

The Most Important Commandment

by Zac Poonen

This sermon emphasizes the importance of humility and love in the Christian life, highlighting the value of personal testimonies over powerful messages, the significance of loving God above all else, and the need for revelation of God's love and forgiveness to deepen our relationship with Him. It challenges listeners to prioritize loving God with all their heart, soul, strength, and mind, and to seek humility like that of a child to receive true spiritual growth.

Scripture: 1 John 4:19, Luke 16:13, Luke 7:47, Matthew 11:25, Romans 7:13, Matthew 22:37, Luke 10:27, James 4:10, Matthew 18:4

Topics: "Humility", "Love for God"

Description

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Transcript

I was very blessed listening to all these testimonies. And I think for all of us, it's good for all of you to ask a question. And that is, would you rather listen to a message by some powerful anointed preacher or testimonies like these from different people? That is a test of your humility and it's good to answer that question honestly.

I can honestly say I rejoice to hear this. It's such a joy. It's like, you know, when I hear my grandchildren say something and when I see my three-year-old getting up in the church in Colorado and quoting his memory verse, that excites me far more than an older person quoting a memory verse.

And that's how it'll be for us if we love the body of Christ. And if we love ourselves, we will only be interested in listening to powerful messages. But we've heard, most of us have heard enough messages, umpteen messages, and we can get, there can be a lust to just hear more messages that don't build us up.

I remember hearing the statement from this saintly person that we may think that it is only by fellowship with really godly people that we grow spiritually, but God very often may bless us through weaker

members. I mentioned this once before, how he uses the weaker members and gives them greater honor. So I look forward to this testimony time.

I think there's an absolutely brilliant idea that the elders had to get everyone to say, why still Jesus? And of course, I so appreciate what Brother Arnoldo said, why still Arnoldo or why still me? Or why still you? Why hasn't he given up on us? That is why we don't give up on him. Because he's not given up on us. So when we think of the reason why, you know the greatest thing in the Christian life is loving the Lord, not serving him, but loving him.

First commandment is not, thou shalt serve the Lord by God. For many Christians, the great thing is to do something, some ministry. I want to have a ministry to the Lord, do here and there.

We appreciate those who've gone as missionaries to far countries. But I'll tell you, I don't think that is the greatest thing. I've met, you know, I've lived all my life in India.

And I've met numerous missionaries, American, Australian, Irish, Scottish, British, European. I've seen all kinds of missionaries. And to tell you honestly, I've respected perhaps 1% of them.

A lot of the other missionaries who came to India, I thought, why in the world did these guys cross the ocean and come here? I don't see any godliness in them. I see love of money in them, love of honor, and racism and all types of things. And so I've seen that, of course, in the eyes of others, and they go back to testify about how they've gone to a foreign country, and there's sacrifice and things like that.

But true spirituality is not in all this activity and going out to serve and all that. True spirituality is to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind. You can go as a missionary and love yourself.

I've seen missionaries who are always fighting with each other, wondering, even questioning like this, because I've been very closely with them in India. Why is he allowed to go back on a vacation to his home country and not me? I see all this. Have you come out here to serve the Lord? I'm really very disappointed.

Those are not the people who have stirred me the most. Some of the people who challenge me the most are not necessarily missionaries. I've been tremendously challenged by the sacrifices many missionaries have made.

But those who led me to a godly life are not all missionaries. Some people just live in their home country all their life, but who live godly. So please remember that the first commandment is thou shall love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, soul, strength, and mind.

And the second commandment is also not thou shall go out and serve him or sacrifice, but love one another as I have loved you. So if I'm not loving the Lord my God with all my heart, soul, strength, and mind, and if I'm not seeking to love all my fellow believers as Jesus loved me, then I'm not really growing. I'm not growing at all.

And whatever else I may grow in knowledge and information, if you can grow in the church, it's like going to the tree. You know that NCCF can become like a tree of knowledge of good and evil or like a tree of life. Both are here.

Both the trees are right in the middle of the church. And you choose when you listen to the word of God and when you come to the church, which of these trees you're going to. You can come here to get

knowledge.

Ah, that was a new interpretation. I got it that verse. Wow, that really blessed me.

And then you can think I can share that with somebody else. Or this other comparison, comparing this verse with this verse and connecting this verse with the other verse. That really blessed me.

That was new. Brother, sister, please consider seriously whether you're going to the tree of knowledge of good and evil. There's nothing wrong with the knowledge of good and evil, but it doesn't bring life.

The tree of life may come very often through listening to some testimonies like we heard today, where there's no profound explanation of some verse or anything like that. We as human beings, particularly those of us who are in the United States come from other countries are educated people. And education has got tremendous disadvantages because God has hidden his truths from the clever and the intelligent.

Please remember this. You're all clever, intelligent people. And CCF is full of clever, intelligent people.

And please remember what the Bible says. Very clearly, Jesus said in Matthew 11 and verse 25, Father, I thank you, Jesus said. I thank you.

There's something Jesus thanked the Father for that his truths were hidden from those who were clever and intelligent. You're clever and intelligent. And you come to the Bible to try and understand to their cleverness and intelligence.

I can guarantee you, you will never understand it. Not in a million years. Then what shall we do? I remember asking God this question years ago when I took that word seriously.

I said, Lord, unfortunately, I'm clever and intelligent. I didn't make myself like that. I was born like that.

It was in my genes. I got it from my parents. So that's a handicap.

What shall I do? Will I never understand your scriptures? And the Lord said, even clever and intelligent people can become like babies if they want to. What is the quality a baby has which clever, intelligent people don't have? Think of it. What is it, a baby, a newborn baby or a three-month-old baby, what does he have which clever and intelligent people just don't have? Humility.

Humility. Jesus said that. He said, babies are humble.

So Christian growth is growth in humility. And so I saw that it doesn't matter if you're clever or intelligent. Don't depend on it.

If you humble yourself like a babe, you'll get revelation, not understanding. There's a line, the word he used, that is revealed in Matthew 11, 25. He reveals them to babes.

Clever and intelligent people will understand scripture, will understand the new covenant. And I think you've heard so much about the new covenant in NCCF, and the church is named after the new covenant, that your clever and intelligent mind has understood it so well that you could preach it to others. And yet you may not be living the new covenant life.

That proves that it hasn't gripped your heart, it's in your mind. It takes a long time sometimes to go from the mind to the heart. The more we humble ourselves, it'll go from the mind to the heart.

And if it does not go from your mind to your heart, it's a proof that you're clever, but you're not humble. If you're still getting angry with your husband and wife, with your husband or your wife, well, what has all these years in NCCF done for you? You still lose your temper. Yeah, I'm not trying to condemn anyone.

There's no condemnation in Christ. But let's not have any high thoughts that we are in a good church and we're growing spiritually. You are, if you're getting revelation on the word.

A revelation, the difference between knowledge and revelation is, the Old Testament, the word revelation doesn't even come. There is no revelation in the Old Testament. They only studied their scribes who studied the word, studied the word.

And you remember a little bit of it. In the last verse of Matthew 13, or towards the end of Matthew 13, Jesus said, the scribe must become a disciple. The scribe must become a disciple.

The one who studies the scriptures must learn to follow the scriptures. That's very important. So that's the difference between knowledge and revelation.

The scribe will come around the tree of knowledge of good and evil, accumulating various knowledge and great truths. Must come to the tree of life now. Humble himself.

You know, there's a sword in front of the tree of life. That sword falls upon all of our pride and intelligence and wisdom and puts it all to death and say, you can't come here with that. So the way I thought of it is like, I must think that the Bible is written in some language which I've never learned.

Supposing you have never learned Mongolian, let's say. You're given a Mongolian Bible. Or what's even more difficult with all these, they may be in English letters, but a Japanese Bible.

And I can't figure out anything in it. I can't figure out anything in it. That's how I must come to the Bible.

Lord, this is another language I can't understand. I humble myself, I understand. So that's the way we must all come to the scriptures.

And our humility is tested in situations like this, especially when God allows us to have some time with the poorer members of Christ's body. One of my greatest blessings has been that for 45 years, I've moved among the villagers in India. I will not exchange that for anything.

Poor people who live in one room houses, the whole family who can't explain anything intellectually or not, many of them haven't even gone beyond fourth grade in school. But they've blessed my heart. Is our fellowship with them, valued them, respected them.

I praise God for everyone who's learned to love the Lord. Why is it that these folks love the Lord? I can learn from them. As I look at scripture, how shall I love the Lord if I've done, Lord my God, with all my heart and all my strength and all my mind? Two things I would say, and I've mentioned this before as well.

Why do I love the Lord? 1 John chapter four, verse 19. We love him because he first loved us. And the more I meditate on God's love for me, if I really meditate on the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, love for him will be spontaneous.

It's like the story I heard of a little child telling his mother. That little boy told his mother, mom, I love every part of you. You've got such a beautiful face and everything about you.

You're loving your kid, but your hands are so ugly. Your hands are all black and scarred. I don't like it.

And the mother said, I want to tell you something, my son. When you were a little boy and you were in the kitchen, accidentally the stove overturned, I was not there, and you caught fire. And I came rushing in and used my hands to put out that fire to save your life.

And that boy with tears in his eyes said, mom, I now love your hands more than any part of your body. We love him because he first loved us. And I would say for myself anyway, by the grace of God, one of the first things that the Lord led me to when I was converted 62 years ago was to meditate on the love of Jesus for me, especially on the cross.

And initially I understood his love for me only in the suffering he went on the cross and he died for me, et cetera. But as I meditated more and more on that, I discovered, as I've often spoken here, that he suffered hell for me on the cross. And he drank the cup so that I would never go to hell.

And that moved me more than I realized when he said in Gethsemane, let this cup pass from me. I asked God for revelation on that. That's when the Lord showed me many years ago that that cup was being forsaken by the father, experiencing hell for three hours on the cross.

And as I said, I felt the father say to him, you don't have to go there. But if you don't go to that, then Zach will go to hell. I made it personal.

And that's the day I really wept and said, Lord, I realize now how much you love me. And I realized his love in Gethsemane. I'd already seen it in Calvary.

We love him because he first loved us. I ask you, my dear brothers and sisters, now you've heard it, it's good. Ask God to give you personal revelations on his love for you.

That's what changed. Not just reading a verse. You can read about the love of God from the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

God so loved the world that he gave his son. Or wonderful verses about God's love. But it can't be really knowledge.

I'll tell you one of the things that'll happen if you really love God. Have you ever read Luke 16, 13? If you're honest, it's a very powerful verse. Most believers are utterly dishonest when they come to this verse.

So don't be so quick to say you're honest when you face up to this verse. If you love God, you will not love money. Luke 16, 13.

And don't be too quick to say that you don't love money. Most immigrants come to the United States because they love money. They want more money.

There's nothing wrong in wanting to earn more money. You can be a millionaire and not love money. Or you can be a beggar and love money.

There are a lot of beggars in India. Every one of them loves money. I've never seen a beggar who doesn't love money.

But I've seen some wealthy people who don't love money. So it's not a question of how much you have. All I ask you is go before God if you're serious about your Christian life.

Read Luke 16, 13 and say, Lord, show me my heart. I've done it. I said, Lord, I want to love you with all my heart.

That's the first commandment. I haven't even kept the first commandment. If I don't love God with all my heart.

I don't want to say more on that. It'll be knowledge. Go to the tree of life.

God himself will speak to you. The second reason why we love the Lord is Luke chapter seven. Luke seven and verse 47.

It's the woman, the sinful woman known as a sinner. Imagine being known publicly. Here is a sinful woman, the well-known sinner in the city.

Came to Jesus' feet and despised by the Pharisees, wiped his feet. And Jesus said, she loved much because she was forgiven much. So that's the second way by which our love for Christ increases.

How can I love the Lord, my God, with all my heart, soul and strength? Obey the first commandment. How can I come to the tree of life and get a love for the Lord, which is more than everything else in my life? First of all, by knowing how much he loved me, asking God to give me a revelation of his love. And secondly, by asking God to give me a revelation of how much he has forgiven me.

I want to tell you in Jesus' name, there's not a single one of you whom Jesus has forgiven little. You may think he has forgiven little. You may think because you have not committed murder or adultery or some of the terrible things other people have done, you've been forgiven little.

If so, it is because you have not seen the seriousness of sin. And you've not seen the seriousness of sin committed after you're born again. I see it like this.

Every sin, if I tell a lie after I'm born again, that is equal to 100,000 lies that an unbeliever tells. If I lust after a woman, after I'm born again, it's like an unbeliever lusting after 100,000 women. If I lust after a woman, it's like an unbeliever committing physical adultery with a woman.

I've got to see sin has to become exceedingly sinful as agreed in Romans, a great expression. Sin becomes exceedingly sinful. Then you know that you've been forgiven much.

I ask you to pray to God to give you a revelation, not the definition of sin from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, but the seriousness of sin coming to the tree of life. Lord, open my eyes to see the seriousness of the sins I've committed after I'm born again and open my eyes to see it. And then you will come like the woman.

You will not be like Simon the Pharisee, despising that other sinner. You'll come like the woman yourself and pour everything at Jesus' feet and say, Lord, I love you because you've forgiven me much. I believe this is what helps us to love the Lord more.

The greatest thing in the Christian life is not serving him. Let me repeat again. The greatest thing in the Christian life is to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind, to love nothing else

more than him, to love him more than you love your father or your mother or your wife or your children or your brothers or sisters.

And don't say quickly that I do it. No, examine yourself. You really, is the Lord first more than your job, more than your profession, more than your ambitions? A lot of people have ambitions which displace the love of God.

Can you say, Lord, I'm willing to give up all my ambitions because I love you? I had to make that choice when I was in the Navy. I had ambitions. I'm not saying you've got to give up your job or give up your wealth or give up anything, but it's good to examine ourselves.

If there's anything on earth that we love more than Jesus Christ. I'll tell you this, if you take this seriously, you'll have great joy in eternity when you meet the Lord face-to-face. You'll be able to complete your course with joy.

May the Lord help all of us. Amen.

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