

# The First and Great Commandment

- Commandments from Jesus are for those who know Him, by faith
  - That's why our first lesson in "The Basics of Christianity" was called "Repent and Believe the Gospel"
  - We must know Him as Savior, be empowered by the Holy Spirit, and be equipped to do all of His commands, in particular this "first and great commandment"
  - It is the subject of our time together today
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- In Matthew 22, a lawyer asked Jesus a question, tempting him, and saying, "Master, which is the great commandment in the law?"
  - Jesus' answer will be the foundation of our study
  - It establishes two principles for all believers
  - Every right thought and action of a believer will flow from these principles
  - First, we are to love God with all we are
  - Second, we are to love our neighbor as ourselves
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- A person will have a lot to learn after coming to know Christ
  - They will have to learn the details of how Jesus wants us to think and act
  - But this is a vital place to start
  - If we are doing these two things, all of the specifics will follow and will be easy for us
  - But these two things are not easy - not without the power of God
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- Let's begin with our text...

Matthew 22:37-40

37 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.

38 This is the first and great commandment.

39 And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

40 On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

- It seems obvious that a person granted salvation by Christ would love Him
- The fact that He loved us while we were still sinners
- The fact that He took our place on the cross while we remained His enemies
- The fact that He provides grace and mercy
- And that He grants us a place in His forever family should solidify this love
- But, the very fact that this command is given, seems to remind us how often we fail in our

love

- Perhaps we are forgetful, perhaps we learn to love other things in His place
- Or perhaps we take Him and His blessings for granted?
- Whatever the case, He commands here that we love Him with everything we are
- Everything that makes us human must be devoted to loving Him
  
- What is Jesus talking about?
- Well, first He commands to love with the heart - and the entirety of it
- This is "the centre of all physical and spiritual life"
- It could refer to the soul or mind, though those are mentioned later in the verse
- With that being said "it is the fountain and seat of the thoughts, passions, desires, appetites, affections, purposes, endeavors"
- And "of the understanding, the faculty and seat of the intelligence" "of the will and character"
- So, we must love God from the very core of us
- In our affections, by our will, in our thoughts, as our purpose in life
  
- But not only with all of our hearts, but with all of our souls
- Elsewhere the soul is translated "life"
- Its most common definition is "breath of life" or "the vital force which animates the body and shows itself in breathing"
- Here it is most likely to be "regarded as a moral being designed for everlasting life"
- And "an essence which differs from the body and is not dissolved by death"
- It is the immaterial part of us that goes on beyond physical life
- The soul is the deepest part of us, because it remains
- It can also be called "the seat of the feelings, desires, affections, aversions"
- You may have already made the observation on Bible dictionary makes "According to the Bible, the heart is the centre not only of spiritual activity, but of all the operations of human life. 'Heart' and 'soul' are often used interchangeably"
  
- What about our minds?
- It can be understood as "a faculty of understanding, feeling, desiring"
- The same word is often translated "understanding"
- This is where intelligence resides and where thinking happens
- It is where we come to understanding
- It is where we accept the facts of who Jesus is and come to grips with what that means
  
- It is not the physical body that makes us a person, but our heart, soul, and mind
- And so Jesus says we must love God with everything

- But what about love itself?
- What are we talking about?
- This word "expresses the purest, noblest form of love, which is volitionally driven, not motivated by superficial appearance, emotional attraction, or sentimental relationship"
- It is a love with understanding built in
- And a love that "can be known only from the actions it prompts"
- Meaning, it is seen and known when we act
- This is a love that is "making much of a person"
- We choose to make much of them because we know their value
- Therefore it is the kind of love that has to come from somewhere deep
- From the heart and soul and mind
  
- Let's read our text again...

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- Why then, is this second command like unto the first?
- Loving God the way this passage describes is logical and understandable, but our neighbor?
- Love for him can be more difficult to understand
  
- First we may ask, who is our neighbor?
- One commentary says "Our 'neighbour' is every one with whom we are concerned, i.e. virtually all men."
- And why then, should all men be loved?
- The commentary goes on "He is to be loved because he is God's image and likeness, heir of the same hope as we ourselves, and presented to us as the object on and by which we are to show the reality of our love to God."
- It is difficult, even impossible, to show, display, exhibit our love for God without giving it to others
- We know that He loved the world, so He gave himself
- We ought also to love and to give ourselves
  
- If we can see, then, how the first and great commandment is like unto the second, can we

also see how "all the law and the prophets" hang on these two commands?

- To love the Lord with everything and to love others like we are loved by Him?

- He means that "all the revelations which God has made to man in every age"

- That is "all the moral and religious, ceremonial and judicial precepts contained in the Law, all the utterances of the prophets, all the voices of history"

- Can be traced back, essentially, to these two mandates

- They can be understood through the lens of loving God and loving others

- And can be performed or executed only if we love God and love others

- So, what do we know for the purposes of our study on the basics of Christianity?

- First, that we must come to Christ alone by faith, turning from sin

- Second, that everything we learn to do - to be obedient to Christ - must be done on the basis of loving God with everything and loving our neighbor

- We must then ask ourselves how these things play out in the real (and sometimes very difficult) lives of Christians

- In the midst of opposition and persecution, will these basics be of use?

- The book of Acts seems like an obvious one to reference for finding out

- Let's begin in Acts 5...

12 And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people; (and they were all with one accord in Solomon's porch.

13 And of the rest durst no man join himself to them: but the people magnified them.

14 And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women.)

15 Insomuch that they brought forth the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches, that at the least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them.

16 There came also a multitude out of the cities round about unto Jerusalem, bringing sick folks, and them which were vexed with unclean spirits: and they were healed every one.

- There is an obvious love for God and love for others that is shown by the Apostles here

- But I want to get to the point in the story where their love for God and others is challenged

- On to verse 17...

17 Then the high priest rose up, and all they that were with him, (which is the sect of the Sadducees,) and were filled with indignation,

18 And laid their hands on the apostles, and put them in the common prison.

- Because they know Christ, love God, and have been showing love to people, they have come up against opposition

- Anger has been stirred in the enemies of Christ and they have been taken by force to the common prison
- I wonder, at this point, if their love for God and people will persist?
- Let's go on...

19 But the angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors, and brought them forth, and said,

20 Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life.

21 And when they heard that, they entered into the temple early in the morning, and taught. But the high priest came, and they that were with him, and called the council together, and all the senate of the children of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought.

22 But when the officers came, and found them not in the prison, they returned and told,

23 Saying, The prison truly found we shut with all safety, and the keepers standing without before the doors: but when we had opened, we found no man within.

24 Now when the high priest and the captain of the temple and the chief priests heard these things, they doubted of them whereunto this would grow.

25 Then came one and told them, saying, Behold, the men whom ye put in prison are standing in the temple, and teaching the people.

- Their love for God was deep - mind, will, and emotions engaged
- And that love brought forth obedience, as they obeyed the Savior's commission, which had been given not many days earlier
- Loving their neighbors, they taught
- And their teaching would not cease...

26 Then went the captain with the officers, and brought them without violence: for they feared the people, lest they should have been stoned.

27 And when they had brought them, they set them before the council: and the high priest asked them,

28 Saying, Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name? and, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us.

29 Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men.

30 The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree.

31 Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.

32 And we are his witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him.

33 When they heard that, they were cut to the heart, and took counsel to slay them.

- Their ministry, even to the counsel and the high priest, was motivated by a love for God and neighbor
- And their mandate to obey God rather than men was evidence that love for God was greater than fear for their own safety
- That care for others was greater than care for self
- But the right motivation and the right action did not mean smooth sailing, as we see a few verses later...

40 And to him they agreed: and when they had called the apostles, and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.

41 And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name.

42 And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ.

- Imprisonment and beating could not overcome their love for God and people
- Empowered by the Holy Spirit, with faith in Christ alone, they carried out their ministry
- They did not lose focus
- And the very basics of their faith determined their direction
- It cost them - but the Savior was glorified

Christopher Harper, October 2021