

## Understanding, Discerning and Applying The Great Commandment

### **Text: Mark 12:28-31**

In Matthew 22:36 a lawyer asks the most serious question of the Lord Jesus: "Master, which *is* the great commandment in the law?" In Mark's gospel we are told it was a scribe who posed the question. We do not know if this is the same man or if these were separate occasions. In answer to this question, our Lord declared that loving God with heart, soul, mind and strength "...is the first and great commandment" (Matthew 22:38). In Greek, the word "first" comes to us from *protos* meaning "foremost in time, place, order or importance." It also means "before, best, chief." Mounce Dictionary of the Greek language says it means from above, from a higher place. Strong's lexicon says that *protos* is a "contracted superlative" of the preposition "pro." And grammatically, a superlative is an adjective that takes a comparison to the highest degree. The word our translators render "great" comes to us from the Greek *magas* meaning "big, greatest and mighty." This is where we receive our English word "mega" from. Jesus went on to say there was "...none other commandment greater..." (Mark 12:31b).

It is paramount that we understand that God has initiated His all-encompassing love to us. Jeremiah 31:3 says, "The LORD hath appeared of old unto me, *saying*, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee."

Romans 5:8; Ephesians 2:4, 5; I John 3:1

I John 4:19 says, "We love him, because he first loved us."

### I. THE OBJECT OF OUR LOVE

Deuteronomy 6:4: "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God *is* one LORD."  
Mark 12:29: "And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments *is*, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord."

We serve a BIG GOD! As Solomon was contemplating building God's house, in wonder he declared in I Kings 8:27, "But will God indeed dwell on the earth? behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house that I have builded?"

In Job 38:8-12 God declares that He has enclosed the seas of the earth. He also folds the clouds like a garment. He tells the oceans to only come so far and no farther through the tides. And as if almost in passing, God says He hold the stars in their place.

Scientists estimate that one inch of rain falling over an area of one square mile is equal to 17.4 million gallons of water. That much water would weigh 143 million pounds! And to think the God who created gravity, defies gravity and holds it in mid-air until He commands it to rain!

Isaiah 40:12 inquires, "Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, and meted out heaven with the span, and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance?"

I John 5:7: "For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one." Amazingly, this Triune God who is so large the universe itself cannot contain Him, has condescended to dwell in the believer's heart. John 17:26: "And I have declared unto them Thy name, and will declare it: that the love wherewith Thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them."

Ephesians 3:17-21 magnifies the importance of knowing this wonderful love of God and serves as a natural outline teaching us how we may love God through the Great Commandment. Ephesians 3:18: "May be able to comprehend with all saints what *is* the breadth, and length, and depth, and height."

## II. THE BREADTH OF OUR LOVE

Mark 12:30a: "And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart...." The Hebrew word for "heart" is translated from *lebab* which means "the most interior organ." It is alluded that this is where affection and courage are generated. The Greek word for "heart" is *kardia*, the place where thoughts and feelings arise. This love from the heart is much more than emotional; it is volitional. We do not depend on our feelings to drive our decisions - we are guided in and by the love of God. It is the outworking of His indwelling.

II Cor. 5:14a: "For the love of Christ constraineth us...." The English word "constraineth" is translated from *sunecho* meaning "to hold together." It also means "to arrest as a prisoner." Putting these two thoughts together we can say, the love of Christ has arrested me and by loving Him with my whole heart, I am held together. This is the opposite of a life that is unraveling and coming apart.

Ephesians 5:1, 2: "Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour." F. B. Meyer commenting on these verses said, "We are to imitate God's love in Christ. The love that gives, that counts no cost too great, and, in sacrificing itself for others, offers all to God, and does all for His sake. Such was the love of Jesus - sweet to God, as the scent of fields of new-mown grass in June; and this must be our model." At another place Meyer said, we should go to I Corinthians 13 and exchange the word for charity (love) and exchange "Jesus" in the place. This would encourage us to follow in the footsteps of His love.

Mark 12:31: "And the second *is* like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these." Do you notice how the Lord takes the two aspects of the Great Commandment and merges them as one commandment? When we love the Lord with all our heart, we will love our neighbor as ourselves.

## III. THE LENGTH OF OUR LOVE

Mark 12:30b: "...and with all thy soul...." We are to love the Lord our God with all our soul. The word "soul" comes to us from the Greek word *psuche* meaning "breath, i.e. the vital force that animates the body and shows itself in breathing." This is evidenced in Genesis 2:7: "And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man

became a living soul.” Basically, this is the personality of the individual. Everyone has their own unique personality. Our very existence as a result of the breath of God should dictate the length of our love, for all of our life, for all of eternity.

#### IV. THE DEPTH OF OUR LOVE

Mark 12:30b: “...and with all thy mind...” We are to love the Lord with all our mind. The word mind comes to us from the Greek word *dianoia* meaning “deep thought, the faculty of the imagination.” This is the New Testament addition, not mentioned in the Old Testament. Our Lord seems to be the one who added this way of loving Him with everything we have.

The Bible says in Proverbs 23:7a, “For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he...” The imagination is powerful. In Jeremiah 9:14a, the prophet laments that the people have disobeyed God: “...But have walked after the imagination of their own heart...” This was the epicenter of the beginning of the end of civilization of the Antediluvian world as shown to us in Genesis 6:5: “And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.” If we love the Lord with all our mind or imagination, could we not do the opposite of those who lived before the flood and by God’s grace serve the Lord continually and have an imagination thinking righteously continually?

#### V. THE HEIGHT OF OUR LOVE

We are to love the Lord with all our strength. The Greek word for strength is *ischus* which means “force, ability, might or power.”

When I was a teen struggling with the totally dedicated Christian life, a preschooler taught me in three words what was required. Her dad asked her, “Honey, how much do you love your daddy?” She replied, “All of it!” And that says it all.

There is a remarkable story found in I Kings 19:15-21. Elisha has been chosen by God to be the next great prophet of Israel. Elijah finds Elisha totally wrapped up in his farming business. Elijah passes by and symbolically throws his mantle over Elisha signifying the call of God as the next anointed prophet. Elisha knows what has happened and asks if he may go home, tell his parents good-bye and, in essence, get things arranged at home before following Elijah. Elijah tells him, “...Go back again: for what have I done to thee?” (I Kings 19:20c). In other words, it’s your choice, but remember, Elisha, it wasn’t me that called you; this was a message from God. So Elisha destroyed his line of oxen with which he used to make a living and gave the towns’ people steaks. He burned his bridges behind him. He was now determined to love God with all his strength or as Deuteronomy says, it “...with all his might.”

-Pastor Pope-