

## THE GREATEST COMMAND OF ALL (Part 1)

W-S-A-W television out of Wausau has a segment during the evening news entitled “Hello My Name Is \_\_\_” where they interview high-school student-athletes from around the viewing area and ask them a series of questions in order to get to know them better. They are asked things like what their favorite sport is, who is their favorite athlete, and what is their favorite food. A question that I always find interesting is this: “If you were able to go back in time and have dinner with anyone in history, who would it be?”

What if that question were posed to you or I? Who would we pick? Suppose you decided to have dinner with **Jesus**. What would you talk to Him about? What would you ask Him? My guess is that you would **not** be like the apostle John and ask Jesus if you could sit right next to Him in His kingdom like we noted last week! Maybe you’d ask for His advice on a current problem you were facing. Or maybe you’d ask Him a question about your future. Imagine how embarrassed you’d be if you asked Jesus a question and He paused, then said “You already have the answer—it’s in the Bible.” You know what would be **worse** than that? Asking a second question—and then a third—and getting the same answer: “I already answered those questions for you, too—they’re in the Bible!” I’m pretty sure most of us would turn beet red—and not ask another question!

So, here’s **my** imaginary conversation at the dinner table with Jesus. “Jesus, I need your advice. My head is spinning—and not because I’m dizzy! I’m a Pastor of a small church and want to get out visiting people more. I have sermons to prepare and books to read and my weak Greek is getting rustier by the minute. We have a church sign that needs to be designed and constructed, as well as some other projects that need to be done on the building. I also have a part-time military job that takes up at least 20 hours per week, not to mention a number of projects I’m trying to finish on my house. Oh yeah—I’m also a husband, a father, and a grandfather. So, tell me, Lord, with all these hats to wear, what should my priority be?”

Knowing Jesus would provide a well-thought-out answer, I would expect somewhat of a delay. But the delay got longer than I had anticipated and I felt my face starting to turn red. And then it struck me—He is going to say “You already have the answer—it’s in the Bible!” Why would He say that? Because it’s true!

Please take your Bibles and turn to Mark 12:28-34. Do we make living life too hard sometimes? We do, don’t we? But here Jesus spells out what our priority is supposed to be—to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. Do we love God like that? In the passage before us, Jesus gives us two reasons “why” we should love God—then 4 ways “how” to love God. Today we will only be looking at they “why.”

Why should we love God? Because first it is...

### **1. The Priority Commandment—there is no greater commandment**

#### **A. It is a commandment—not a suggestion (v 28-31)**

Oftentimes when we read a portion of Scripture we are familiar with, we have a tendency to overlook the obvious. In v 28, we see the scribe asking Jesus “Which is the first **commandment** of all?” He is not asking Jesus about His favorite book of the Bible—or the best place to get a bite to eat in Jerusalem—or even about future events. He is asking him about a **commandment**. What is a commandment?

It is a command/charge/ requirement—**from God**. It is not a suggestion—it is something that God says we **must** do!

Isn't it sad—and rather ironic—that the longer we are saved, the more we look at commandments as being “optional?” Kind of like driving a car, right? During our driver's license road-test, we follow every traffic law and sign to a “t.” We got in the car and put on our seat belt, we actually came to a complete stop at every stop sign, and we went exactly the speed limit—or a little below. But after passing the test—and driving for a while—we aren't so careful to follow the laws or the signs, are we? Seat belts aren't bothered with if you are only going a “short” distance; stop signs become “ooze” signs; and the posted speed limit is a “suggested” speed—not a requirement.

And yet we still **do** follow some things to “the letter of the law,” don't we? We file our taxes by the deadline—not when we get “a round tu it;” we put the right kind of fuel in our vehicle gas tanks—not water; and we follow the instructions of our boss at work—but some of us only while he or she is watching!

Back to our text. The scribe asks Jesus about “the first commandment of all;” Jesus gives the answer and uses the word “commandment” three times in His answer. Notice again verses 29-31. The command to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength is a **commandment**—it is required by God. Are you obeying it?

In addition to being a commandment—and not a suggestion—it is also....

B. It is the priority commandment—not a second or third choice

Notice again v 28; the scribe's question is very specific: “Which is the **first** commandment of all?” The Greek word *protos*, translated “first” in this passage, has primarily two meanings: a) first in time or place; or b) first in rank. In this context, it is not first in **time**—like what is the first thing we should do when we wake up in the morning. Instead it is first in **rank**, in order of importance. ‘What is the chief commandment, the most important one’ is what the scribe was asking.

Jesus stressed the priority—the “firstness” of importance—in His answer.

--v 29 “The first of **all** the commandments is...”

--v 30 (end) “this is the **first** commandment.”

--v 31 (end) “There is none other commandment **greater** than these.”

Here it is; here is what our life passion and priority should be—loving God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. It is to be our primary pursuit now and always—regardless of how busy we are and what stage of life we are in. Jesus does not give any exceptions or exemptions or loopholes.

C. It is a personal commandment to all—not just for some (v 29-30)

Notice again verse 29 “...Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord: and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart...” I'm not a mind reader, but it is possible that someone in here could think ‘There; there is the loophole—Jesus is quoting the OT so this refers only to the Jews!’ Is that a good argument? I don't think so and here's why:

--By virtue of the fact that Jesus quotes it, He makes it relevant to all those who **heard** it

--On top of that, the HS inspired Matthew, Mark, and Luke to **write it** and it is now in the NT—and applicable to all followers of Christ

--We—the NT church—are not Israel, but if you are a child of God, God is YOUR God—meaning this command is for you. Verse 30 “And thou shalt love the Lord **thy** God...”

Do you love God? We should, shouldn't we? Why? Because we are commanded to do so—and it is the greatest command of all! Here's a second reason we should love God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength: Because of...

## **2. The Properness of the Commandment—there is no greater God**

The properness of the commandment—the rightness of loving God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength—is based on at least two things. First, it is based on...

### A. The Oneness of God

Verse 29 (middle) “Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is **one** Lord:” In addition to quoting Deuteronomy 6:4, Jesus is reinforcing an often-repeated truth in the OT—that there is only **one God**.

**Deut 4:35** “Unto thee it was shewed, that thou mightest know that the Lord He is God; there is **none else beside Him.**”

**Deut 4:39** “Know therefore this day, and consider it in thine heart, that the Lord He is God in heaven above, and upon the earth beneath: **there is none else.**”

**Isaiah 44:6** “Thus saith the Lord the King of Israel, and his redeemer the Lord of hosts; I am the first, and I am the last; and **beside me there is no God.**”

**Isaiah 45:5** “I am the Lord, and there is **none else**, there is **no God beside me:**”

The scribe who asked Jesus the question understood that Jesus was emphasizing the one-ness of God. Notice verse 32 “And the scribe said unto Him, Well, Master, thou hast said the truth: for there is **one God**; and there is **none other but He:**” So, what does the oneness of God—the truth that there is only one God—have to do with the properness—the rightness—of loving God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength? It is a matter of “only” versus “first.”

God does not want to be the **first** God of many gods in your life—He wants to be the **only** God in our life because He is the only God in the world! Granted, there are false gods—and not just in the form of idols or statues. Jesus warned about trying to serve God and mammon. Jesus also said we can “gain the whole world”—but lose our own soul (Mt 16:26). We can make fame or power or wealth or even our self the “god” of our life, but God does not want to share the love that should be directed **to Him** with any of those things.

The commandment to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength is proper based on the oneness of God. It is also proper based on...

### B. The worthiness of God

**Isaiah 42:8** “I am the Lord: that is my name: and **my glory will I not give to another**, neither my praise to graven images.”

**Isaiah 48:11** “For mine own sake, even for mine own sake, will I do it: for how should my name be polluted? and **I will not give my glory unto another.**”

Why is God so reluctant to share His glory? Does He have a fragile ego? Is He insecure? Of course not! But God is a God **of truth** and to give praise to someone for doing something they **can't** do or **didn't** do is to believe a lie and to promote falsehood.

God alone created us, God alone redeemed us and made us His child, God alone keeps us alive, God alone will take us to heaven—His home—to be with Him, so God alone deserves all glory and praise. God is the only Being worthy of being loved with all our heart, and all our soul, and all our mind, and all our strength so it is obviously a proper command for us to do just that.

To recap, we've seen Jesus emphasizing the **priority** of the commandment—it is a commandment, not a suggestion; and the most important commandment of all. We've also seen the **properness** of the commandment because there is only one God and He only is worthy of being loved with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. Jesus didn't just talk about the commandment, though—He also talked to him about **eternal life**.

It is interesting that although this exchange between Jesus and the scribe is also recorded in Matthew 22 and Luke 12, Mark gives the most detail about what the scribe said—and what Jesus said in response. I see three principles taught about eternal life in Jesus' answer to the scribe.

### **3. The Principles taught by Jesus regarding eternal life (v 32-34)**

Notice verse 34 “And when Jesus saw that he answered discreetly, He said unto him, “Thou art not far from the kingdom of God.” In other words, ‘You are almost a child of God; you are close to gaining entrance into heaven.’ Why did Jesus say that? What are the principles we can learn about getting into heaven from what Jesus said?

#### A. We must recognize Jesus' words as truth (v 32)

Notice verse 32. “And the scribe said unto Him, Well, Master, thou hast said the truth...” Part of me wants to chuckle when I read this because here is a mere man “assessing” what Jesus said and deciding it is truth. ‘Good job, Jesus—it seems like you know what you are talking about!’ Can the One known as the Way, the Truth, and the Life speak anything **but the truth**? Obviously not! But Jesus didn't condemn him for judging His words—instead He **commended** him for what he said. In verse 34 we read that “Jesus saw that he answered discreetly”—meaning he answered “wisely”—and that is why Jesus said he was not far from the kingdom. The scribe believed that Jesus spoke the truth—and we must believe that the words of Jesus are absolute truth!

We cannot get to heaven if we refuse to believe the words of Jesus.

**John 5:24** “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on Him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.”

**John 10:9** “I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture.”

**John 14:6** “Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.” Do you believe that what Jesus says is absolute truth? You can't get to heaven if you don't!

#### B. We must recognize that eternal life is a matter of the internal—not the external (v 33)

Jesus commended the scribe for “being on the right track” not just because he accepted Jesus' words as the truth, but also because the man recognized that burnt offerings and sacrifices are not the most important thing—the **heart** is. Notice verse 33 “And to love him [God] with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love his neighbor as himself, is **more than all whole**

**burnt offerings and sacrifices.**” The scribe recognized that offerings and sacrifices could be given to God, but the heart could still be far from God.

God has not changed—He is still more concerned about our heart than He is about what we **give Him** or **do for Him**. There are many people that agree with God that they are sinful and need forgiveness, but instead of accepting Jesus Christ as their substitute, they try to “bribe” God into forgiving them by doing things. Some are baptized, some join churches, some give money, some promise to be good and help others, and some pray elaborate prayers—all in hopes of convincing God that He should let them into heaven. But getting into heaven is not dependent on what we do—it is dependent upon what **Jesus did!**

### C. We must recognize that not everyone is heaven-bound (v 34b)

By declaring “thou art not far from the kingdom of God,” Jesus was saying that at that moment, the scribe was not on his way to heaven. Why is that important? Because it shows from the lips of Jesus Himself the truth that not everyone goes to heaven. Sadly, some believe and teach that in the end, because God is love, that **everyone** will get into heaven. Is that true? No, it’s not because Jesus said the **exact opposite**. There are a number of verses that could be referred to; here are two:

**Matthew 7:13** “Enter ye in at the strait gate: for **wide is the gate**, and **broad is the way**, that leadeth to **destruction, and many there be** which go in thereat:”

**Matthew 7:21a** “**Not every one** that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, **shall enter into the kingdom of heaven;**”

We serve a good God, don’t we? That may sound like a strange thing to say on the heels of a verse that teaches not everyone gets to heaven, but here’s why God is good—God provided **a way** for us to be forgiven! God commands us to love Him with all our heart and even though we fail, He offers us forgiveness through His Son Jesus Christ. And even in the context of Jesus’ teaching us how **we should love God**, we have the reminder that **He first loved us** and provided a way for us to enter into the kingdom of God.

### **CONCLUDING THOUGHTS:**

1. First and foremost, are you a child of God? What does Jesus know of you—and what would He say to you? Would He say “thou art not far from the kingdom of God”—meaning you weren’t a member of His family yet?

2. Child of God—do you love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength? We often don’t, do we—but we should. It is a command that is to be obeyed and when we fail to obey it, it is a sin that needs to be confessed and forsaken.