement of the celestial bodies through physical causation like we do, they believed that the stars and planets were moving, or animated, by a desire to “kindly incline” towards the source of all being or God, who existed at the edge of the cosmos. In the same way, they believed that our souls were the part of us that naturally “inclined” towards God, and therefore its desires were, in some ways, at odds with the desires of the body that long for the things of the flesh.

This doesn’t actually mean that the body, or the flesh, only wants sinful things, it merely means that it longs for *physical* things to be satisfied, whereas the soul longs for spiritual things to be satisfied. As the Psalmist says:

*“As the deer pants for the water brooks, So pants my soul for You, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God?”*

*-Psalm 42:1-2*

This means that to love God with all our soul is to take the soul's desires, which naturally incline it to be satisfied in the realm of the spirit, and set it fully on God. And it is because the soul *naturally* longs for God that makes it, in many senses, pure and undefiled. This is why every day Jews are encouraged to pray the following prayer:

*"My God, the soul You have placed within me is pure.*
*You formed it within me,*
*You breathed it into me,*
*and You guard it while it is within me.*
*One day You will take it from me and restore it within me in the time to come.*
*As long as the soul is within me, I thank You,*
*O Lord my God and God of my ancestors, Master of all worlds, Lord of all souls.*
*Blessed are You, O Lord, who restores souls to lifeless bodies."*
*-Talmud - Berakhot 60b*

So we can think of it this way, the body is satisfied by fulfilling its appetites, when we are hungry we need to eat, when we are thirsty we need to drink, and when we are tired we need to sleep. Whereas the desires of the soul are for things that can only be found in the spiritual world. Take loneliness as an example. This desire can't actually be fulfilled *physically, it can* only be satisfied *spiritually.* This is why the loneliest people on earth tend to live in the most physically dense cities on earth. It isn't about physical proximity towards others, it is about spiritual intimacy with those that we care about.

And the worst mistake that we can make is by trying to satisfy a spiritual longing physically. Take the desire for sex for a second. Many would want to place this longing in the desires of the flesh, but it actually isn't. The reason why we can know that it isn't is that if the real desires of the flesh go unmet, we suffer physical harm and can even die. If I am hungry but don't eat, I am not merely dissatisfied, this will kill me. The desires of the soul won't physically kill us if they aren't met, but they can bring about dissatisfaction and a type of spiritual death. If we don't have sex, it won't kill us, but it can create dissatisfaction.

So what is our desire for sex really all about? The apostle Paul tells us:

*"Foods for the stomach and the stomach for foods, but God will destroy both it and them. Now the body is not for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body."*
*-1 Corinthians 6:13*

By starting the statement with “foods for stomach…” he is attacking the widely held belief that the desire for sex was *merely* physical and therefore *can* be met physically, and even that it *must* be met otherwise we would suffer physical harm. But Paul tells us that our bodies are made “for the Lord”. This simple verse not only teaches us the purpose of sex, but it also explains what it means to love God with all our souls.

What we are told here is that all of our spiritual longings, whether it is our loneliness, sadness, fear, guilt, aimlessness, or anything else are all things that can be met in the world of the spirit. So, if I am lonely, I need connection, if I am sad I need to grieve and find joy, if I am aimless I need to find purpose, if I feel guilty I need to find forgiveness and repentance, and so on. Even sex, my desire to have sex is ultimately a desire to be intimate, or united to someone else. And what Paul teaches us when he says that the body is made for the Lord is that all of these desires point us ultimately to our need for God.

*“On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. “He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.” But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.”*

*-Johnn 7:37-39*

*“And Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst.”*

*-John 6:35*

When Christ speaks of “hunger” and “thirst”, He is not speaking about our literal physical hunger and thirst. No matter how sincerely we believe in Christ and no matter how passionately we follow Him, if we don’t eat or drink our bodies will die. Jesus is instead saying that *all* the desires of our soul are ultimately met in Him. This doesn’t mean that God doesn’t want us to have friends, or to get married and have physical intimacy, it is only to recognize that these relationships can’t *ultimately* satisfy our souls. If we don’t recognize this, we will put an infinite weight on our finite relationships and by doing so we will break them and suffer despair. Or we might conclude that all of our spiritual desires are fraudulent and that we have to give up any hope of finding their fulfillment.

But the Christian way is different. We recognize that our human relationships are there to “wet our appetites” , they are there to suggest the real thing, but not to satisfy us fully,

this will only happen in heaven. These desires drive us towards God for our ultimate satisfaction. Which means that to love God with all our souls is to recognize that fact and to pursue God as though He really can satisfy every longing of our soul:

*“Everyone who thirsts, Come to the waters; And you who have no money, Come, buy and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk Without money and without price. Why do you spend money for what is not bread, And your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, And let your soul delight itself in abundance.”*

*-Isaiah 55:1-2*

The great disappointment of the human soul, and the source of all lust, disappointment, and unfulfilled longing, is when we try to find the spiritual satisfaction that only God can give in His creation. And most of our temptation to sin comes from this fact. We don’t associate God with the fulfillment of our longings, and so we look outside the law of God to fill our souls. But this again only makes us bitter and unsatisfied.

For the person who doesn’t know God, this isn’t the worst thing. They have never been fully satisfied and so ancient people often taught that such things don’t exist here but only after the grave. This made the unfulfilled longings bearable. But the reason why the modern west is so miserable and depressed is because we know that this fulfillment *does* exist, but we have turned from it:

*“For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning. For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them. But it has happened to them according to the true proverb: “A dog returns to his own vomit,” and, “a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire.”*

*-2 Peter 2:20-22*

It is one thing to never know the satisfaction of Christ, but to know it and to be led away by our lusts is to subject ourselves to misery. This is the fate of every backslidden believer, and it is also the source of the current modern world. Not only have we tried to reduce all spiritual longings to the flesh, which is why we are increasingly materialistic and why the teachings of psychology that seeks to medicate our pain, and socialism that promises a utopian world without physical lack, are so appealing to the next generation. But worse than all this, we are a culture that has turned our backs on the source of all satisfaction and joy, God Himself, and we can’t do this without severe consequences to our souls. To love God with all our souls is to sing with the Psalmist:

*“All my springs are in you.”*
*-Psalm 87:7*

# With All Our Strength

*“Therefore you shall be careful to do as the LORD your God has commanded you; you shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left. “You shall walk in all the ways which the LORD your God has commanded you, that you may live and that it may be well with you, and that you may prolong your days in the land which you shall possess.”*
*-Deuteronomy 5:32-33*

Which leads to the final point, we must love God with all our strength. Our faith in God can never be relegated to the world of the spirit and the heart, it must be fulfilled in the world of the flesh. This is, after all, what the incarnation is all about. If God merely wanted to redeem our hearts and our souls He would have come in a spiritual body, But to redeem our flesh, He had to come in the flesh, to die in the flesh, and be raised to new life in the flesh. And this is indeed what God has done for us:

*“Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s.”*
*-1 Corinthians 6:19-20*

But this means that while our obedience to God doesn’t begin with the body, it must include the body. We are an incarnate faith, which means that the “faith” that remains in the heart and the soul has not fulfilled its purpose. In order for it to be real faith, it must manifest itself in our bodies. We must give our behavior over to God, to recognize the authority of His word and submit ourselves to it fully. This is what it means to be a true disciple of Christ and this is what it means to love the Lord our God with all our strength.

But Moses makes a note of this difficulty:

*“When the LORD your God brings you into the land which you go to possess, and has cast out many nations before you, the Hittites and the Girgashites and the Amorites and the Canaanites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and mightier than you, “and when the LORD your God delivers them over to you, you shall conquer them and utterly destroy them. You shall make no covenant with them nor show mercy to them. “Nor shall you make marriages with them. You shall not give your daughter to their son, nor take their daughter for your son. “For they will turn*

*your sons away from following Me, to serve other gods; so the anger of the LORD will be aroused against you and destroy you suddenly. "But thus you shall deal with them: you shall destroy their altars, and break down their sacred pillars, and cut down their wooden images, and burn their carved images with fire."*

*-Deuteronomy 7:1-5*

In order to love God with all their strength, the Israelites had to truly recognize that their strength was insufficient to honor God. God sets them up to face an enemy that far exceeded their strength in order to teach them this lesson. And in the same way, the true believer in God is the one who has recognized this to be true. They weren't merely taught that they can't possibly please God with their good works, they need to know this to be true. It is only this person who has recognized this divine truth who can truly cry out for the grace of God.

*"Blessed are the poor in spirit, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven."*

*-Matthew 5:3*

This blessedness is not for the lazy person who never even tries to follow Christ. The person who merely hears that they won't be enough for God and says "well I might as well not try then and lean fully on God's grace". No, the person who loves God with all their strength is the person who is grieved over their failure and lack of strength. They are the people who, like the tax collector in front of the temple, beat their breast in contrition and say "Lord be merciful to me a sinner." Or like the woman who washes the feet of Christ with her tears and wipes them away with her hair. These are the ones who have tried to love God in their own strength, and only when they realized they couldn't cry out for mercy.

These kinds of people will not be content to wallow in their sin. When they receive the grace of God they will say like Paul did:

*"But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me."*

*-1 Corinthians 15:10*

The grace that he received was not license to sin, it was the very fuel that propelled him along in his fervent pursuit of Christ and discipleship under His name. For a Christian to love God with all our strength we must recognize this truth. We must go to war with our sin and strive to honor God in our bodies. Not because we can actually do it, but because we have been forgiven for our failures, and because the redemptive love of

God can actually redeem our actions and our behaviors. Not that we can see this fully on this earth, but we can receive a foretaste of heavenly glory in our attempts. Always remembering that it isn't our guilt and shame that is moving our bodies, but our love for God, as Paul says:

*"For the love of Christ compels us…"*
*-2 Corinthians 5:14*

*"Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts."*
*-Romans 13:14*

*"If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell. "And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell."*
*-Matthew 5:29-30*