

**“The First Aim”**  
**Deuteronomy 5:10; 6:4-5; 7:9; 11:1; 30:6-8,16**

## **INTRODUCTION**

Many years ago, I met a young man I’ve not forgotten. He was a bright, charming, and confident person who told me during the course of our conversation what his life’s goal was. It was to be a millionaire by the age of 35, which he was already in the process of pursuing.

Let me ask you a question that I’ve already asked myself. What is your life’s goal? I mean by that, what is your first aim in life? If you answered truthfully, what would it be?

I don’t what it *would be* but I do know what it *should be* - loving God. Loving God should be the first aim of our lives and that’s what I’m going to preach about today. The verses that I read in Deuteronomy, 5:10; 6:5; 7:9; 11:1; 30:6-8; and 30:16, teach us just that.

## **THE ORDER OF SPIRITUALITY**

Notice something about these verses. They’re in the Old Testament.

I point out the obvious because of a misconception that many Christians have. The New Testament is primarily about love. The Old Testament is primarily about law. The Old Testament, therefore, is sub-Christian. Many sincere Christians believe that. But they’re wrong. The verses that I read make it clear. The Old Testament isn’t sub-Christian. Just like the New is, it’s primarily about love not law.

Moses wrote Deuteronomy just before the Israelites entered the Promised Land. In it, God gave them the law, which consisted of commandments, that would govern their national and individual lives. He then, in the verses I read, told them to keep it. Keep the law.

But that isn’t all He told them to do or even what He told them to do first. In each of the verses I read, except 6:5, He told them that something else came before keeping. That something else was loving. In 11:1, for instance, He said, “*You shall therefore love the LORD your God and always keep His commandments.*” I talked about sequences three weeks ago. Notice the sequence in this verse and all the

others except 6:5. That sequence is *“love”* then *“keep.”*

I call that the Bible’s order of spirituality. It’s also found in these verses: Exodus 20:6; Joshua 22:5; Nehemiah 1:5; and Daniel 9:4; John 14:15; 14:23; and 1 John 2:5. You can see that the order of spirituality in both the Old and New Testaments is the same – love and keep. Love God and keep His commandments.

## **THE FIRST AIM**

Now, that order of spirituality teaches us several things. One of those things is what our first aim should be. By “first aim,” I mean the one thing that we should seek before anything else. Our first aim, defined that way, should be to love God with our whole being

I say “with our whole being” because of Deuteronomy 6:5. In that verse, God commands us to love Him with all of our heart, soul, and might, that is, with our whole being.

In Matthew 22:37, Jesus called that *“The great and foremost commandment.”* He reaffirmed in doing so what the order of spirituality had already revealed. That loving God with our whole being should be our first aim, the chief objective of our lives.

There are several reasons why it should be, one of which is this. Let me ask you a question. What is the deepest need of human life? Take any person from the richest to the poorest, from the smartest to the dullest, from the strongest to the weakest, and so on. What is the deepest need in his or her life? The answer is going to surprise most of you. It’s loving God. Loving God is the deepest need of human life.

Deuteronomy 6:4-5 reveals why it is. Moses writes in verse 4, *“Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one!”* Inherent in that great declaration is the dominance of God. He is both the author and governor of the universe and life in it. Well, after declaring that in verse 4, Moses then calls us to love Him in verse 5.

It’s plain to see that verses 4 and 5 are linked. Verse 4 reveals a fact. Verse 5 then reveals the response to which that fact should lead.

Those two verses, in other words, are about living consistently with reality. God is the dominant reality of the universe. Because He is, we act *for* reality by loving Him with our whole being. Conversely, we act *against* reality by not loving Him with our whole being.

That is a powerful point. Do you realize what it means? It means that nothing will go right in our person and life if we *don't* love God. But everything will go right in our person and life if we *do* love Him. Those are dramatic statements I admit but they're true. Things can go right in our person and life only if we love God, which is why I said what I said. Loving God is the deepest need of human life.

Take marriage, as an example of what I mean. I'll tell you what I tell couples in pre-marital counseling. The best thing a husband can do for his wife is to love God. His love for her won't be right if He doesn't love Him. It will be right if He does.

I speak from experience. My wife loves putting jigsaw puzzles together. And for years, she has asked me to join her in doing that, saying that it would be even more fun for her if I did. But I didn't like putting jigsaw puzzles together. So, I didn't. But now, I do. Why is that? The real answer is *"because I love God."*

I've discovered a remarkable thing. The more I love God, the more I love my wife - the more I yield my preferences to hers. There's actually a causal connection between the love I have for Him and the love I have for her. Can people not love God but love their spouses? Yes! Can they not love God but love their spouses rightly? No! There's a certain quality to loving our spouse that those who don't love God can't attain.

It's that way in every aspect of our person and life. Loving God has what I call "tentacles of impact." It reaches into every aspect of our person and life and sets things right. Who are the best employees or customers? Who don't worry? Who receive criticism with joy? The answer to those diverse questions is, *"he or she who loves God."* Loving God eventually sets things right in our lives. The very order of spirituality itself, loving and then keeping, confirms that.

And that's why I said what I said. We should make loving God with our whole being the first aim of our lives. Good sense dictates that we do that. It's the very best thing we can do for God, others and us.

## HOW TO LOVE GOD

But can we actually achieve that aim? Can we in reality love God with our whole being? That's the question and it's a valid one.

A mother of two young children once asked me a question that was disturbing her. Does God really expect me to love Him more than I do my children? *"I gave birth to them,"* she said, *"and am with them every day. I can see, hear, and touch them. But I can't do that with God. So, how can I possibly love Him as much let alone more than I do them?"* I felt like telling her, *"Give it some time. They'll be teenagers soon and it won't be so hard."* No, I'm just joking. Teenagers are great.

Anyway, her question was a legitimate one. Can we actually love God, whom we can't see, *as much as*, let alone *more than*, human beings, whom we can see? The answer is *"Yes, we can."* That answer of course leads us to another question. How? How can we?

In that regard, many Christians think that loving God is an event. I know I did for many years and here's why. My pastors and teachers told us to love God – and then dropped it at that. They gave no further instructions about it. I inferred therefore, and logically so, that loving Him is an event. I go forward to the altar, kneel down, and decide to love God. The Holy Spirit then honors that decision by zapping me. After He does, I rise from the altar and go into the routines of my life loving God. That's what I thought but it didn't work. I still didn't love Him with my whole being and so went back to the altar over and over again.

I realize now what the problem was. Loving God is a process not an event. We must grasp that. It is a process not an event. It does involve *making* the decision to love Him. But it also involves *carrying out* that decision over time by doing two things.

Our first memory verse, Jeremiah 9:23-24a, reveals what those two things are. They're understanding and knowing God - in that order. We are able to understand Him and choose to. That in turn enables us to know Him and we choose to. Knowing Him then leads to loving Him. The Holy Spirit is actively involved in this process. He responds to our understanding and knowing by producing in us the love that we seek.

That's the process and I'm going to explain it to you in its right order. Today, I'll explain what we have to do to understand God. Then next week, I'll explain what we have to do to know Him.

## **UNDERSTANDING GOD**

Today, it's understanding. We understand God by doing a simple thing. We build a purposeful, objective, and thorough vision of Him.

Thomas Aquinas wrote a classic work titled Summa Theologica. In it, he shares one of the most penetrating insights about love that you will ever hear. He wrote, "*Love is born of an earnest consideration of the object loved.*" He also wrote, "*Love follows knowledge.*" Those two statements reveal what love is. It is an emotional response aroused in our will by our vision of the beloved. It's our vision of our beloved, in other words, that creates our love for him or her. That is so true isn't.

Some years back, I counseled a mother who was upset about her daughter's choice of fiancée's. "Upset" is putting it mildly. She couldn't stand him and told me why: "*I don't know what my daughter sees in him. He's lazy, irresponsible, and doesn't care about anybody but himself.*" The very next week, her daughter came in upset about her mother being upset. She just couldn't figure out what her mother's problem was. After all, she tearfully said, "*He's such a wonderful guy - so thoughtful, carefree, and kind.*"

You wouldn't know they were talking about the same person would you? The source of their conflict was the vision of this young man that each of them had. The mother perceived him one way and her daughter just the opposite way. The mother's vision caused her to despise him.

The daughter's caused her to love him.

The moral of the story is that Aquinas was right. Love always has a vision of the beloved. It is that very vision in fact that creates the love.

That's the way it is not just with human beings but with God as well. To love Him, we must have a vision of Him that enables us to. So build such a vision, which in His case is the realistic or correct one.

Going back to the mother and daughter, the daughter's vision of the young man was incorrect. He wasn't the lovely person that she perceived him to be, which is why she divorced him 2 years after she married him.

But that isn't the way it is with God. He is the only utterly lovely and utterly competent being in the entire universe. His qualities are ravishing. And because they are, building a correct vision of Him, perceiving Him as He really is, elicits love.

So build a correct vision of Him. That is not a difficult thing to do because He has purposely revealed Himself to us. He has disclosed what His qualities are to us in Scripture, creation, and human beings. So, study those three things and you'll learn what His qualities are.

I've done that. I've spent years studying and learning what God is like. Then based on that, I've built a purposeful, objective, and thorough vision of Him. That vision of Him is what I'm teaching on Wednesday nights. Come and learn what is taught. You'll be well on your way to a correct vision of Him if you do, one that elicits love.

## **CONCLUSION**

I close today the way I began – with the young man whose life's goal was to be a millionaire by the age of 35. I asked him that day why it was and he told me. *"I have to admit it,"* he answered. *"I love money."* What he loved the most was money and he knew it.

But what about us? What is it that we love the most? All I can say is, if it isn't God, it should be because that's the deepest need of our life. So let's make loving God our first aim. And let's make it that right now.