

## THE FIRST AND GREAT COMMANDMENT

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### INTRODUCTION:

1. The term generally used in the classical sources for the whole body of Jewish teaching is Torah (meaning instruction). Thus the Talmud (Shab. 31a) tells the story of a heathen who wished to be converted to the Jewish faith, but only on the understanding that he would be taught the whole of Torah while standing on one leg. (Rabbi) Hillel accepted him, and in response to his request replied: “That which is hateful unto thee do not unto thy neighbor. This is the whole of Torah. The rest is commentary. Go and learn” (Israeli Pocket Library, “Jewish Values,” p. 3).
2. Jesus was tested by a Pharisee on one such occasion much as Hillel (above) had been: “But when the Pharisees had heard that he had put the Sadducees to silence, they were gathered together. Then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked him a question, tempting him, and saying, Master, which is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets” (Matt. 22:34-40).
3. All the law and the prophets “hang” on the first great commandment and its complement. Therefore, it is important to understand the two charges.

### DISCUSSION:

- I. Ethics Supersedes Ritualism (Matt. 15:1-20; 19:18-22).
  - A. Pharisaical annoyance is seen in the approach of the lawyer (Matt. 22:34).
  - B. Jesus’ power to silence (phimos, to muzzle) the scribes had annoyed the Pharisees (Matt. 22:34).
  - C. One of the Pharisees, a lawyer, who had witnessed the muzzling of the scribes, by acting in concert with the other Pharisees hoped to do better against Jesus (Matt. 22:35).
  - D. The Pharisee asked Jesus the age-old-legal question quite common in the Rabbinical schools: “. . .which is the great commandment in the law” (Matt. 22:36).

1. The Rabbis viewed the above question as not about the quality of greatness but about legal greatness.
2. The Rabbis debated often about little laws and great ones (Expositor's Greek Testament, p. 277).

## II. The Only Attitude that Gives Value to Obedience

A. Jesus replies by citing Deuteronomy 6:5 which follows the shema (Deut. 6:4) or Jewish confession of faith in the One God (Matt. 22:37).

1. Supreme, devoted love to God is required for all obedience.
2. The clauses referring to heart, soul, and mind (Luke adds strength, 10:27) are to be understood cumulatively. That is, love to the uttermost degree means all that within us is.

B. A second commandment is added by Jesus taken from Leviticus 19:18, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" (Matt. 22:39).

1. The Textus Receptus (source of the King James Version) indicates that the second is "like into" the first.
2. The Westcott-Hort Text (source of the American Standard Version of 1901) indicates that the second is also a "first" or "great" commandment; that is, it is the first one in another form.
3. Love to God must include love to one's fellow man: "If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also" ( John 4:20-21).

## III. The "Self" Involved in Loving God

A. The Scribes taught that there were 248 positive precepts in the law of Moses (as many as there were "members" of the human body) and that there were 365 negative precepts (one for each day of the year) or a total of 613 additions to the law of Moses (Robertson, Word Studies, "Matthew," p. 177).

B. Jesus cuts through the Pharisees' ritualistic hair-splitting and gets to the "heart" of the matter.

1. God is to be loved with all of man's heart.
  - a. Here a distinction is made between heart and mind.
  - b. Sometimes the "heart" is a synonym for mind (Prov. 3:5; 4:23; 23:6). In this sense, the word means the seat of desires, feelings, affections, passions, and impulses.
  - c. Here Jesus uses kardia (heart) to mean that the sphere of God's influence in one's life permeates the whole person (c.f. 2 Cor. 4:6).
  
2. God is to be loved with all of man's soul. That is, all of man's psuche (soul) or entire affection (as in Mark 12:30; Luke 10:27; Deut. 26:16 LXX) is involved with God (c.f. Col. 3:1-3).
  - a. In the Bible psuche can mean just the immaterial part of man, that is man's life-force (1 Thess. 5:23).
  - b. The Bible also uses psuche to refer to life itself in a figure called metonymy (Matt. 6:25; 20:28; Mark 3:4; et al).
  - c. But, in the verse here under consideration, Jesus uses the term to refer to the very center of man's desires. (Therefore, the idea is no different from loving God with all of one's heart or mind; the last mentioned attribute.)
  
3. God is to be loved with all one's mind.
  - a. Jesus used the term, dianoia here which is a compound of dia (denoting separation) and noeo meaning to "think over."
  - b. The word, dianoia, as used in Matthew 22:37 is a metonymy for one's intellect or thoughts.
  - c. Again, as with the "heart" and the "soul," one's mode of thinking, his affection or disposition of mind, must be toward God.
    - (1) One's opinions, judgments, and purposes are to be God-centered (I Cor. 1:10).
    - (2) What meaning does the term God attach to my thoughts is the all important question.

IV. Practical Application

A. Are all of my affections first attached to God (Matt. 6:33)?

1. What about my physical family (Matt. 10:37)?

2. What about riches, career, and life itself (Matt. 10:39)?

B. Does my soul belong to God (Matt. 16:24-26; 10:36) or, like Demas, do I love this life more than the next one?

1. Would I die for the faith?

2. Would I give my life to protect the Church?

C. Have I given every effort to know God and His Word? Is my mind turned toward the spiritual?

1. See 2 Timothy 2:15.

2. It is a sad, but proven, fact that 70% of members of the church cannot give the plan of salvation if they have to recite a Bible verse for each step!

CONCLUSION:

1. The first and great commandment is wholly to love God (1 John 5:3).

2. A second “great” commandment naturally follows. A Christian will give his life for his neighbor (John 15:13).