

Five Things Ministers Need to Know

by Bob Young

The apostles, disciples, teachers and preachers who followed Jesus Christ were the nucleus Jesus used to build His church—a church that, with courage and confidence, faced all the enemies that rose up against her. The early followers had just spent three years with the master teacher as he showed them and taught them what they should know and do as leaders of a new movement—a "reformation movement" among God's people. What did Jesus emphasize? When asked about the greatest commandment, Jesus mentioned two commandments as primary: love God and love your neighbor. The basics of Christianity are encompassed in these two ideas. Various lists have been developed to explain the meaning and application of these two commandments. In this article I suggest five things that summarize the basics of loving God and loving others. These are things that preachers (and all Christians) need to know: how to love God, talk to God, love others, serve others, and keep oneself pure.

1. HOW TO LOVE GOD.

Put God first in all of life, in everything you do. The minister must love God supremely. Jesus identifies this as the greatest of all the commandments. All that the Ten Commandments teach is encapsulated in this brief statement of Jesus: "And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart . . ." (Mark 12:28-31; Matthew 22:37-40). Note that Jesus was speaking to the religious leaders of His day. His words resound to all his followers today, but especially to those who would serve as leaders. Leaders must know how to make loving God the first priority. This means putting selfish desires and ambitions in second place.

2. HOW TO TALK TO GOD.

Effective prayer is essential to a successful ministry. Prayer enables us to tap into the power and presence of God. One of the things the disciples asked Jesus was, "Lord, teach us to pray." Jesus responded, "When you pray, say, 'Our Father, who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, as in heaven, so in earth . . .'" (Luke 11:1-4 and Matthew 6:9-13).

Preachers and Christians who do not know how to communicate with God remain spiritually weak. Most preachers are responsible for their own spiritual "battery charging". Without the ability to listen to God and talk to God in meaningful ways, spiritual growth is stunted, and eventually the preacher will find that he has little to say that is helpful to the church.

3. HOW TO LOVE OTHERS.

The second great commandment is like the first, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself . . ." That demands that the modern preacher and Christians become involved with making life better for others. That commandment is the basis for what we know as charity and missions. It is feeding, clothing, sheltering and doing for others what we want others to do for us. It is loving and caring for others. Loving others is one way we communicate the love of God.

4. HOW TO SERVE OTHERS.

Jesus came as a servant. He did not come to be served. Accountability to God and one another is important to all Christians, but especially in the life of a minister. No one rises so high in rank, popularity, office or influence that he ceases to be a servant accountable to God, to other Christians, and to the society in which he lives and serves. Those who are great must first be the servant of all.

5. HOW TO KEEP ONE'S SELF PURE.

Sexual temptation and impurity have led to the downfall of thousands of ministers. Jesus instructs those who follow Him to be sexually pure. He says that adultery can be committed without physical contact, by looking on a man or woman lustfully and desiring them for sexual gratification (Matthew 5:27-32). Sexual intercourse outside of a loving and accountable marriage relationship is adultery. It is reserved for a married couple, one man and one woman. Sleep in your own bed with your own spouse. To do otherwise is death to ministry.

These five things are essential for successful Christian living and successful ministry. To disregard them spells failure.