

Lesson 1. **A loving mind.** Matthew 22:34-40.

If some things in life are not used for a time, they start to deteriorate. Left too long they become useless. Batteries left in a flashlight corrode. A bicycle chain seizes up and the tyres go flat. A human leg, broken, and treated in plaster, stiffens and then needs therapy to get it moving properly. A footpath left to become overgrown, needs to be cleared before it can be used again.

If we do not use our minds for the purpose God has given them, we may find it hard to bring them back into good use. Hard, but not impossible; hard, but necessary. We must use our minds to love God as fully as we can.

In verse 38 our Lord Jesus says: "This is the first and greatest commandment". "Greatest" (Greek MEGA) means this single command is all embracing. It sums up all the others, bringing them together as if they are only one. If you can love God with all of your being, the greater part of Christian discipleship is automatically done. In verse 37 the command is clearly stated by Jesus, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind".

This is a New Testament quotation from the Old Testament, Deuteronomy 6:5. Jesus was quoting Moses. There is one different word used - the last one. Moses says: "Strength" where Jesus says "Mind". Perhaps the two words comment on each other? We use the phrase in English, "Strength of mind". Someone has "strength of mind" when they have the ability to grasp and understand something, or when they can figure things out. Perhaps the

meaning here is that strength of mind which helps people reason out God's way to live, and then remain resolute to those conclusions, in spite of any tough conflicts or difficulties they face.

The dynamic our world needs today is more Christian people who are prepared to love God with their utmost ability; who will talk about – plus live out – the truth of God; and who will remain faithful to this way of living irrespective of fashion, fancy or fad round about them.

- The heart (Greek KARDIA) is the chief organ of physical life in every one of us. It is the blood pump. It is the hidden drive of life within. We should love God 100% with our hearts.
- The soul (Greek PSUCHE) is the flowing of life, the centre of willing purpose. It is the real us, our characters – not just the outer shell we call our bodies. We should love God 100% with our souls.
- The strength (Greek NOUS) is the mind. It is where we understand, we feel, we discern, we perceive. The Greek word is used directly in English slang. We say “That person has a lot of “nous”” (pronounced “nowse”)! It means “common sense or intelligence”. We are to love God 100% with our minds.

God made us. God made our world. The way we respond to what we see, hear, touch, experience, etc. is controlled by our minds. God made us that

way. The mind is our Creator's way of giving us control of ourselves in every circumstance. Loving God with all of our minds means we will be filled with Christian common sense and intelligence.

Just before we see how we can love God with all our minds, we should be sure of what we mean by "love". Jesus used a unique Christian word here. To love like this is impossible without being born again. It is more than philanthropic, brotherly love. It is more than erotic, sexual love. It is more than egotistical, selfish love. All of these types of love are merely human. But the love Jesus speaks of here is God-love (Greek AGAPE). It is the characteristic word of Christianity.

God wants to see himself in me. When my image reflects God back to himself, I am loving God as I should. The age in which we live is described in 2 Timothy 3:1-5. Verse 4 uses the descriptive phrase "lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God". A loving church is much more than any secular club of people who meet up together. Christians are closer to one another than to even blood-family members who are not Christians. God is number one in life. He means more to a Christian than a husband or a wife. What an incredible challenge that is.

Yet it was our Lord Jesus who said we are to "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind" Matthew 22:37. Since he told us to do it, it must be possible. To see how, think about the following four ways to love God with all of your mind.

Firstly, **we love God with all of our minds by submitting our minds to the Lordship of Jesus Christ.** Avoid the pride of boasting about your brain! It will never be good enough to deliver you into salvation, 1 Corinthians 1:18-20. God's way is always the best way. It took Jesus to the cross, but it was still the best way. The context of Isaiah 29:14 (quoted in 1 Corinthians 1:19), is people who talk about God one way but who live a different way entirely. Do not be like them. The way to avoid that is by thinking in God's way about everything you do, and applying God's way to all of your actions.

Recognise you don't know it all! In 1 Corinthians 2:9 the quotation is from Isaiah 64:4. God knows so very much more than we will ever know. His wisdom is sharper and more perceptive than the biggest library of Encyclopaedias in the world, in whatever language they are written. We must keep our limited understanding in proper perspective. We only know what God has shown us, what he has given us the ability to discover. Beyond this we must submit to the mysteries of God.

A Christian recognises his or her disabilities. He or she listens to God until he can say either, "I see", or, "I trust". Because we know God we do not need to know everything else. We should grapple with what we can, but having done that we must place our confidence in God for all of the rest.

Secondly, **we love God with all of our minds by saturating our minds in God's word.** Following Moses' revelation of God in Deuteronomy 6 are three

positive actions to be taken. Remember verse 5 is the command, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all our strength (mind)”. In verses 6-9 Moses says how this should affect our lives.

- (1) Train yourself in the words of God, verse 6, “These commands are to be upon your hearts”.
- (2) Teach the words of God to your family, verse 7, “Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home, when you lie down and when you get up”.
- (3) Take the words of God into your world, verses 7-8, “Talk about them when you walk along the road. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of our houses and on your gates”.

Christians are to think consciously and sub-consciously about God’s word. It is how we know God’s way for us to live. Evangelism is a natural outcome of debate with unbelievers about the way we see the world, in which we both live.

Thirdly, we love God with all of our minds by strengthening our minds, applying them – submitted to the Lordship of Christ and saturated in God’s word – to evangelism and to all of the issues of today.

To strengthen something is to make it tough, vigorous and sturdy. Use your Christian mind as Peter told his readers to. “Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have”, 1 Peter 3:15. It is an evidence of the Lordship of Christ in our life (see the start of that verse).

Where are the people like Stephen, Acts 6:9-10, who showed the “wisdom of the Spirit” in his arguments? To argue is to debate, to dispute, to bring strong reason to prove.

Where are the people like Paul, Acts 9:20,22, who “preached and proved that Jesus was the Christ”? To preach is to explain, to urge strongly, to advocate, to exhort morally. To prove is to show to be true or valid, to establish beyond doubt.

Where are the people like Paul, Acts 17:2-3, who “reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving”? To reason is to think or discuss logically, coherently and explicitly. To explain is to make clear and intelligible, to illustrate the meaning of something.

Where are the people like Paul, Acts 18:4, “trying to persuade” others? To persuade means to induce, convince, influence by argument or appeal.

Where are the people like Apollos, Acts 18:28, who “vigorously refuted the Jews in public debate, proving from the Scriptures”? To refute is to prove to be false. A debate is a public discussion of a motion, an argument or controversy.

Where are the people like Paul, Acts 19:8-10, who “spoke boldly .. arguing persuasively .. had discussions daily”? To discuss means to argue the case for and against something.

Remember the lesson from the humble tea bag. The tea bag has to be put into boiling water for it to produce what it is designed for – a drink to refresh those who are thirsty. Are you as useful as a tea bag? Are you prepared to be put into hot water?

Fourthly, **we love God with all of our minds by sanctifying our minds, choosing to set them apart to know and to do God's will.**

How can a person show their love for God? How can they exercise a loving mind? Think of what a loving husband does for his wife, or a loving wife for her husband. Think of what loving parents do for their children. Think of what a concerned teacher does for her pupil. Think of what a careful businessman does for his customer.

Think for yourself and think for your community.

What does God want? What will give God pleasure? What is best for God?

What does God want for other people He cares for? How will my plans affect God? Why has God put me here now? What will best advance the cause of God in this place?

“Jesus replied, “Love the Lord our God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment”, Matthew 22:37-38. Even if you have not used your mind seriously for quite some time, now will be a good time to begin!