

Session 1: Loving God: The First and Great Commandment

I. THE CALL TO WHOLEHEARTED LOVE: TO BE EQUALLY YOKED TO JESUS IN LOVE

³⁷ *You shall love the LORD ... with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.* ³⁸ *This is the first and great commandment. (Mt. 22:37-38)*

A. God's ultimate eternal purpose for creation is to provide a family for Himself that includes faithful children for Himself and an equally yoked Bride for Jesus as His eternal companion. God promised to give Jesus an inheritance consisting of a people whom He fully possesses in love.

⁸ *I [the Father] will give You [Jesus] the nations for Your inheritance, and the ends of the earth for Your possession. (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 people who voluntarily choose to love Him.

B. Equally yoked in love: God wants us to love Him with all of our heart and mind, because He loves us with all of His heart and mind. Jesus wants us to love Him in the way He loves us. He will supernaturally empower us to love Him this way. It takes "God to love God." The anointing to receive God's love and to return it to Him is the greatest gift the Spirit imparts to us.

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

C. 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)*

D. 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.

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

E. God's four-fold love: love from God, to God, which overflows to ourselves, and then to others. We love to be loved. Why? We were created that way. You were created to be loved and to love.

F. Foundational premise of this course: people who love Jesus will love others much more. We will focus one session on the relationship of the first commandment to the second commandment. It is impossible to love Jesus and not love people.

G. This session is focused on showing the wisdom and beauty of continually realigning our life and ministry to make the first commandment first in 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. We must intentionally pursue with Him with diligence. Our greatest attainment is to have a burning and shining heart for God (Lk. 11:36).

II. LOVING GOD ON GOD'S TERMS

- 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.”
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. We must love God on His terms (not on our terms). A core issue at the end of the age is whether we will define love on God's terms or by the humanistic culture that seeks love without reference to obedience to God's Word. Jesus wants love from us that allows Him to take over our lives. There are many definitions of love, liberty, and freedom in the culture of the Church in our nation. God is not a hippie. His definition of love is not about being laidback to chill out.

III. 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. Jesus makes it clear that cultivating love for Him 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 (believers and unbelievers).
- B. God has everything, yet He is searching for something that He still wants first. What does God search for? What does He want most and first? It is love that He is after. He is after our heart. The mystery of our life is found in this truth. He wants us. He wants our voluntary love. One of the most important questions to ask God is, “What are You looking for before anything else?” When we find what God is looking for, then we will find the answer to what we are looking for.
- C. Loving God is the first priority to God, or it is number one on God's priority list. We must plan ministries with this as the first goal and measurement of success. Numerical growth is good, but that is not the litmus test of God's grace or pleasure. I ask the Spirit to mark you in so that you always have this as your number-one priority in your ministry action plan or mission statement.
- D. Many are searching to know the will of God. What is the first issue in the will of God? First, God's will is to strengthen the response of our heart to Him in love. This is more important to Him than our ministry assignment. “Lord, what are You doing in my life? Why are You allowing certain things to continue?” Jesus is after our heart. He wants to wake us up to reveal and impart His love to us. Everything that God does, He does first for love.
- E. Christianity is an ongoing encounter of love with a Person. Possessing fierce dedication and making radical choices for righteousness will not keep us steady unless we encounter love. It is not enough to be a part of a mission or have vision to change a city or nation. The labor of the vision will make us emotionally weary without the small but consistent stirring of love in our emotions by the Spirit. Stirred emotions in love are the most powerful force in the universe!

IV. LOVING GOD IS THE GREATEST COMMANDMENT, CALLING, AND LIFESTYLE

- A. Loving God has the greatest impact on God's heart, our heart and others we touch, as well as being our greatest calling for our heart and in our ministry to others, because the fruit lasts forever. It is what Jesus esteems as the greatest way to live and it is how He measures the greatest quality of ministry. The greatest call in ministry is to call people to this.
- B. Our greatest calling in the grace of God is to move or impact God's heart. We move His heart by every movement of our heart to show love to Him by obedience. It is the most extreme lifestyle. What God wants most and esteems as greatest is the response of love from the human heart. He wants our time, money, and talents, because in giving them we express our love for Him.
- C. 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 (Mt. 10:42; Heb. 6:10). Impacting people is very important, but it is not our greatest call. Our greatest impact cannot be measured by the size of our ministry.
- D. Some are captivated most by getting more people to receive their ministry and to listen to them preach or sing. With better networking, marketing, and lighting, we can often get a bigger crowd. It is good to use creative wisdom to more effectively communicate through our ministry.
- E. Our greatest satisfaction is to know and feel His love, to love Him and to overflow in love for others. This will have the greatest impact on our heart as our spirit is exhilarated in God's love.
- F. The greatest grace we can receive is the anointing to feel God's love and to express it.
- G. 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 simply by living in deep love for God. You will not be the most famous but can be one of the greatest.
- Whoever ... breaks ... these commandments ... shall be called least in the Kingdom; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. (Mt. 5:19)***
- H. 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.
- I. 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. When we are tempted to quit, the obstacle in our path is that we love God.
- J. Our spiritual identity as individuals is ***"I'm loved [by God] and I am a lover [of God]; therefore I am successful."*** This is what we look like to God. We are not defined by our accomplishments.

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. The church of Ephesus was a great revival center in the early church (Acts 19-20). Yet they did not sustain the freshness in their love for Jesus. They became workers for God more than lovers of God. Lovers will always outwork the workers. When we work without intimacy, we work as a slave. A heart of a bride is refreshed as she labors. Service without the foundation of devotion leads to burn out, disappointment, and wounding. Thus, the service is not sustained over decades.
I have this against you, that you have left your first love. (Rev. 2:4)
- D. Satan's priority is to lead us astray from cultivating wholehearted love and devotion to Jesus.
I am afraid, lest as the serpent [Satan] deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds should be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ. (2 Cor 11:3, NAS)
- E. We must make a determined decision to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. We must set our heart to make love our first priority and have a vision to go deep in God. It takes focus and effort to go deep in God. To walk in this requires that we must be focused on pursuing it more than gaining things and influence.
Because he has set his love upon Me, therefore I will deliver him. (Ps. 91:14)
- F. People seeking to extravagantly love Jesus ask, "What is the most that God will empower me to give to Him?" We are not content with the minimum requirement of salvation. We must choose the good part, as Mary did. No one can choose it for us.
Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her. (Lk. 10:42)
- G. Sustaining a fresh walk with God through decades is the definition of living radically before God. We are not radical because we do something unusual for a few weeks or months.
- H. David sustained his passion for God for decades that he referred to as "all" the days of his life.
One thing ... I seek ... all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord. (Ps. 27:4)
- I. Daniel sustained his prayer life with passion for decades (from about age 16 to 82 years old).
Daniel ... knelt down on his knees three times that day, and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as was his custom since early days [605-539 BC, or 66 years]. (Dan. 6:10)