

The Greatest Commandment

Lev 19:18; Deut 6:4-7; Mark 12:28-34

SS Lesson for 05/25/2014

Devotional Scripture: 1 John 4:7-21

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Introduction

Overview and Approach to Lesson

The lesson teaches about **The Greatest Commandment**. The **study's aim** is to learn why the two greatest commandments are so important. The **study's application** is to find a way to keep the greatest commandments always in mind at home, place of work, and church. (From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary).

Key Verse: *Mark 12:30-31*

30 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. 31 And the second, like it, is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."

Commentary from the Bible Knowledge Commentary

One of the Law teachers (cf. Mark 1:22), had heard Jesus' discussion with the Sadducees (12:18-27) and was impressed with His good answer to them. This suggested he was probably a Pharisee. He came with no apparent hostile or hidden motive to appraise Jesus' skill in answering a much-debated subject in scribal circles. Traditionally the scribes spoke of 613 individual commandments of the Mosaic Law—365 negative ones and 248 positive ones. While they believed all were binding, they assumed a distinction between weightier and lighter statutes and often attempted to sum up the whole Law in a single unifying command. In light of this debate, this Law teacher asked Jesus, Which (poia, "what kind of") commandment is the most important (prōtē, "first") of them all? Jesus' reply went beyond the debated lighter/weightier classifications to a statement of the most important command and its inseparable companion, which together summarize the whole Law. He began with the opening words of the Shema (from Heb., "Hear!" [šema'], the first word of Deut. 6:4). This creed (Num. 15:37-41; Deut. 6:4-9; 11:13-21) was recited twice daily—morning and evening—by devout Jews. It asserted the basis of Jewish faith: The Lord (Heb., Yahweh), namely, our God, Israel's covenant-keeping God, the Lord is One, that is, unique (cf. Mark 12:32). The command, Love (lit., "you shall love") the Lord your God (Deut. 6:5), calls for a volitional commitment to God that is personal, comprehensive, and wholehearted. This is emphasized by the repeated words with (ex, "out of," denoting source), all (holēs, "the whole of"), your (sing.), and the various terms relating to the human personality—heart (control center; cf. Mark 7:19), soul (self-conscious life; cf. 8:35-36), mind (thought capacity), and strength (bodily powers). The Hebrew text does not mention "mind"; the Septuagint omits "heart"; but Jesus included both terms, stressing the comprehensive nature of the command (cf. 12:33; Matt. 22:37; Luke 10:27). Jesus then spoke of a similar commitment to one's neighbor by quoting a second inseparable (cf. 1 John 4:19-21) and complementary command. Love (lit., "you shall love") your neighbor (plēsion, "one who is nearby," a generic term for fellowman) as, in the same way as, yourself (Lev. 19:18). The love a person has naturally for himself is not to focus solely on himself—a constant tendency—but should be directed equally toward others. No (Gr., "no other") commandment is greater than these two because wholehearted love to God and one's neighbor is the sum and substance of the Law and the Prophets (cf. Matt. 22:40). To fulfill these commands is to fulfill all others. These verses are unique to Mark. Apparently they instructed his readers who struggled with the relationship between spiritual reality and ceremonial ritual (cf. comments on 7:19). The scribe (cf. 12:28) recognized the accuracy of Jesus' answer and voiced his approval, viewing Him as an excellent Teacher (cf. vv. 14, 19). He restated Jesus' answer, carefully avoiding mention of God (not in the Gr. text but supplied in the NIV) in keeping with the typical Jewish practice of avoiding unnecessary use of the divine name out of great respect for it. The words, There is no other but Him, come from Deuteronomy 4:35. He also substituted the word understanding for "soul" and "mind" (cf. Mark 12:30). He made the bold statement that the double command of love is much more important than all burnt offerings (fully consumed sacrifices) and sacrifices (those partly consumed and partly eaten by worshipers; cf. 1 Sam. 15:22; Prov. 21:3; Jer. 7:21-23; Hosea 6:6; Micah 6:6-8). He had responded wisely, and Jesus probably stimulated further thought by declaring, You are not far ("not far" is emphatic in Gr.) from the kingdom of God (cf. Mark 1:15; 4:11; 10:15, 23). This man had the kind of spiritual understanding (cf. 10:15) and openness to Jesus that brought him near to embracing God's kingdom, His spiritual rule over those related to Him by faith. Whether he entered this relationship is not known. Jesus had effectively thwarted all attempts to discredit Him and had exposed the hostile motives and errors of His opponents so skillfully that nobody else dared ask Him any more questions.

Approach to the Major Outlines in Lesson

The outline of the lesson came from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary and from the points revealed by the study of the Scriptural text.

Verse	Phrase	Commentary
Lev 19:18	You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord	The Social Mandate
Deut 6:6	And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart	The Spiritual Mandate
Mark 12:29-31	29 Jesus answered him, "The first of all the commandments is: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. 30 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. 31 And the second, like it, is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."	The Dual Mandate

Lesson Introduction and Background

From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

When one compares what it meant to be God's people during Old Testament times with New Testament times, we notice that many things change. God's people are no longer focused on trying to live in Palestine. The practice of circumcision is no longer associated with incorporation into God's people. Animal sacrifice is no longer required or even adequate to atone for sin. Instead we see that God's people are scattered throughout the world in mission (Matthew 28:19, 20); baptism is now associated with the circumcision of the heart as people are incorporated into the church (Colossians 2:11, 12); and the death of Jesus brought an end to the old sacrificial system (Hebrews 10:11-14). We ought to be careful, however, not to emphasize the differences at the expense of the similarities. For example, God cares about the heart—one's "internal life"—in both eras. Both old and new covenants reveal God to be a loving God; this truth was used to expose the false distinction offered by Marcion, a bishop of the second century AD, who sharply contrasted what he saw as the loving God of the New Testament with the wrathful God of the Old Testament. The church of Marcion's day wisely identified his teaching as false and dangerous. The truth is, God always has been a loving God. Central to God's desire for his people is that they model his love toward others.

Our first Old Testament text comes from Leviticus. This book includes many laws that Moses received from God on Mount Sinai; Moses was responsible for passing these on to the Israelites who left Egypt. Leviticus 19:18 is located in the heart of the Holiness Code of that book. This section, spanning chapters 17 to 26, instructed the ancient Israelites

how to live holy lives before their holy God. Our second Old Testament passage is from Deuteronomy. Though Leviticus and Deuteronomy both belong to Torah, the five books of Moses, they were addressed to different audiences. After the first generation of Israelites was not allowed to enter the promised land, Moses had to present God's laws anew to the second generation, which would enter instead. That's where Deuteronomy comes in. After recounting the failure of the first generation in Deuteronomy 1-3, Moses prepared the second generation to renew the covenant in chapters 4-11. Our passage in chapter 6 was a key part of that preparation, and Jesus later acknowledged its ongoing relevance for his followers. Though only one generation separates our two Old Testament passages, a millennium separates those two from our text of Mark 12:28-34. These verses feature Jesus having one of his most congenial conversations with a Jewish leader. Since Mark 11:27, Jesus had been challenged by priests, teachers of the law, elders, Pharisees, Herodians, and Sadducees. They had been coming at him from every angle, trying to find fault. But the teacher of the law in today's text asked Jesus a frank question and received a frank answer. That answer drew upon the two Old Testament passages to which we now turn.

Major Theme Analysis

(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)

The Social Mandate (Lev 19:18)

18 You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord.

The prohibition - No vengeance (18)

Do not seek revenge or try to pay back (Prov 24:29)

29 Do not say, "I'll do to him as he has done to me; I'll pay that man back for what he did."

Do not seek revenge because it is God's role to avenge (Deut 32:35)

35 It is mine to avenge; I will repay. In due time their foot will slip; their day of disaster is near and their doom rushes upon them."

Do not seek revenge because God is a jealous and avenging God (Nah 1:2-3)

2 The Lord is a jealous and avenging God; the Lord takes vengeance and is filled with wrath. The Lord takes vengeance on his foes and maintains his wrath against his enemies. 3 The Lord is slow to anger and great in power; the Lord will not leave the guilty unpunished. His way is in the whirlwind and the storm, and clouds are the dust of his feet.

Do not seek revenge because God does the judging (Heb 10:30-31)

30 For we know him who said, "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," and again, "The Lord will judge his people."
31 It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

Do not seek revenge, instead bless those who have harmed us (1 Peter 3:9)

9 Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing.

The command - Love neighbor (18)

Loving our neighbor by loving God (1 John 4:21)

21 And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother.

Loving our neighbor by obedience to the second great commandment (Matt 22:39-40)

39 And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' 40 All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

Loving our neighbor by owing nothing except love (Rom 13:8)

8 Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law.

Loving our neighbor as we have been taught by God (1 Thess 4:9)

9 Now about brotherly love we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other.

The Spiritual Mandate (Deut 6:4-7)

4 "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one!

5 You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.

6 "And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart.

7 You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up.

Love of God (4-5)

Loving God by fearing Him, walking in His ways and serving Him (Deut 10:12)

12 And now, O Israel, what does the Lord your God ask of you but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul,

Loving God by keeping His commandments (1 John 5:1-2)

1 Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves the father loves his child as well. 2 This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands.

Loving God by listening to Him and holding fast to Him (Deut. 30:20)

20 and that you may love the Lord your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For the Lord is your life, and he will give you many years in the land he swore to give to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Loving God by obeying Him (1 John 5:3)

3 This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome, NIV

Loving God by being known by Him (1 Cor. 8:3)

3 But the man who loves God is known by God.

Loving God results in deliverance and protection (Psalm 91:14)

14 "Because he loves me," says the Lord, "I will rescue him; I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name.

Stewardship of God's Word (6-7)

Stewardship of God's Word because the righteousness from God is revealed in it (Rom 1:16-17)

16 I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. 17 For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith."

Stewardship of God's Word because it makes one wise for salvation (2 Tim 3:15)

15 and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

Stewardship of God's Word because it rebukes, instructs and encourages (2 Tim 3:16-17)

16 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, 17 so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Stewardship of God's Word because it is living and enduring (1 Peter 1:23)

23 For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.

Stewardship of God's Word because of the delight in God's words (Ps 119:46-47)

46 I will speak of your statutes before kings and will not be put to shame, 47 for I delight in your commands because I love them.

The Dual Mandate (Mark 12:28-34)

28 Then one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, perceiving that He had answered them well, asked Him, "Which is the first commandment of all?"

29 Jesus answered him, "The first of all the commandments is: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.

30 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.

31 And the second, like it, is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."

32 So the scribe said to Him, "Well said, Teacher. You have spoken the truth, for there is one God, and there is no other but He.

33 And to love Him with all the heart, with all the understanding, with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as oneself, is more than all the whole burnt offerings and sacrifices."

34 Now when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, He said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." But after that no one dared question Him.

Greatest commandment is Love (28-31)

Greatest because all of God's law is summed up in love (Gal 5:14)

14 The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbor as yourself."

Greatest because love proves we have been born of God (1 John 4:7-9)

7 Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. 8 Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. 9 This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him.

Greatest because loving others should be the only debt we should have (Rom 13:8)

8 Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law.

Greatest because love will always remain (1 Cor 13:13)

13 And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

The truth - there is only One God (32-33)

There is only One God and He is over all (Eph 4:6)

6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

There is only one God and He justifies all men (Rom 3:28-30)

28 For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law. 29 Is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles too? Yes, of Gentiles too, 30 since there is only one God, who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith.

There is only one God and He created us (Mal 2:10)

10 Have we not all one Father? Did not one God create us? Why do we profane the covenant of our fathers by breaking faith with one another?

There is only One God and He will justify us (Rom 3:30)

30 since there is only one God, who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith.

There is only One God and we can share and partake of Him (1 Cor 10:17)

17 Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf.

Being in the kingdom of God (34)

To be in the Kingdom of God, one must become like a little child (Matt 18:3)

3 And he said: "I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

To be in the Kingdom of God, one must be born of water and Spirit (John 3:5)

5 Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit.

To be in the Kingdom of God, one must go through many hardships (Acts 14:22)

22 strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. "We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God," they said.

To be in the Kingdom of God, one must be spiritual (1 Cor 15:44-50)

44 it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. 45 So it is written: "The first man Adam became a living being"; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit. 46 The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual. 47 The first man was of the dust of the earth, the second man from heaven. 48 As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the earth; and as is the man from heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. 49 And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven. 50 I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.

To be in the Kingdom of God, one must be born again (John 3:5)

5 Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit.

Conclusion and Other Thoughts

Concluding Thoughts From J. Hampton Keathley

The Foundation—The Basic Proposition and Belief

Underlying the question of the Pharisee and Christ's answer was belief in divine inspiration and thus, the accuracy, inerrancy, infallibility, and authority of Scripture. It was the Lord who said, "The Scripture cannot be broken" (John 10:35). This meant Scripture is true and that its principles, promises, and purposes are accurate. The Bible works in our lives when believed and applied, and whether man believes it or not, its principles are true, its record accurate, and what it promises will come to pass. Because of this, man is faced with the consequences of his unbelief or failure to live by faith in the teaching of the Bible.

This statement by our Lord in John 10:35 also means that the Bible is authoritative because it is not a word from man, but the Word of God. It represents, "thus says the Lord."

The basic proposition, then, is that the Bible is God breathed; we have supernatural revelation, the revealed absolutes of God which are essential to both knowing and having a relationship with Him and to moral and social stability. The first command, loving God, is the foundation or framework for the second, loving others. But the mindset of today is strongly against this and this is true to some degree even among many Christians because they have been infected with the world's mentality. Though intellectually people hold to the inspiration and authority of the Scripture—as did the Pharisees—many today tend to interpret or respond to the Bible according to their comfort zones, personal interests, desires, opinions, or lust patterns.

As a result, people develop all kinds of ways to circumvent the Scripture when it hits too close to home. Fear strikes when our desires are thwarted, when our determination to pursue life the way we want it is hindered, or when we sense God's call upon our lives. So what happens? We rationalize, we make excuses, or we simply shut our ears and harden our hearts. We may avoid serious study of the Word by stressing fellowship or programs or entertainment. If we are involved in serious Bible study, we may find ways to avoid its application. We may argue that we are in a different culture and it is not applicable to us today or we simply disobey because we think we can always confess it and God will forgive us even though Proverbs 28:13 warns, "He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, But he who confesses and forsakes {them} will find compassion." Perhaps we simply avoid anything which might cause us to become accountable to others in deeper relationships and ultimately have to face up to sin in our lives and make tough choices.

Thus, crucial to what follows is this basic proposition: The Bible is God's inerrant and authoritative Word which cannot be broken without serious consequences to individuals, to churches, and to nations.

In Mark we read "there is no other commandment greater than these" but Matthew adds this astounding statement, "on these two commandments depend the whole Law and the prophets." Now what does this mean?

Negative: What this does not mean

Some say that since Christians are no longer under the Law, they are not obligated to its many commands. Instead, it is said, we are obligated to *a* command—the love command. They maintain as long as we love, anything we do must be moral. That approach—sometimes called the "new morality" or "situation ethics"—is popular both within and outside the church. This naturally exerts a strong appeal to our generation, a generation that is uncomfortable with absolutes, that seeks to do its own thing in its own way, that seeks to do what is right in its own eyes, and would like to be free from conventional moral codes.

While it is true that we are not under the Old Testament law as a religious code, most of the Ten Commandments are in some way reiterated in the New Testament and are to be obeyed, not as a means of spirituality, but as a result of an intimate walk with Christ through the enablement of the Spirit (cf. Rom. 8:1ff). Without the rest of the absolutes of God's Word and its directives, we too easily mistake love for selfishness. We fool ourselves into doing what we want out of so-called humanitarian motives which are often nothing more than self-love and the pursuit of our own selfish desires at the expense of others like our family, our church, and our society.

For instance, a father may consistently spend 60 or 70 hours a week in his business, which means he must neglect his family. He may rationalize this by saying he is providing more for his family, while in reality he is being driven by self-centered longings. Perhaps he is still trying to prove something to his parents or seeking his security in material wealth or personal significance. But he has never faced this as sinful.

Positive: What this does mean

In general, this means that no commandment is greater because these two commands stand to the rest of Scripture as **source, sum, substance, and goal**. The rest of Scripture is God's "**commentary**" on these two responsibilities—loving God completely and our neighbors as ourselves. As God's commentary on the Scripture, the rest of Scripture provides us with the **means, manner, motive, and method** for loving.

Without GROWTH in the REALITY of these two commands in our lives, obedience to rest of Scripture will become merely legal demands and burdens that we seek to obey—usually for the wrong reasons. In the process, all our works and ministries become acts of self-love, things we do to feel better about ourselves, for the praise of men, for power over others, or for position.

But what does the Lord mean by the term "depend" when he says "on these two commandments depend the whole Law and the prophets" (Matt 22:40, NASB). The NET Bible has "all the law and the prophets hang on these two commandments." The tense of this verb is the continuous present. It points to that which is always true. "Depend" is the Greek kremannumi which means "to hang, suspend on something," like a door hangs on hinges or articles hang on a peg. The voice of the verb is passive and looks at what God has done in the writing of His Word. God has hung the whole of Scripture on these two foundational commands and principles of life. This stresses that our ability to properly fulfill the rest of Scripture hinges on our grasp of these two paramount commands as the goal of our study of the Bible. Without the reality of these two, we will miserably fail. Let's look at some specifics of what this means.

(1) The Principle of Source—the Concept of Internal Controls: Love for God and our neighbor becomes our source and means of obedience in the other commands of Scripture by virtue of internal motives and inner ability to carry out the commands of God. Of course, we obey through the power of God's love operating in us by the ministry of His Spirit and the joy of His fellowship (cf. Gal. 5:22; 2 Cor. 8:1-5; 1 Thess. 4:2-9), but the hundreds of commands in Scripture are no longer simply duties we must obey. Rather, they become the means for the expression of love through fellowship with God. Note a couple of illustrations:

- We are not to neglect the assembling together with other believers because it is the means of encouraging each other (Heb. 10:25).
- One of our responsibilities is giving, but giving is always to be the result of the grace of God at work in the heart—the result of love for God and others (cf. 2 Cor. 8: 1f).

(2) The Principle of Supervision--the Concept of External Controls: We need the imperatives, principles, promises, and guidelines of Scripture as a whole to guide us in the wise expression of God's love so that love never degenerates into mere sentimentality, self indulgence, or the compromise of righteousness. Fundamentally, the whole of Scripture gives us the revealed will of God in the expression of how we are to demonstrate love. This can be seen in the Old Testament by a comparison of the three codices of the Old Testament Law and their relationship to each other (see also Phil. 1:9-11).

- Codex I—The Ten commandments. These commandments set forth the basic moral law of God. Commands 1-5 deal with man's relationship with God (how to love God) and 6-10 deal with man's relationship to his fellow man (how to love man).
- Codex II—The Ordinances. This set forth the laws concerning the sacrifices, the priesthood, and the tabernacle. This showed Israel how to maintain a right relationship with the Lord.
- Codex III—The Judgments. This set forth the social laws which showed Israel how to live in right relationship with one's neighbor.

(3) The Principle of Substance and Summary--the Controls Defined and Directed: Love for God and for one's neighbor is the very essence, heart, and substance of the rest of Scripture. Thus, these two commands sum up the heart and goal of the rest of the God's commands in the Word. In other words, they tell us what we are doing (or should be doing) when we obey God's word—*we are loving either God or people, or both.*

Ephesians 5:22-6:9 contains a number of social commands and provides a practical illustration and application for us. For instance: Husbands, love your wives; Wives, submit to your husbands; Children, obey your parents; Parents, bring up your children...; Slaves, obey your masters...; Masters, give up threatening....

But these imperatives must never be divorced from their context in Ephesians.

- **Obedience** can be defined in this passage as love for God. It is in reality responding in love and obedience to God—seeking to walk worthily of the Lord who has loved us as His beloved children (cf. Eph. 4:1 and 5:1f with 1 John 4:11, “Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought to love one another”).
- **Obedience** in the home or in the workplace is a product of responding to other controls that occur from the source of personal relationship with God. Love is to have its source in fellowship with God through a Spirit-controlled, Word-filled life (cf. Eph. 5:14ff; Col. 3:1ff).
- **Obedience** in the home or in the workplace is a product of God's direction through other passages of the Word. It gives us the “how,” it describes for us the responsibilities of love and the methods God has chosen according to His perfect wisdom and love (cf. Prov. 13:24).
- **Obedience** in the home or workplace is also the product of developing and deepening relationships with one another because these two environments—the home and the workplace—are like laboratories which test the reality of our walk with God and our commitment and willingness to change for the glory of God and concern for others. This is seen, for instance, when we compare Ephesians 4:1 with verse 2.

Summary

The fact that the whole of Scripture hangs on these two commands means that *the rest of Scripture is God's commentary* on these two responsibilities and provides us with the means, manner, motive, and method. The other commands are never the end or goal in themselves, but find their meaning and purpose in these two—love for God and love for men who are made in the image of God.

Morality without the knowledge of God and the absolutes of Scripture cannot long exist. Morality must be founded on the reality of God and the absolutes of the Bible or society will crumble like Humpty Dumpty. And apart from God, it can't be put back together again.

Our passage in Mark 12:28-31 (and its parallel in Matthew 22:37-40) stress the necessity of a heart relationship with God through the Word of God. Love for others can only grow out of the soil of love for God as it is fed and watered by fellowship with God in the streams of the Word (cf. Ps. 1:2). Without this, you and I will end up with a life that is pharisaic, external, sterile, artificial, petty, critical, selfish, and lifeless. Or we will end up being dominated by the control of others. We will find ourselves submitting to please people or to avoid confrontation, but it will not be the product of love for either God or for others. Without fellowship with God, our actions of love, if we have any, will be full of hypocrisy and self-centered goals (Rom. 12:9).

There is, therefore, in these two passages, Mark 12:28-31 and Matthew 22:37-40, the principle of VISION. Vision means seeing as God sees and allowing that sight to direct our path. Having such vision leads to devotion to God, but to have vision we must start with His precious Word and our relationship with Him.

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Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

God wants his people to be set apart by their love for him and for one another. Is it not true, however, that differences between the Old and New Testaments mean that God wanted something quite different in this regard from Old

Testament Israel? How else can we explain the Old Testament focus on Palestine, circumcision, and sacrifices? An analogy to parenting is instructive. When parents ask different things of their children at different stages in their development, it does not mean that the parents' ultimate desires for their children are constantly changing. When my children were toddlers, I blocked their access to electrical outlets and warned that they must never touch them. As they grew older, I removed the plastic protectors and taught the children that it is OK to stick appliance plugs into the outlets, but they must never remove the faceplate. Now that they are becoming adults, I am teaching them that it is appropriate to switch off the circuit breaker, remove the faceplate, detach wires, and install a new outlet when the old one needs to be replaced. Though I have taught my children three different ways of relating to electrical outlets, what I have wanted of them from the beginning has never changed.

Practical Points from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator

1. When we hate others, it hardens us to God's love (Lev. 19:18)
2. Just as God is one God, so He should always be number one in our lives (Deut. 6:4)
3. Experiencing God's love makes us want to share it with those around us (vss. 5-7)
4. Loving God means we should always seek His will and not our own (Mark 12:28-30)
5. As we love others, we reflect God's love for us (vs. 31)
6. Kind deeds to others do not replace the need to love God first (vss. 32-33)
7. When we recognize the importance of loving God, we often seek to serve Him better (vs. 34)