

The Greatest Commandment

Introduction: In Matthew 22, Jesus is asked which is the greatest commandment. We are all familiar with the response of Jesus. What we might be less familiar with is the fact that Jesus is quoting from the Old Testament, and the general context of the original statement. Let us go back to Deuteronomy 6 and consider this verse that Jesus quotes to help us gain some greater understanding.

I. Love the Lord Your God: vs 4-5

- A. Hear, O Israel, the Lord Our God, the Lord is one!
 - 1. There is some discussion as to how this should be best translated, but the point Moses is making is clear. God is to be the sole object of Israel's worship, allegiance, and affection.
 - 2. This points us back to the first two commandments in chapter 5. God is not one among many Gods, He is the only God, the one true God of heaven.
 - 3. Also, as Moses reminds Israel of the 10 commandments, he reminds them of all that God had done for them and before them. They've witnessed the power of God and have no excuse to not acknowledge the God of heaven.
- B. Love the Lord your God:
 - 1. Israel is called to respond to God with the same fullness of love that God has displayed toward them.
 - 2. Throughout this context, Moses tells Israel to carefully observe the laws that God has given them.
 - a. Their obedience was not intended to be some wooden adherence or some barren legalism. God is not telling them to simply adhere for the sake of adhering.
 - b. Their obedience to the commands, then, was not out of necessity or duty, but rather out of love for God.
 - c. This indicates that even in the Old Testament, God was concerned with the heart of man. He wanted the love and devotion of His people. This is the same God we serve today.
 - 3. Love the Lord with all your heart, soul, and strength:
 - a. To the Hebrews, the heart was regarded as the seat of the mind and will.
 - b. The soul may be more difficult to determine but seems to refer to the source of life and vitality, or even of one's being.
 - c. These two terms placed together indicate that God's desire for His people is that they serve Him with unreserved devotion.
 - d. A third expression is given, with all your strength. We ought to serve God with all that we have.
 - 4. The command to love God with all our hearts is surrounded by a discussion of carefully observing the Lord's commands. You may see a sort of chiasmic structure where the first 3 verses call for careful obedience, the last 4 verses call for the commands to be within our hearts. All these emphasize the verses in the center, which is loving God with all our hearts.
 - a. When the Lord is loved His words will be treasured, thought of, talked, written, lived: Psalm 1:2
 - b. The all-encompassing love for God was to find its expression in a willing and joyful obedience of the commandments of God, this theme is developed in the next four verses.

II. When I Love God:

- A. I will fear Him: vs. 2
 - 1. Fear can mean being afraid but it also is the idea of reverence. We need to realize that both are important when considering our God.
 - 2. The fear of God is acknowledging the power of God, His greatness, His sovereignty, and also His judgment.
 - 3. There is a sense in which we ought to have a fear of God: Matthew 10:28, Hebrews 10:31, 2 Corinthians 5:11
 - 4. But this fear is tempered by our love and respect for Him: Psalm 89:7, Proverbs 1:7
 - 5. God expects us to show proper fear and reverence toward Him: Hebrews 12:28
- B. I will be careful to observe His statutes: vs 2-3
 - 1. This means that I am going to take care that I am walking in the manner that God expects.
 - 2. One reason I will be careful to obey them is they are for my benefit: Deuteronomy 6:2-3
 - 3. This is similar to the instruction given in Ephesians 6:1-3
- C. I will place God's words in my heart: 6
 - 1. This is key to loving the Lord with all your heart. The word of God will not become a burdensome law, but it will be our delight: Psalm 119:33-40
 - 2. The word of God can save our souls, but it has to be written in our hearts: James 1:21
 - 3. At some point, it has to go from being highlighted in our Bibles to being written on our hearts.
- D. I will teach them to my children: vs 7
 - 1. The greatest gift a parent can give their child is the knowledge of God and teaching them to know Him and love Him.
 - 2. As the nation of Israel was established, God repeatedly told the Israelites to teach their children about the Lord and what He had done for them. When they failed to do so, idolatry and sin resulted: Judges 2:10
 - 3. First and foremost, this is done by the parents living by their faith and demonstrating that to their children: vs 7
 - 4. This also is done by teaching them the commands of God and helping them to develop a heart that loves God with all of their being.
- E. I will place them ever before me: vs. 8-9
 - 1. The Pharisees literalized these commands. They had leather straps on their hands, phylacteries on their foreheads, and scripture boxes on their doorposts.
 - 2. The point here is not to literally carry the scripture wherever we go, though that is never a bad thing.
 - 3. When he speaks of binding it on our hands, it refers to letting God's word rule over all that we do.
 - 4. When it talks of the words being as frontlets between our eyes, it is the idea of keeping it ever present before you, always in your mind.
 - 5. The doorposts and gates show that God's word is going to be present in your home. It will govern your home and all that you do.

Conclusion: Hopefully, we can have a greater appreciation for the greatest commandment that Jesus discussed in Matthew 22. When we love the Lord with all our heart, soul, and strength, we will be wholly devoted to Him. Let us love God more, fear Him, and write His words on our hearts so they may govern all that we do.