

The First Commandment and the Bridal Paradigm

- I. The First Commandment - Matthew 22:34-40
 - A. The FIRST and GREATEST commandment
 - 1. FIRST in priority to God; nothing else matters if this is not in place
 - 2. GREATEST - has the greatest impact on God's heart, our heart, and the hearts of those with whom we come in contact; following this commandment makes us great in God's eyes
 - B. Four spheres of love
 - 1. Heart ó defines us and drives everything that we do; deals with our affections and decisions to honor God regardless of the cost
 - 2. Mind ó thoughts and meditations; the primary means for transforming our affections
 - 3. Soul ó personality; how we respond to God and others; what we talk about, how we act, etc.
 - 4. Strength ó energies, resources, & gifts
 - C. Jesus laid the foundation for us to be able to keep this commandment ó John 17:24-26
 - 1. Jesus prayed that we would love Him the way the Father loves Him!
 - 2. We will love Jesus the way the Father loves Jesus! the commandment is also a promise!
 - D. In order for us to keep the first and great commandment, we must rely wholeheartedly on the Holy Spirit's work within us and submit to His process for bringing us into wholehearted love
- II. Growing in Wholehearted Love ó Four Stages
 - A. The four stages by which we grow in love (a continuous cycle)
 - 1. Gaining revelation of His love for us
 - 2. We are empowered to love Him in return
 - 3. We are free to love ourselves (in a healthy way) in the grace of God
 - 4. We love others out of the overflow
 - B. Reversing God's process leads to legalism, discouragement, burn out, etc.
 - 1. Making an effort in our own strength to "love" and serve those around us.
 - 2. Leads to at least a temporary feeling of "love" for ourselves, but it is really nothing more than pride and arrogance
 - 3. We begin to believe we are the only ones who TRULY love God
 - 4. We reach the conclusion that because of all that we are doing, then God MUST love me!
 - C. Understanding the fullness of God's love for us is the foundation for everything in the Christian life - you cannot be effective as a disciple without growing in understanding of His love!
- III. The Bridal Paradigm
 - A. God desires to share His deepest secrets and emotions with each of us who care to listen (I Corinthians 2:9-12)
 - B. One of the deepest secrets of God's heart is that He is ravished with burning desire for those who would give their lives in devotion to Him! in fact, His word says that He desires to MARRY us!
 - C. Nowhere is God's commitment and desire to marry His Bride more evident than in the book of Hosea

- D. God wants so much more than to *just* forgive us ó He desires to marry us and have us share in ruling His Kingdom!
- E. Not only does He desire you, but you can fully trust Him with your heart!
 1. He is a compassionate Lover, who is tender with us in our weaknesses if we are sincere and repentant
 2. He is also a God with a happy heart - when you begin to understand and feel God's gladness over your life, you can run to Him instead of running away from Him
 3. He is a God with fiery affections and desire ó God desires you and will do whatever He can to win you fully to Himself

IV. Mary of Bethany

- A. Mary was a woman whose life was marked by complete devotion to and love for Jesus
- B. Sitting at Jesus's feet ó Luke 10:38-42
 1. In a world that values accomplishment, busyness, and "getting things done," Jesus's words are a strong warning that we must heed ó there are *important* things to accomplish, but the *essential* thing is knowing Jesus intimately
 2. When we choose to put aside the distractions, whether they are "sinful" or not, and instead focus our full attention on Jesus, He counts it as true worship
- C. Single-minded extravagance ó Mark 14:1-9
 1. Jesus wants each of us to experience this kind of intimacy with Him ó the freedom of wasting our lives without regard to the cost
 2. Jesus's heart is touched by those who choose to relate to Him in extravagance, and it opens the door to our experiencing Him in a way that others cannot
- D. Mary focused her life around being a friend to God