

Loving God: The First and Great Commandment

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I. the call to wholehearted love for God

A. The Shema Israel: Shema is the Hebrew word for "hear". God called Israel to hear His heart. Jesus' most repeated exhortation in the NT was, "He that has an ear, let him hear" (Mt. 11:15; 13:9, 43; Mk. 4:9, 23; 7:16; Lk. 8:8; 14:35; Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22; 13:9).

4 Hear (Shema), O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one! 5 You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. (Deut. 6:4-5)

B. Jesus interpreted what they were meant to "hear". Namely, that loving God is His first priority and what He considers the greatest way to live. We must press to the limits of what the words "first" and "great" imply. Do not apologize for your intensity in your vision to love Jesus.

37 You shall love the Lord; 38 This is the first and great commandment. (Mt. 22:37-38)

C. The Shema reveals the "why" behind the "what" of creation and redemption. God's ultimate purpose for creation is to provide a family for Himself and an eternal companion for Jesus who would be equally yoked to Him in love. Jesus' inheritance is a people He fully possesses in love.

8 I (the Father) will give You (Jesus) the nations for Your inheritance; (Ps. 2:8)

1. Mandatory obedience: God will cause all creation to obey Jesus (Phil. 2:9-11).

2. Voluntary love: God will raise up a people equally yoked in love. He wants us to love Him with all of our heart and mind because He loves us with all of His heart and mind.

D. As a King, Jesus will be obeyed, but as a Bridegroom, He will be loved. A king's inheritance is to rule over obedient subjects. A bridegroom's inheritance is partnership with a loving bride.

E. We must continually realign our life and ministry to make the First Commandment our first priority. By the very definition of love, we must invite Him. He will not force us into a relationship of voluntary love. He waits until we invite Him in the matters of our heart.

F. God's purpose is to select and train a Bride who would be prepared by voluntary love to reign with Jesus. The First Commandment will be in first place in the Church when Jesus returns.

7 For the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready. (Rev. 19:7)

G. He will supernaturally empower us to love Him this way. It takes "God to love God".

5 The love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit; (Rom. 5:5)

H. Jesus prayed for His people to be supernaturally empowered to love Him with God's love.

26 I declared; Your name; that the love with which You loved Me may be in them. (Jn. 17:26)

II. loving God is the First Commandment: it is what God wants first

A. Loving God is the first priority to God. Jesus did not call it the first option, but a commandment. This is the first emphasis of the Holy Spirit. Loving God is a glorious end in itself, however, it never ends with loving God, but always overflows with loving ourselves and others.

B. The Song of Solomon has two main sections. Song 1-4 is focused on the Bride receiving her inheritance in Jesus. Song 5-8 is focused on Jesus receiving His inheritance in the Bride.

C. Since loving God is His first priority, we must plan our ministries with this as our first goal and measurement of success. Numerical growth is good, but that is not the litmus test of God's favor. I ask the Spirit to mark all of us so that this is our top priority in our ministry mission statement.

D. God has everything yet He is searching for something. What does God search for? What does He want most and first? It is love that He is after. He is after our heart. He wants our voluntary love. When we find what God is looking for, then we will find the answer to what we are looking for.

23 True worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him; 24

Those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth. (Jn. 4:23-24)

E. Many are searching to know God's will. The first issue in God's will is to love Him. The mystery of our life is found in this truth. He wants us. We cry, "Lord, what are You doing in my life? Why are You allowing certain things?" He is after our heart. God does everything for love.

F. Christianity is an on-going encounter of love with a Person. A deep sense of mission to change a city or nation will keep us steady unless we encounter Jesus in love. The labor of ministry makes us weary without the small but consistent stirring of love in our emotions by the Spirit.

III. loving God is the Greatest Commandment, calling and lifestyle

A. Loving God is the greatest thing we can do. It has the greatest impact on God's heart and ours. Our greatest calling is to move God's heart and to be moved by God's heart. We touch Him by every movement of our heart to show love to Him by obedience. It is the most extreme lifestyle.

B. Do you know the way that you move Him? Each time we repent of compromise it moves Him. We move His heart by sitting before Him (Lk. 10:38-42) and by doing small acts of service for others because of love for Him (Heb. 6:10; Mt. 10:42).

C. Our greatest satisfaction is to know and feel His love, to love Him and to overflow in love for others. Our identity is found in this. I confess, "I'm loved (by God) and I am a lover (of God) therefore I am successful". This is what we look like to God.

D. Loving Jesus has the greatest reward in the age-to-come and thus, it is the only way to enter our greatest destiny. You can be one of the greatest people in history by loving God (Mt. 5:19).

IV. Love is defined by obedience

A. Jesus defined loving God as being deeply rooted in a spirit of obedience (Jn. 14:21; Deut. 6:1-9). There is no such thing as loving God without seeking to obey His Word. Loving God requires more than singing to Him or having sentimental feelings about a "god we make in our image";

15 If you love Me, keep My commandments; 21 He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me; 23 If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; (Jn. 14:15-23)

B. What does Jesus command us to do? He commands us to love Him, ask Him for things, be near Him, and enjoy His glory with His liberating holiness. His commands are related to loving Him.

3 This is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. His commandments are not burdensome. (1 Jn. 5:3)

C. "Affection-based obedience" is obedience that flows from experiencing Jesus' affection for us and giving it back to Him. It is the strongest, deepest and most consistent obedience. Why? Because a lovesick person will endure anything for love.

D. "Duty-based obedience" is our commitment to obedience even if we do not feel God's presence. God's Word requires that we obey God without feeling inspired to do so.

E. "Fear-based obedience" is obedience motivated by the fear of negative consequences. It is biblical to appeal to shame and fear to motivate people. Scripture has many "do's" and "don't's"; such as do not commit adultery, steal, etc. We sin when our heart is unsatisfied with God.

F. Obedience based on affection does not need the pressure of added difficulty (God's discipline), shame (being caught), or to be watched to avoid dishonesty with money, laziness, porn, etc.

V. revelation of the supremacy of the first commandment

A. We need revelation of the supremacy of the first commandment. It is the standard of evaluation at the Judgment Seat of Christ. God measures life differently than man because He has all the money, wisdom, fame, influence and time. What will matter is whether we grew in love for God.

B. We are not left guessing as to what God considers greatest. In seeking to stay up with popular ministry trends, some regularly change directions in their ministry. We must not get our ministry focus from the latest trend, but from God's Word. God is raising up forerunner messengers to call others to define love as God's highest purpose. They will make the First Commandment their primary focus for their life and ministry.

C. Our greatest strengthening is found in "affection-based obedience" that flows from experiencing Jesus' affection and responding back love. It is the most consistent obedience because a lovesick person will endure anything for love. People in love are untouchable. We set our heart to live as extravagant lovers of God without getting trapped into bitterness toward those who mistreat us.

D. What is your greatest dream for your life? The anointing to love God is our greatest possession. The reward of love is found in possessing the power to love. No sacrifice is comparable to what He gives us in His love. Anyone can quit, but a person in love.

E. The church of Ephesus was a great revival center in the early Church (Acts 19-20), yet, they did not sustain the freshness of their love for Jesus. They became workers for God more than lovers of God. Lovers will always out work the workers.

4 I have this against you, that you have left your first love... (Rev. 2:4)

F. When we work without intimacy we work as a slave or a hireling. The heart of a bride is refreshed as she labors. Service without the foundation of devotion leads to burnout, disappointment, and wounding. Thus, the service is not sustained over decades.

VI. a needed paradigm shift: making the First Commandment first

A. Our first loyalty and preoccupation is to a Man, then secondly to His mission and our role in it. It is common to be preoccupied with the mission because it is deeply tied to our role and identity.

24 Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority; 28 When all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him (the Father); that God may be all in all. (1 Cor. 15:24-28)

B. The power of martyrdom is found in being preoccupied with the First Commandment. The Book of Revelation is Jesus' plan to fill the earth with the First Commandment.

2 I saw; those who have the victory over the beast; standing on the sea of glass. (Rev. 15:2)

11 They overcame him (Satan) by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death. (Rev. 12:11)

C. We must make a determined decision to set our heart to make loving God our first priority. We must establish a vision to go deep in God. This will require much focus and continual effort. It also requires that we must be focused on pursuing it more than gaining things and influence.

14 Because he has set his love upon Me, therefore I will deliver him; (Ps. 91:14)

D. The power of articulating our love and gratitude to Jesus is often overlooked. It will change our life to regularly say out loud, "Jesus, I love You, I thank and trust You";

2 Take words with you, and return to the LORD. Say to Him, "Take away all iniquity; receive us graciously, for we will offer the sacrifices of our lips. (Hos. 14:2)

15 One of them; returned; giving Him thanks; 17 Jesus answered and said, "Were there not ten cleansed?... 19 He said to him, "Your faith has made you well." (Lk. 17:15-19)

E. See three prayer lists on www.IHOP.org: F-E-L-L-O-W-S-H-I-P (prayers to be strengthened); A-R-K (applying the

descriptions of Jesus) and T-R-U-S-T (fellowshipping with the Holy Spirit).
Information provided by:
IHOP.org