

The First Commandment
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"The first of all the commandments is: 'Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one. And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' This is the first commandment." Mark 12:29-30

In Mark 12 Jesus was being tested by His adversaries on His handling of the law. Many of the questions were clearly meant to entrap Him, and Jesus deftly deflected these questions against those who were asking. But in the midst of this Jesus was asked a very important, legitimate question: Which commandment is the first commandment?

What does it mean to be first in the commandments? We know that the laws of God are an "all or none" proposition (James 2:10), but even within that truth there are some laws that are weightier than others (Matthew 23:23). This idea, that some law has greater weight, speaks to the concept that some laws authorize other laws, and some laws are preeminent over other laws. For example, we are told to submit to the government, but when that law conflicts with submitting to God, "we must obey God rather than man". It is important to understand that some laws outweigh others.

The first commandment is the greatest commandment, and it is the foundation of all other commandments (including the second great commandment). Thus all commandments are established in our love for God. If any commandment seems to contrast this, then we have misunderstood. This is why it is important to understand the basis of law; those who love God will seek all of the laws of God based in their love, not their obligation.

What is love? It is not acceptance or emotion, as commonly understood in our world today. Instead, the Bible reveals that it is the desire to seek and uplift another. Love is often spoken of in Scripture as wanting the best for another. God so loved the world that He sought to change it, not accept it or feel good about it. The good Samaritan did not love the injured man by accepting his condition, but by seeking to change it. God desires people to love Him, and His rewards are for those who love Him (Deuteronomy 7:9, James 1:12). Our love for God comes from an understanding that He is God, we are His creation, and yet He loved us so much that He died for us (1 John 4:19). Thus love is about understanding, not feeling. Jesus repeatedly declared that if we love God, we obey God (John 14:15).

The First Commandment called God "your" God. It seeks to make us take the stance that God is our own; that we have drawn ourselves to Him. Moses sang in Exodus 15 *"The LORD is my strength and song, and He has become my salvation; He is my God, and I will praise Him; my father's God, and I will exalt Him"*. We declare to the world that the God of Heaven is also the God of our lives and our own; we are unashamed to praise and serve Him.

The First Commandment gave multiple descriptions of our love. They are meant to describe our love by giving it dimension. It is all of our heart (our innermost self, Luke 6:45), all of our soul (our eternal self), all of our strength (our physical self), and all of our mind (our intellectual self). It states that every aspect of our identity is committed to the love of God. It proclaims that we are entirely His; no part of our life and self are denied to Him.

Finally, Jesus added someone to the question. He stated that the second commandment is in line to the first: to love your neighbor as yourself. Jesus would go on to define neighbor in Luke 10:29-37 as anyone

in need. Throughout the New Testament we are told again and again that to love one another is to fulfill the law of Christ (Romans 13:9-10, Galatians 5:14). God's love is shown among men when we love one another, made in the image of God.

To Love God is the constitution of the Covenant of Christ. It is the Law that all laws are built upon. The nature of the New Testament is to discern by commands and examples who loves God and who merely pays the love of God lip service.