

12-31-17
A NEW YEAR CHALLENGE
PUTTING FIRST THINGS FIRST IN THE NEW YEAR

Tomorrow is the start of a New Year, 2018 The New Year is a good time to take inventory. It is a good time to set goals. It is a good time to look back to where you have been and then look forward to where you want to be. There are many things we may have on our list for the new year, but the one thing that should be on the top of that list. There are many things you can pursue in 2018 but the Lord clearly tells us in Scripture what should be our greatest priority. So this Last message I will preach is for the New Year: PUTTING FIRST THINGS FIRST.

READ OUR SCRIPTURE TEXT.

Mark 12:28 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?

Mark 12:29 And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord:

Mark 12:30 And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment.

Mark 12:31 And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these.

Mark 12:32 And the scribe said unto him, Well, Master, thou hast said the truth: for there is one God; and there is none other but he:

Mark 12:33 And to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love his neighbour as himself, is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.

Mark 12:34 And when Jesus saw that he answered discreetly, he said unto him, Thou art not far from the kingdom of God. And no man after that durst ask him any question.

Let me suggest that in 2018 you seek to obey this the greatest of all the commandments. TO LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL AND MIND AND STRENGTH.

Now words are cheap. We can easily say we love the Lord our God with all our hearts but our actions prove our love.

I. CONSIDER THE OCCASIONS OF OUR LORD REVEALING THE PRIMACY OF THIS COMMAND:

1. HE SHOWED THE PHARISEES THIS WAS THE GREATEST OF COMMANDMENTS. The pharisees and lawyers thought to trip Jesus up.

Matthew 22:35 Then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked him a question, tempting him, and saying,

Matthew 22:36 Master, which is the great commandment in the law?

Notice the occasion was the question was asked to trip up our Lord, instead He tripped them up by exposing their greatest spiritual neglect.

They asked if it was lawful to give tribute, to render to Caesar.

They tried to catch him with the woman taken in adultery.

With this question, our Lord answers clearly and directly.
The first commandment is to love the Lord your God with all your heart soul mind and strength.

After our Lord answered them, there was nothing more they could say.

Mark 12:34 And when Jesus saw that he answered discreetly, he said unto him, Thou art not far from the kingdom of God. And no man after that durst ask him any question.

Who can argue the truth of this, THIS IS THE FIRST AND GREAT COMMANDMENT.

2. HE REVEALED TO A RICH MAN THAT HE DID NOT KEEP THIS COMMANDMENT.

Mark 10:17 And when he was gone forth into the way, there came one running, and kneeled to him, and asked him, Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?

Mark 10:18 And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God.

Mark 10:19 Thou knowest the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Defraud not, Honour thy father and mother.

Mark 10:20 And he answered and said unto him, Master, all these have I observed from my youth.

Mark 10:21 Then Jesus beholding him loved him, and said unto him, One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me.

Mark 10:22 And he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved: for he had great possessions.

Mark 10:23 And Jesus looked round about, and saith unto his disciples, How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!

Mark 10:24 And the disciples were astonished at his words. But Jesus answereth again, and saith unto them, Children, how hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God!

Mark 10:25 It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.

Mark 10:26 And they were astonished out of measure, saying among themselves, Who then can be saved?

Mark 10:27 And Jesus looking upon them saith, With men it is impossible, but not with God: for with God all things are possible.

Notice: He quoted 5 of the ten commandments

5. Honor Father & Mother.
6. Thou Shalt not kill.
7. Thou Shalt not commit adultery.
8. Thou shalt not steal.
9. Thou shalt not bear false witness.

He purposely omitted the first 4 which showed our love for God And the last one, “ thou shalt not covet.. “

This man failed to Love God with all his heart, when asked to sell all he had and follow the Lord he showed he coveted his riches more than God!

It is easy to say you love God, but it was not so easy to sell all that this man had and follow the Lord.

II. *CONSIDER, IS THERE ONE PERSON THAT CAN SAY THEY HAVE LOVED GOD WITH ALL THEIR HEARTS?*

Rich Young man if he had come to Jesus and Jesus said you need to love God with all your heart to have eternal life, he might have said, I do, I do. The fact is he did not love God with all his heart, this became evident when the Lord asked him to do something and he was unwilling to do it. This was the evidence that he could not put God first in his life.

IT IS EASY TO SAY YOU LOVE GOD BUT WHAT YOU DO PROVES WHAT'S IN YOUR HEART!

How many say they love the Lord with all their hearts, but their actions show otherwise.

It is one thing to say we love. It is quite another to do it.

We say we love God, but our actions say something else.

I John 5:3 For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous.

1. *What is the proof that we love God with all our hearts?*

The proof is in our willingness to put Him first and please Him.

SO IN THIS NEW YEAR, WHEN YOU ARE MAKING OUT YOUR LIST OF RESOLUTIONS, RESOLVE TO PUT GOD FIRST ABOVE ALL OTHER THINGS.

So many people have all kind of excuses for not doing what God tells them to do, especially when it comes to our faithfulness to the local church and serving and worshipping the Lord as we should.

Charles Spurgeon said in his Sermon "The Great and First Commandment: 1858

"...But I hear one of these gentlemen reply, "Well, sir, I make no pretensions to religion, but still I believe I am quite as good as those that do; I am quite as upright, quite as moral and benevolent. True, I do not often darken the door of a church or chapel, I do not think it necessary, but I am a right good sort; there are many, many hypocrites in the church, and therefore I shall not think of being religious.

"Now, my dear friend, allow me just to say one word--what business is that of yours? Religion is a personal matter between you and your Maker. Your Maker says_"Thou shalt love me with all thine heart:" it is of no use for you to point your finger across the street, and point at a minister whose life is inconsistent, or at a deacon who is unholy, or to a member of the church who does not live up to his profession. You have just nothing to do with that. When your Maker speaks to you, he appeals to you personally; and if you should tell him, "My Lord, I will not love thee, because there are hypocrites," would not your own conscience convince you of the absurdity of your reasoning? Ought not your better judgment to whisper "Inasmuch, then, as so many are hypocrites, take heed that thou art not; and if there be so many pretenders who injure the

Lord's cause by their lying pretensions, so much the more reason why thou shouldst have the real thing and help to make the church sound and honest." But no, the merchants of our cities, the tradesmen of our streets, our artisans and our workmen, the great mass of them, live in total forgetfulness of God. I do not believe that the heart of England is infidel. I do not believe that there is any vast extent of deism or atheism throughout England: the great fault of our time is the fault of indifference; people do not care whether the thing is right or not. What is it to them? They never take the trouble to search between the different professors of religion to see where the truth lies; they do not think to pay their reverence to God with all their hearts. Oh, no; they forget what God demands, and so rob him of his due. To you, to you, great masses of the population, this law doth speak with iron tongue_ "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind...."

2. WE DO NOT PUT GOD FIRST JUST BY GIVING HIM LIP SERVICE.

If we say one thing and we do the opposite: We prove God is not first in our lives.

We say we love God but cannot put Him first above earthly pleasures.

We say we love God but when asked to make little sacrifices we refuse.

We say we love God but we fail to worship Him as we should.

We say we love God but we have no time for prayer.

We say we love God but we have no desire to read His Word.

We say we love God but we make no mention of Him to others no desire to witness, etc..

III. CONSIDER THE CONSEQUENCES OF THIS LAW AND THAT WE ARE ALL GUILTY OF VIOLATING IT.

If we cannot keep the first commandment what makes us think we can keep any of them!

We all fall short.

Peter and the Apostles could not even stay awake when the Lord asked them to. This a perfect illustration of our weakness.

Matthew 26:39 And he went a little farther, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt.

Matthew 26:40 And he cometh unto the disciples, and findeth them asleep, and saith unto Peter, What, could ye not watch with me one hour?

Matthew 26:41 Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.

Matthew 26:42 He went away again the second time, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done.

Matthew 26:43 And he came and found them asleep again: for their eyes were heavy.

Did not Peter deny our Lord 3 times? I wonder how many times we have done similar things against our Lord.

Truth is if obeying the first commandment was God's requirement for us to be saved none of us would make it. We are saved by Grace because He loved us.

I John 4:10 Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

I John 4:11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.

But now I speak to Christians who have received the love of God. Should we not abandon our idolatrous ways and put God first?

IV. APPLICATION:

The only way we can love God is by receiving His love for us.

He loved us and now we love Him.

As we receive the forgiveness of our sins through His work on the cross we can say that we love Him because of His love for us.

1. NOTE HE LOVED US BEFORE WE LOVED HIM.

Romans 5:8 But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

Now we who love God are that group of sinners who failed to love him.

We were like that rich man who went away sorrowful loving our possessions more than God.

To whom much was forgiven the same loveth much. Jesus said this in Luke 7:47 when he was criticized by the self righteous Pharisee for letting a woman anoint his feet with an alabaster box of ointment and wipe His feet with her hair. Jesus saves the greatest of sinners. And then we who were forgiven our sins should from the heart love Him back!

Our Lord said to the self righteous Pharisee:

Luke 7:47 Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little.

Those who think themselves as having lived a pretty good life and who don't need the payment of Christ on the cross, the same love little.

We love him because he first loved us.

I John 4:10 Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

I John 4:19 We love him, because he first loved us.

Those who think they have lived good lives and are in little need of forgiveness will find it hard to keep this first commandment.

Matthew 19:25 When his disciples heard it, they were exceedingly amazed, saying, Who then can be saved?

Matthew 19:26 But Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible.

2. As we receive the forgiveness of God for sins at the cross God does the impossible. He transforms our hearts to love Him as we should.

I John 4:19 We love him, because he first loved us.

Invitation:

Do you find yourself like the sleepy disciples, saying you love the Lord but unable to serve Him as you should? That was before Calvary. After Calvary, these same disciples were charged up with the love of Christ.

Why? Because they witnessed the Love of God in Christ. He loved us and gave Himself for us. When they received His payment for their sins they were transformed by the love of God.

WE LOVE HIM BECAUSE HE FIRST LOVED US!

If He has forgiven much in your life you should love Him much.

When we are humbled by the cross, suddenly we can love Him as we should. At the cross we awaken to the seriousness of our sins. We realize just what it took to save us, what it took to take away our sins. Our sins were severe enough to require Christ to suffer! Just ours alone! How can we not love Him?

So let me suggest, that you set a goal in this new year to obey the first commandment with a new heart. FOR THIS IS THE FIRST AND THE GREATEST OF ALL THE COMMANDMENTS. LET US PUT FIRST THINGS FIRST IN THIS NEW YEAR.

Mark 12:30 And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment.