

Are you all in?

Great Commandment, part 1
By Dr. Kenny Smith

When Jesus walked among men, He noted that there was one commandment that stood out from the rest. It was originally given to the nation of Israel through Moses at around 1406 BC, as recorded in Deuteronomy 6:4. The passage is an affirmation of the singularity of God and commands singular worship involving the whole self. Jewish liturgy labels the first line of the verse the *Shema*, and it is traditionally recited in a quiet manner to begin morning and evening prayers. This is where the practice of the Christian faith hinges. Jesus Christ deemed it so important that He labeled Deuteronomy 6:4-5 the *greatest* commandment.



The commandment says:

Hear O Israel: the LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength” (Deut. 6:4-5 NKJV).

Luke, in the New Testament tells of a time that Jesus had an encounter and exchange with a lawyer who posited and then answered a question.

“And behold, a certain lawyer stood up and tested him, saying, ‘Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?’ He (Jesus) said to him, ‘What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?’

So, he answered and said, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,’ and ‘your neighbor as yourself.’

And Jesus said to him, ‘You have answered rightly; do this and you will live’” (Luke 10:25-28 NKJV).

And if being the difference in life or death was not enough, in another account of this conversation recorded in Mark’s gospel (12:28-31) Jesus clearly labels this as the greatest commandment.

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?” Jesus answered him, “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. And the second, like it, is this: ‘You shall

*love your neighbor as yourself.' **There is no other commandment greater than these.*** (Mark 12:28-31 NKJ.)

Jesus makes absolutely clear that this commandment is the most important and that keeping it is an essential element for the abundant life He promised His followers. “The thief (devil) does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have *it* more abundantly” (John 10:10 NKJV). I am not saying that we must labor in keeping this commandment in order to be saved, because we can never keep it perfectly. Confessing to sin, and turning from our sin, and believing that Jesus is the Son of God—was crucified in our place, died, was buried, and then God restored His life after three days is the only path to salvation for eternity. What I am saying is that we can be saved and still miss out on blessings He has in store for us if we do not strive our absolute best to keep this commandment. I believe this is what Jesus meant when He told the lawyer, “do this and you will live.”

Note that in both Luke and Mark’s account Jesus adds something to the list Moses recorded in Deuteronomy 6:5—of things we are to love God with. The Old Testament text Mark and Luke reference in Deuteronomy does not mention “mind”, but Jesus adds it here, and for good reason. The ancient Hebrews did not differentiate between the heart and the mind; they were considered as one. But as human intellect advanced, at the time of Jesus’ life on earth, the Greeks had determined (correctly) that the center of thought was in the head and not the heart. But it is important to recognize that Jesus did not replace or substitute the heart for the mind, but rather He distinguished both as a legitimate part of the human existence—heart, soul, strength, and mind.

Our issue today is that the pace of life in current culture, both secular and religious, makes it hard to keep the Greatest Commandment as we should. Yet, Jesus clearly says to “do this and you will live”, so every Christian should make a point to lend all their effort to the task. The importance Jesus places on this passage suggests it would be wise to learn all we can about the commandment, then research and implement ways to keep it. We can begin by answering the question, “What does it mean to love with all our heart, soul, strength, and mind?” (Matt 22:26-38, Mark 12:30-31, Luke 10:25-38). Recognizing God as our sole and unique Creator is the starting point according to Deuteronomy 6:5. Generally, when practicing Jews recite the Shema the first line is followed by “Blessed is the name of His glorious kingdom for ever and ever,” and it is recited in an undertone. The reverence shown to this revelation and command is starkly portrayed in the Jewish tradition of how it is to be recited.

Each of these four areas of heart, soul, strength, and mind are given to us by God and are to be used as conduits of love toward Him. Some instructions on how best to accomplish the commandment follow in verses 6-9. Basically, Christians are to: Store the commandment in their heart, be sure and teach them to their children, talk about them regularly in their homes and when going about their daily business, think about them at the beginning and end of each day; keep a copy handy so you can look at it often, and conspicuously display them in your home.

All humans were created for the purpose of having a relationship with our Creator. Each of these regions of our being are designed for that relationship. These four areas of our human existence drive us

emotionally (heart), spiritually (soul), physically (strength), and intellectually (mind). All four make up the complete person and are required to be implemented in keeping the greatest commandment. God created humans for a purpose and equipped them to fulfill that purpose.

So, when it comes to living your best Christian life, the question is: Are you all in? If you call yourself a Christian and you want to walk closer to the Lord, the greatest commandment is not just a clever idea, it is a requirement. Jesus, God, expects Christians to earnestly seek to keep the greatest commandment so they can experience “life more abundantly.” The question Christians should ask themselves regularly is: “Am I prepared to do what it takes to follow the greatest commandment—to apply my whole self to the endeavor?” Followers of Jesus should then strive to direct *ALL* their love with *ALL* their being toward the One True God, every moment of every day! *(to be continued in part 2 of 3)*