

Pursue Love

The First and Great Commandment

I. Love Wants To Be Chosen

1. God has designed salvation, sanctification and glorification to where He does all the heavy lifting. But He's left man one critical role – choice.
2. Voluntary choices are the fabric of love. God made us as the one creature with the ability to choose Him, and He's been zealously pursuing our choices ever since. We are the one creature created with the ability to love God as He loves.
***John 4:23** But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. 24 God is Spirit [pneuma - possessed of the power of knowing, desiring, deciding, and acting], and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.*
3. All of creation was made as an arena for human beings – the image-bearers – to choose love.
***Genesis 1:1** In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth... 26 Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion... over all the earth... 27 So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. 28 Then God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion... 2:8 The LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden, and there He put the man whom He had formed. 9 And out of the ground the LORD God made every tree grow that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil...15 Then the LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it. 16 And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; 17 but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."*
4. God did all that He did, so that men might seek Him, search for Him, pursue Him and find Him.
***Acts 17:24** God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. 25 Nor is He worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things. 26 And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, 27 so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us*
5. The prophetic call over and over again is "seek My face." God never intended for man to just stay out of trouble. He wants us in His face, going for God.
***2 Chronicles 7:14** if My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face...
Psalms 14:2 The LORD looks down from heaven upon the children of men, To see if there are any who understand, who seek God.
Psalms 27:8 When You said, "Seek My face," My heart said to You, "Your face, LORD, I will seek."
Proverbs 8:17 I love those who love me, And those who seek me diligently will find me.
Isaiah 55:6 Seek the LORD while He may be found, Call upon Him while He is near.*

Hosea 6:1 Come, and let us return to the LORD... 3 Let us know, Let us pursue the knowledge of the LORD.

Matthew 6:33 But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness...

Matthew 7:7 Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.

James 4:8 Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.

Hebrews 11:6 But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

6. When the work of redemption is completed, God will be praised for His most remarkable work – without ever once violating man's free will He will have a Bride who chooses to pursue Him in love. His Bride will make herself ready.

Revelation 19:6 And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty thunderings, saying, “Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns! 7 Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready.”

7. Choices are the arena where we play our part in the transforming of our hearts – we must choose to pursue love (**1 Corinthians 14:1**).

II. The First Commandment

1. Jesus establishes the love of God as the First and Great Commandment, and says on it hangs our ability to fulfill all the other ones.
Matthew 22:37 Jesus said to him, “‘You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ [Mark and Luke add strength] 38 This is the first and great commandment. 39 And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ 40 On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.”
2. Loving God and loving our neighbor go hand in hand. We will never love God without coming to love those He loves, but we cannot love people rightly unless we first love God. Unless our one desire is Him and our hearts have been fully satisfied in Him we will carry an agenda and a need into every relationship.
3. Obedience and love go hand in hand – we cannot claim to truly love God if we are not seeking to obey Him. Obedience is the fruit of love. *But*, obedience is *not* the extent of love. The First Commandment is a call to actually cultivate a reality of love for God, not just to show love for God. Obedience is an expression of love for God, but it is not the substance of it.
4. Jesus calls the Church of Ephesus back to the first works – back to the substance of loving God – after commending them for their obedience and their works.
Revelation 2:2 “I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; 3 and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name’s sake and have not become weary. 4 Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love. 5 Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent.

5. There is a whole arena of love that takes place on the inside in the cultivating of a devoted heart, a sensitive spirit, a worshipful thought life and a submitted will. God not only commands us to love Him inwardly as well as outwardly, He makes that inward reality of love top priority, because out of it flow our words and deeds.

Proverbs 4:23 Keep your heart with all diligence, For out of it spring the issues of life.

1 Samuel 16:7 ...For the LORD does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.

III. Desiring God

1. The good news of the first commandment is that everyone of us has what it takes to fulfill the First Commandment. God only wants all that you are. He made us in His image with everything we need to know and love Him – heart, soul, mind and strength. We were wired with the ability and desire to love the Beautiful God with abandon.
2. We are designed as God's counterpart. We are incarnate thirst, because He is living water. At the deepest levels of what it means to be human, we are built to need God in order to be whole.

Psalms 42:1 As the deer pants for the water brooks, So pants my soul for You, O God. 2 My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God?

John 7:37 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. 38 He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water."
3. God made us with a mind that craves beauty and entertainment, because He is the fascinating God who the living creatures full of eyes have been staring at for all of eternity and still can't take Him in.
4. God made us with a heart that craves love, because He *is* love – He abounds in it.
5. God made us with a soul that craves significance and purpose, because He is the Author of the Greatest Story Ever Told and He's written us into His story.
6. God blessed us with strength – the ability and desire to build, create and affect change so that we could love as He loves – in the giving of our strength to make another man great.
7. We don't have to become anything that we're not in order to love God. He brings us into mature love not by instilling anything that wasn't there, but by washing away junk that has hindered us from being who we're made to be. Wrong ideas about God, about ourselves, about wisdom, about others, hurts and defenses from the past, misdirected desires and dreams that have been twisted from what God intended.

Ephesians 5:25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, 26 that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, 27 that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.
8. God put in us everything we need to love Him wholeheartedly. We were created to be passionate, to feel, to desire, to be fascinated, to be compassionate – and all of these things to their fullest extent all the time. The call is to gather our thoughts, emotions, affections and desires from the various wrong directions they've been running and dark corners where we've stuffed them, and to direct them all towards the one thing that satisfies – close relationship with Jesus.

IV. Pursuing Love

1. If we are not actively pursuing satisfying our hearts in God, we will be pursuing satisfaction in other things. It's the nature of how we were designed.
1 Chronicles 12:14 He [King Rehoboam] did evil because he had not set his heart on seeking the LORD.
2. God set in man's heart an aching need to touch the eternal. But He also set lesser pleasures before us, leaving us a choice.
Ecclesiastes 3:10 I have seen the burden God has laid on men. 11 He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end.
3. All the while, God is shouting 'those other things will not satisfy – choose Me.'
Isaiah 55:1 “Ho! 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. 2 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.
4. We cannot repent away our soul's ache for significance and belonging, but we can and must find that identity and purpose in reaching to lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus laid hold of us (*Philippians 3:12*).
5. We cannot repent away our mind's desire to behold beauty and to be entertained, but we can and must learn how to encounter the beauty of the Uncreated God and live fascinated with our Maker and His story.
6. We cannot repent away our heart's need to experience love, but we can and must learn how to be abundantly satisfied in knowing the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge.
7. We cannot repent of having strength – giftings, wisdom, resources, time, energy, creativity – but we can and must find ways to use those God-given blessings to delight the heart of our Beloved who we value Him above them all.
8. We cannot and need not repent of being who we are – God made us this way *so that* we could love Him. Every desire He put in us, He intends to satisfy. He came that we might have life and have it to the full.
9. We must return to our first love – the One for whom our hearts were made – and to the first works – fixing our thoughts on *His* beauty, grounding our souls in who we are *in Him* and unlocking our hearts with the simple exchange of 'I love you's.
10. It's not mysterious, it's not complicated, it's simple devotion to Christ. It's written into our hearts. Be who you are in light of the truth that who you are was made for God and the exchange of love between your heart and Jesus is the most important thing about you.
Deuteronomy 30:11 For this commandment which I command you today is not too mysterious for you, nor is it far off. 12 It is not in heaven, that you should say, ‘Who will ascend into heaven for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?’ 13 Nor is it beyond the sea, that you should say, ‘Who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?’ 14 But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may do it.