

The Greatest Commandments

29 November, 2009

By Rev. Lonny R. Bower

Scripture Reference – Deuteronomy 6:4-5; Matthew 22:34-38; Leviticus 19:15-18; Matthew 22:39-40; Luke 10:25-37

Unit Theme: “The Gospel Fulfills the Law”

Central Truth: The demonstration of our love for God is born out in our daily lives as we live in obedience to His commands.

Focus: Consider God’s greatest commandments and make loving God and others the priority of our Christian walk.

Key Verse: Luke 10:27

Introduction:

The thing that defines us most, even more than our words, is our actions. It is easy to claim something with our lips, but entirely different to live it out in our lives. The Commandments weren’t given to us by God so that we could simply nod our heads and agree with them. On the contrary, they were given to us so that we would demonstrate them as we live our lives. Apart from the love of God, we would never understand the Commandments, for they are a demonstration of His love toward us. Remove God’s love and there would be no Commandments, conversely take away our love for God and following the Commandments becomes impossible! Therefore love is both the source of the Commandments and enabler for obedience to them. First, we need to have a revelation of God’s love for us, then and only then will we be able to love Him in return. The demonstration of our love for Him is born out in our daily lives as we live in obedience to His commands. So then, loving God proves to be more than just saying, “I love you Lord,” but the actual proof of our words is captured in whether or not we live in joyful obedience to His commands – oh my, what a wretched man I am...Lord help me to love you more.

I. Love God Supremely – Deuteronomy 6:4-5; Matthew 22:34-38

Deuteronomy 6:4, 5 is known as the *shâma’* [שמע] taken from the first word of verse 4 “Hear”.

Of course, the Hebrew meaning is far deeper than our English definition of the word ‘hear’, it carries with it the necessity of obedience. James captured it best when he said, “don’t be hearers only...but be doers” (James 1:22). Jesus recognized and rightly proclaimed it as the first and greatest commandment because failure in this one, will lead to failure in all. The nation of Israel quickly lost the favor and blessings of God because they simply stopped loving Him as He commanded. Their failure caused a chain reaction that adversely affected them as a nation of God’s chosen people and it was irreversible – the judgment of God. If we have any hope of living in obedience to God’s commands we must first, before anything else, love God with everything within us – heart mind and soul. Doing this makes the rest not only possible but easy

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and enjoyable. Jesus said in John 14:15, “If you love me, keep my commandments.” John would later say, “For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome.” (1 John 5:3).

➤ **Think about it:**

How would you define your love for God?

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“You wish to hear from me why and how God is to be loved? My answer is: the reason for loving God is God himself, and the measure in which we should love Him is to love Him without measure.” – Bernard of Clairvaux

II. Love Your Neighbor – Leviticus 19:15-18; Matthew 22:39-40

What kind of world would we live in if everyone truly took this commandment to heart? I suspect it would be quite different than the one we know. We will never be able to love our neighbor as our self if we first do not love God. The Lord established this order so that we would be able to love – everyone. Regardless of the sin in their lives, their race or their lack of love toward us, if we love God with all our heart soul and strength we will experience so much of His love in return that it will overflow out of our lives and infect those around us. I have found that man’s love is conditional, we often expect change or some other element prior to offering our love – our love is conditional. However, living this way reveals that we do not know God or His love. His love toward us is unconditional in that while we were still sinners He loved us so much that He left His glory, became a common man, and died for us (**Romans 5:8**). He did not wait for us to become righteous before demonstrating His love. We cannot love God and hate people; our love for God is in fact demonstrated by loving others. Love is what sets us apart from everyone else in the world, love defines and reveals to whom we belong – “By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” (**John 13:35**).

➤ **Think about it:**

In what ways can you demonstrate your love for God to the people around you?

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“I think love is the only spiritual power that can overcome the self-centeredness that is inherent in being alive. Love is the thing that makes life possible, or, indeed, tolerable.” – Arnold Toynbee

III. Everyone Is My Neighbor – Luke 10:25-37

It is part of the human nature to manipulate things for ones personal advantage. The command was to love ones neighbor as oneself. In an attempt to avoid the fulfillment of this command, man put limitations on the definition of ‘neighbor’. In fact I would go as far to say that he decided who his neighbor was by whom he naturally loved – those whom I love are my neighbor. Living by this interpretation would make it impossible to break the commandment to love ones neighbor. However, Jesus would raise the bar and reveal the intent of His words, “Love thy neighbor as thyself.” – everyone is my neighbor. This caused immediate problems for the religious people of Jesus’ day and it still does today. If I love my doctrine, more than God, if I do not love everyone as God loves me, then how can the love of the God I claim to serve, be in me? This is the moral dilemma that the teacher and those who agreed with him found themselves in. Jesus gave them a living example of a Samaritan (of all people) whose very life was the epitome of love – he did not talk about it, teach about it or debate over it, he simply demonstrated it, and will be forever known as the “Good Samaritan”.

➤ **Think about it:**

Do you define love, or does love define you?

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“To love the whole world for me is no chore: My only real problem is my neighbor next door.” – C. W. Vanderbergh

Conclusion:

To love is a choice, we can choose to love God and demonstrate our love toward Him by keeping His commands and above all else loving others, or we can choose to pretend to love Him and though we experience His great love each and every day, never truly love Him in return. Of course the former is the preferred, God wants us to love Him, but He will not force us to. His love is vast, far beyond our understanding; He simply will never stop loving us. His love is eternal and even hell will not separate man from God's love (**Romans 8:35, 38-39**). Those who are in hell will ever be aware of God's love for them, their worse torment is not in the flames, brimstone or worms, it is in the knowledge that they had the opportunity to love God back, but instead chose to go their own way and define love instead of letting Divine Love define them. God is love and whoever does not love, does not know God (**1 John 4:8**). This is why Jesus gave the illustration of those who will say to Him in “that day”, “Lord did we not prophesy in your name and cast out demons in your name...” then the Lord will declare to them, “Depart from me for I never knew you.” The Kingdom of heaven is exclusive to those who do the will of the Father (**Matthew 7:21-23**). Those who know God, know His love and will through His love secure for themselves an eternal future where they will dwell in His love for eternity. So then, there are two classes of people in the world and thereby two ends, those who have knowledge of His love, and those who demonstrate His love. Where do you stand?

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Except where I have paraphrased all scripture is taken from the NKJV unless otherwise noted.

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Next Week's Lesson starts the Winter Quarter – The Major Prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel)

Responding to God's Call

- I. Awed by God's Majesty – Isaiah 6:1-4**
- II. Cleansed for Service – Isaiah 6:5-7**
- III. Commissioned to Serve – Isaiah 6:8-13**