

## The Great and First Commandment

Not too many years ago, the church stood in the community as a symbol of safety and order. It was a respected institution. Today, the picture has changed. Modern man is not impressed anymore by what once was. He asks "What does this or that benefit me?". In this modern pragmatic situation, the church needs to strengthen its spiritual resources. It must show a strong vitality derived from spiritual strength and maturity.

The problems we face today ought to stimulate the church into deepening its faith. It is sad that often Christians do not get any further in their faith than "Come to the Saviour, do not delay," and do not show the content and the consequences of the Christian gospel.

It is lamentable when a grown man can use only the prayers he has learned in his childhood. We cannot stop at the A B C's of the gospel. We need the whole alphabet. To know that we have become Christians through the grace of God is the basic joy that refreshes and encourages us when we are disheartened. However, there is more to the gospel than knowing that we are saved.

What is spiritual maturity? This is to let Jesus Christ reign through His Word and His Spirit in our life, and to let Him be our King in each life situation. Spiritual maturity has its roots, its motivation, its goal and its own content in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the ever living God, who took humanity upon Himself in order to make us real persons. We do become mature spiritually if our first love is God and then our neighbour. Only in Jesus Christ can we come to grip with the vital issues of life. Christ came to save men from their guilt, hopelessness and He restores men into persons who have faith, hope and love. Only in faith, hope and love can a restored person really live. Thus the gospel always demands a response.

Today, we hear often that when we love our neighbour we don't have to bother too much about God. The only place where we can see God is in our neighbour in need. Through loving our neighbour we love God. The Lord has never said "Love your neighbour first and foremost because loving God is not so important, or, when you love your neighbour you automatically love God." This is just not so. We cannot mix together the love for our neighbour and the love for God. If we would do this then God is not God anymore. His rights are then being trampled upon and man is not man anymore.

According to the standards of the Bible, the man who does not love God - does not love in God and through God his neighbour.

Therefore, real spiritual maturity is only through the relationship God-man. We are on the way to spiritual maturity when we fully realize the commandment "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind."

This is the great and first commandment. And a second like unto it is this. "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments the whole law hangeth and the prophets."

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