

The First Commandment

"And one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, and perceiving that he had answered them well, asked him, Which is the first commandment of all? And Jesus answered him, The first of all commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord: And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment. And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these." (Mark 12:28-31).

Love God. Show that love for Him from the depths of your soul, from the deepest recesses of your heart, with every waking thought and with every fiber of your being. This command is the very foundation of obedience to God.

This love manifests itself in respect for God. So many today casually, thoughtlessly and even vainly toss around the name of God. Usage of His name has become a trite expression for some and a method of venting anger for others. For far too many, their utterance of the name of God in a holy and righteous manner is practically unknown. How drastically different this is from the way in which the inspired Psalmist carefully and respectfully spoke of the name of God. "O magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name together." (Psalm 34:3). "I will freely sacrifice unto thee: I will praise thy name, O LORD; for it is good." (Psalm 54:6). "In Judah is God known: his name is great in Israel." (Psalm 76:1). "Every day will I bless thee; and I will praise thy name for ever and ever." (Psalm 145:2).

Adherence to the first commandment shows itself in recognition of God's greatness. Jeremiah said, "Forasmuch as there is none like unto thee, O Lord; thou art great, and thy name is great in might." (Jeremiah 10:6). God is eternal (Psalm 90:2). He is perfectly just (Deuteronomy 32:4). He Himself is love defined (I John 4:8). That being said, to love God and to recognize His greatness is to recognize our own weakness in comparison to Him and our own need for His blessings. In short, our recognition of God's greatness leads us to humble ourselves before Him. "Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up." (James 4:10).

Obedying the first commandment requires resignation to God's will. Jesus' exemplary prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane demonstrated His resignation. "Saying, Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done." (Luke 22:42). Loving God means accepting the fact that He knows what is best for us far better than we ourselves do. It means emptying self of self-will and submitting self to God's will. It means not complaining, worrying or doubting, but instead trusting that "his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue." (II Peter 1:3). This resignation does not involve sitting and waiting. Instead, it involves watching and working, progressing through life with the quiet confidence that, as Abraham told Isaac, "God will provide..." (Genesis 22:8). Whether it be in the spiritual realm or the physical, God will provide. His will is supreme.

The first and greatest commandment is to love God with all we have to give. We demonstrate this love by respecting the Father, recognizing His greatness and humbling ourselves before Him, and resigning ourselves to His will. There is a well-worn phrase in sports that says, "Leave it all on the field." This exhortation is typically made by a coach who is encouraging his players to give everything they have. When they get tired, they should push themselves harder. When they are hurt, they should do all that is within their power to get right back up and go at it again. When they feel discouraged because they are behind on the scoreboard, they should muster every ounce of courage and fight on. It is with this same tenacity and intensity that we are to love God so that when we come to the end of life we can say, as it were, that we "left it all on the field." Better still, may we love God in such a manner that when we stand before death's door we can sincerely utter those touching words of the aged apostle Paul, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing." (II Timothy 4:7-8).