

## Introduction

In 1995, I was praying about my wife's upcoming birthday. I wanted to know if the Lord had a word of encouragement for her. The Lord gave me a word for me instead. He told me that this was the last page of this chapter of my life. I knew what that meant. I had just won the Tallahassee Open that year and we thought we would be playing golf for many more years, and would probably play on the Senior Tour one day. I clearly understood God's word to me, that 1996 would be my last year playing golf. God had something else for me to do. So, I began to ask God to show me what He had in mind, and He did exactly that. He told me to plant a church, and He gave me the vision for the church. The vision for the church was that we were to be a people that loved God with all of our heart and a church that loved our neighbor as ourselves. It was to be a relational church. In our vertical relationship, we were to love God. With our horizontal relationships, we were to love our neighbors. I made it pretty simple and called it the ABC's of the church. We were to love our Abba (A) Father, our Brothers (B) and sisters, and we were to reach out in love to those that did not know God, the Great Commission (C). In every church that I have planted, I have kept that vision.

The vision of the Connection Church of East Rome is based on the same command. We are a church that connects people with God and with one another. How do we connect with God and with one another? We connect through a loving relationship with God and one another. Paul said in 1 Timothy 1:5 that the goal of his instruction was love, and that is also my goal. I want to teach and encourage people to love God and one another.

(1 Ti 1:5) "But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith."

I do not believe there is a single thing that is more important than loving God with all of our heart. I try and encourage people to spend time with the Father. I encourage people to read their Bibles. I encourage people to pray. I encourage people to worship. I encourage people to obey God. I encourage people to honor God with their tithes and offerings. I encourage people to love God with all of their heart. If at the end of my ministry I have helped people love God more, then I will have carried out the Father's instructions to me.

As I was praying about what to teach during the last two weeks of February before I take a medical leave of absence, the Lord asked me a question. He said, "If these were your last two sermons you ever preached, what would you want to preach?" He did not say these were going to be the last two sermons that I would preach. He was asking me about what I considered the most important sermons that I know to preach. I said to Him, "I will preach on the two greatest commandments." So, this week we will be looking at the foremost commandment, which is to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. We will look at the context of the commandment, the greatest and foremost commandments, how the other commandments depend on this commandment, and at applications and evidences of keeping this commandment. Next week we will look at the second greatest commandment, which is to love our neighbor as ourself.

## The Foremost Commandment

1. Context of the commandment
2. The Greatest and Foremost Commandment
3. All Other Commandments
4. Applications and Evidences

(Mt 22:36–40) “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” {37} And He said to him, “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ {38} “This is the great and foremost commandment. {39} “The second is like it, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ {40} “On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.”

### 1. Context of the commandment

The Pharisees wanted to trap Jesus in what He said, and they sent some disciples, along with the Herodians, and asked Him about paying a poll-tax to Caesar. In Luke’s account, we read that they watched Jesus and sent spies who pretended to be righteous in order that they might catch Him in some statement, so that they could deliver Him to the rule and authority of the governor. They wanted the governor to do their dirty work and put Jesus to death. Large crowds of people were following Jesus, and He was doing many miraculous things, and they were envious. They also feared that they would lose some of their power and influence, so they wanted Jesus to be put away for good.

(Mt 22:15–17) “Then the Pharisees went and plotted together how they might trap Him in what He said. {16} And they sent their disciples to Him, along with the Herodians, saying, “Teacher, we know that You are truthful and teach the way of God in truth, and defer to no one; for You are not partial to any. {17} “Tell us then, what do You think? Is it lawful to give a poll-tax to Caesar, or not?”

(Lk 20:20) “So they watched Him, and sent spies who pretended to be righteous, in order that they might catch Him in some statement, so that they *could* deliver Him to the rule and the authority of the governor.”

The first trap that they tried was about paying taxes to Caesar. They sent some Pharisees and Herodians. Herodians were not liked by the Pharisees and Sadducees, but they teamed up with them because they knew the Herodians would welcome the opportunity to look good in the eyes of Herod. They asked Jesus whether it was okay to pay the poll tax or not. If He had answered yes, they were hoping that He would lose popularity and respect by the Jews, who did not like paying this tax to the Roman government. If Jesus answered no, the Herodians were there to report Him to Herod, who could arrest Him for insurrection and rebellion. In either case, the religious leaders thought they had Jesus trapped. Unfortunately for them, Jesus knew their hypocrisy and their motives. He also knew the way of escape from this trap. He asked them to bring Him a denarius, and then asked whose inscription was on it. They replied that it was Caesar, so Jesus told them to render to Caesar that which is Caesar’s and render to God that which is God’s. They were amazed that He had successfully avoided their trap.

(Mt 22:18–22) “But Jesus perceived their malice, and said, “Why are you testing Me, you hypocrites? {19} “Show Me the coin *used* for the poll-tax.” And they brought Him a denarius. {20} And He said to them, “Whose likeness and inscription is this?” {21} They said to Him, “Caesar’s.” Then He said to them, “Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s; and to God the things that are God’s.” {22} And hearing *this*, they were amazed, and leaving Him, they went away.”

The second trap was set by the Sadducees, who did not believe in the resurrection. They brought a hypothetical situation where a married man died without any children. His brother took his

wife as per Deuteronomy 25:5, but he too died and did not leave any children. There were seven brothers and they all married this woman, and all of them died without leaving any children. The Sadducees asked Jesus whose wife she would be in the resurrection. Again, Jesus was not taken by surprise by their question or their intent. He told them that they were greatly mistaken, which is a hard pill to swallow for a proud heart. Jesus explained to them that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob was not the God of the dead, but of the living. He also told them that when people rise from the dead they are like angels and are not given in marriage. Once again, Jesus had successfully navigated their test. Jesus had one final obstacle to tackle in our text, and that was the question presented by a scribe.

(Mt 22:23–32) “On that day *some* Sadducees (who say there is no resurrection) came to Jesus and questioned Him, {24} asking, “Teacher, Moses said, ‘If a man dies having no children, his brother as next of kin shall marry his wife, and raise up children for his brother.’ {25} “Now there were seven brothers with us; and the first married and died, and having no children left his wife to his brother; {26} so also the second, and the third, down to the seventh. {27} “Last of all, the woman died. {28} “In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife of the seven will she be? For they all had *married* her.” {29} But Jesus answered and said to them, “You are mistaken, not understanding the Scriptures nor the power of God. {30} “For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. {31} “But regarding the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was spoken to you by God: {32} ‘I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’? He is not the God of the dead but of the living.”

When the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered themselves together. This is the Sanhedrin Council that was made up of seventy Pharisees and Sadducees. This was like halftime at a football game. They went into the locker room and decided what game plan they were going to come out with for the second half. Only in this case, there was only going to be one more question asked of Jesus.

(Mt 22:34) “But when the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered themselves together.”

The third trap was about the great and foremost commandment. Why did the Sanhedrin Council want the scribe to ask this particular question? This was another trap, so what was the purpose of this trap? For both the Pharisees and Sadducees, the Shema in Deuteronomy 6 was the most important law given. If Jesus did not give this particular answer, He could be discredited by all the Jews. Furthermore, these religious leaders felt that they could then turn Him over to the civil authorities as a new sect leader and threat to Caesar. In Mark 11:18, we see that their goal was to destroy Jesus.

(Mt 22:35–36) “One of them, a lawyer, asked Him *a question*, testing Him, {36} “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?”

(Mk 11:18) “The chief priests and the scribes heard *this*, and *began* seeking how to destroy Him; for they were afraid of Him, for the whole crowd was astonished at His teaching.”

The context of learning about the greatest commandment came in a series of questions designed to trap Jesus and get him put away by authorities, and to be discredited by the Jews.

**2. The Greatest and Foremost Commandment**

When asked by a lawyer or scribe about the great commandment in the Law, Jesus responded by saying, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and foremost commandment.” It was not just the great (megas, Strong’s G3173), but it was the foremost (protos, Strong’s G4413) commandment. Protos means the first in time, place, order, or importance. Jesus said it was not just a big commandment, but it was the most important priority in our lives.

(Mt 22:37–38) “And He said to him, “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ {38} “This is the great and foremost commandment.”

In the business world, we try to focus on the priorities of the business. We do not want to spend time on things that do not produce revenue; we try to minimize those activities. Accountants, lawyers, and other professionals focus on billable hours. The priority for all of us is to love God. We should minimize other activities and prioritize our relationship with God.

I often find that people find other things to do on Sundays that interfere with participating in church. It reveals that these other activities have a higher priority in their life than meeting with the Lord and His people. Our relationship and our worship of God must be the highest priority in our life.

Jesus responded to the question about the greatest command by quoting the Shema from Deuteronomy 6:4-5, “Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.”

(Dt 6:4–5) “Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one! {5} “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.”

In Mark’s account, he records, “The foremost is, ‘Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’”

(Mk 12:29–30) “Jesus answered, “The foremost is, ‘Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is one Lord; {30} and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’”

<b>Deuteronomy</b>	<b>Matthew</b>	<b>Mark</b>	<b>Luke</b>
Heart	Heart	Heart	Heart
Soul	Soul	Soul	Soul
Might		Strength	Strength
	Mind	Mind	Mind

There is a slight difference in the three gospel accounts and Deuteronomy. In Deuteronomy, we are to love God with all our heart, soul, and might. In Matthew’s account, we are told to love God with all our heart, soul, and mind. Might or strength is not mentioned, but mind is added. In Mark and Luke’s accounts, we are to love the Lord with all our heart, soul, strength, and mind.

The Hebrew word for soul is *nephesh*, which means breath or life. The Greek word for soul is *psuche* (Strong's G5590), which comes from *psucho* (Strong's G5594), which means breath or life. We are to love the Lord with all of our breath or life. Typically, we think of the soul being comprised of our mind, emotions, and will. That would be supported by 1 Thessalonians 5:23, where Paul prayed that the Thessalonians would be sanctified entirely, and that their spirit and soul and body be preserved complete. Our lives would consist of our spirit, soul, and body. Our body would be our physical body. Our spirit would be our capacity to know and hear from God, and our soul would be our mind, emotions, and will.

(1 Thess 5:23) “Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Our heart refers to many different things in the Scriptures.

- **Seat of our affections.** In Psalm 62:10, we are not to set our heart on riches if they increase.
- **Seat of our intellect.** Genesis 6:5 says, “every inclination of the thoughts of his heart.” It is obviously the place where our thoughts originate. In Luke 2:19, Mary treasured the things told by the shepherds, and was pondering them in her heart. Again, the heart was where these thoughts were originating.
- **Seat of our will.** In Psalm 119:2, we are to “seek him with all our heart.” This refers to our will. It is a choice we make. In Hebrews 4:12, we read about the thoughts and intentions of the heart. The intentions speak of our will.
- **Seat of our emotions.** In Genesis 6:6, “the Lord was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and he was grieved in His heart.” We see that the heart can be broken (Ps 34:18), bitter (Ezek 27:31), discouraged (Nu 32:7-9), astonished (Dt 28:28), glad (Dt 28:47), heavy (Pr 12:25), merry (Pr 15:15, and full of joy (Job 29:13). These are all emotions and deep feelings of the heart.
- **Character of a person.** Sometimes the word heart is referring to the character of a person, whether good or bad. In Luke 8:15, we read about an honest and good heart. Paul wrote about teaching from a pure heart in 1 Timothy 1:5. Solomon wrote about a deceitful and desperately wicked heart in Pr 22:20. There is a froward and proud heart (Ps 101:4-5), stubborn and are rebellious (Jer 5:23), and a wise heart. (Job 9:4) These all refer to a person's nature, character, or reputation.
- **Core, Center, or Middle.** In Psalm 46:2 we are told that we should not fear even if the earth should change or the mountains slip into the heart of the sea. The heart of the sea means the middle of the sea. It is not talking about the coast, but into the depths of the sea.

The significance of this is that we are to love God with our mind, emotions, and our will. The heart and soul are used almost synonymously. I believe that we are to love God with our total being, everything within us. We do not have an intellectual love of God or just an emotional love of God. We intentionally love God. We use our minds in loving God. We study, memorize, and

meditate on God’s word. We study to show ourselves approved by God as workmen, who rightly divide the word of God.

(2 Ti 2:15 KJV) “Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.”

We express our emotions in our love to God. We pour out our hearts to the Lord. We rejoice and celebrate before Him. I don’t think David would have been sipping lattes during worship; he would have been dancing and singing with all his might.

(2 Sa 6:14–15) “And David was dancing before the Lord with all *his* might, and David was wearing a linen ephod. {15} So David and all the house of Israel were bringing up the ark of the Lord with shouting and the sound of the trumpet.”

We love God with all our strength and might. Some things that God asks us to do require much effort, so we will love God with all our strength. Noah did not have power tools, and yet he built an incredible ark. It took a lot of strength and might to build that ark. We love God with our whole being, and I believe that this is what Moses, Matthew, Mark, and Luke all tried to capture.

(Ge 6:14–22) “Make for yourself an ark of gopher wood; you shall make the ark with rooms, and shall cover it inside and out with pitch.... {22} Thus Noah did; according to all that God had commanded him, so he did.”

### 3. All Other Commandments

When asked about the greatest commandment, Jesus gave the great and foremost commandment. Then He said, “The second is like it, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.” We will cover the second commandment next week, but I want to take a quick look at Jesus’ statement, “On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.” Jesus has quoted from Deuteronomy, and God gave lots of commandments about our relationship with God and how we are to interact with others. If we look at all the various commandments, they are built on these two greatest commandments. These two commandments are the foundation of all the other commandments. In the ten commandments, which is a condensed version of all the other commandments, the first four commandments pertain to our relationship with God. We are to have no other gods before the Lord. We are not to make idols. We are not to take the name of the Lord in vain. Fourth, we are to keep the Sabbath day holy. The remaining six commandments pertain to our relationships with one another. We are to honor our father and mother. We are not to murder, commit adultery, steal, bear false witness against our neighbor, or to covet.

(Mt 22:39–40) “The second is like it, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ {40} “On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.”

When we love God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength we will not have other gods before the Lord or make idols, or take His name in vain. We will also keep the Sabbath day holy. When we love our neighbor, we will not murder them, steal from them, bear false witness against them, or covet what they have. When we love our neighbor, we will treat them with honor and respect, and this is learned at home, where we are to honor our father and mother. All of the commandments are built on the foundation of loving God and loving one another.

#### 4. Applications and Evidences of loving God

In Revelation 2, God rebuked the church of Ephesus for leaving their first love, which is to love God with all their heart, mind, soul, and strength. He told them to repent and do the deeds they did at first or He would remove their lampstand. What were the deeds they did at first? What were the evidences that God was looking for in their lives?

(Re 2:4–5) “But I have *this* against you, that you have left your first love. {5} Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place—unless you repent.”

##### A. Knowing God

The first evidence would be getting to know God, which implies spending time with the Lord. When you are in love with someone, you will want to spend time with them. You will want to get to know the person. There will be intimacy and open communication.

In Psalm 27, David said that he asked from the Lord, and was seeking, to dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of his life. He wanted to spend as much time as he could with the Lord. In verse eight, he said, “When You said, ‘Seek My face,’ my heart said to You, Your face, O Lord, I shall seek.” David loved God and wanted to spend time and know God even more. It is interesting that the Lord had told David to seek His face. God wants relationship with all of us and calls all of us to seek His face.

(Ps 27:4–8) “One thing I have asked from the Lord, that I shall seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord and to meditate in His temple....{8} *When You said*, “Seek My face,” my heart said to You, “Your face, O Lord, I shall seek.”

In Micah 6:8, God gave three things that are good and that He requires of us. We are to do justice, love kindness, and to walk humbly with God. He wants relationship with us. I love what it says about Enoch, that he walked with God, and was not, for God took him. God wants fellowship and time with all of us, which is what walking facilitates.

(Mic 6:8) “He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?”

(Ge 5:24) “Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him.”

When I met Karen, she would go watch me hit balls in the field, or practice my short game at a local course. She wanted to be with me. I also wanted to be with her, and looked for opportunities for us to be together. We took long walks together, and we cherished our time walking and talking. Both of us still look for opportunities to do things together. Why? Because when you love someone, you will spend time with the person. In the same way, when someone receives Christ, there is a desire to spend time with the Lord. The apostle Paul said he counted all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, and he counted everything rubbish so that he could gain Christ. It is very clear that Paul wanted to know Christ, and it was the highest priority in his life.

(Php 3:8) “More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ.”

## B. Honoring God

A second evidence of loving God is honoring Him. There are many ways to honor God. In Psalm 50:23, the Lord tells us that our sacrifices of thanksgiving honor Him. He is also honored by living lives that honor Him. In Proverbs 3:9-10, we are told to honor the Lord with our wealth and our first fruits. Our tithes and offerings honor Him. Our praise and worship should honor Him. Everything that we do in our life should honor him.

(Ps 50:23) “He who offers a sacrifice of thanksgiving honors Me; and to him who orders *his way aright* I shall show the salvation of God.”

(Pr 3:9) “Honor the Lord from your wealth and from the first of all your produce;

If I were to say things that dishonor my wife, she would have good reason to believe that I do not love her. You do not dishonor those that you love; you honor them. I want people to think the very best of my wife, and I honor her in front of others.

In our prayer times, we are to begin our prayers by praising and honoring Him. Jesus taught the disciples to begin with “Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed by Thy name.” He taught them end their prayers with praise, “For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.” In the Psalms we are taught to enter His gates with thanksgivings and His courts with praise. When you love someone, it is only natural to honor them.

(Mt 6:9–13) “Pray, then, in this way: ‘Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name.... For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.’”

(Ps 100:4) “Enter His gates with thanksgiving *And* His courts with praise. Give thanks to Him, bless His name.”

One of the more difficult things that I have done is to help people learn to honor God in their prayers. Many people just want to tell God what they want Him to do for them, and that is all that is on their mind. When I tell them to spend five minutes honoring God with thanksgiving and praises, they have a difficult time doing that. While some of it is lack of training and practice, some of it reflects the state of their relationship with God. When you love someone, it is only natural to honor them.

## C. Obedience to God

Another evidence of loving God with all our heart is obedience. In John 14:21, Jesus said, “He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him.” If we love God, we will be obedient to Him and keep His commandments.



(Jn 14:21) “He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him.”

#### **D. Love for God’s Word**

When a person loves God, they will love His word. God’s word is one of the primary ways that God speaks to us. There are many ways He speaks with us, but His word is the primary way. Jesus said that a mark of a disciple is to abide or continue in God’s word. Jesus said His disciples will know the truth, and the truth would set them free. If we are loving God, we will love His word.

(Jn 8:31–32) “So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, “If you continue in My word, *then* you are truly disciples of Mine; {32} and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.”

Young Christians will also have a love of God’s word. They need milk, rather than meat, but they will have a longing for God’s word. Peter encouraged the believers to long for the pure milk of the word, so that they could grow. This longing should be a natural thing.

(1 Pe 2:2–3) “like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation, {3} if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord.”

In Psalm 119, the psalmist shared his delight in God’s commandments, which he loved. He meditated on God’s statutes. He said, “O how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day.” That should be the declaration of every believer. If we love God, we should also love His word.

(Ps 119:47–48, 97) “I shall delight in Your commandments, which I love. {48} And I shall lift up my hands to Your commandments, which I love; and I will meditate on Your statutes. {97} O how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day.”

When I became a Christian, a man named Jim share with me some steps in how to grow as a Christian. He told me that I needed to read my Bible. I did not know that and had never read my Bible on my own. I began reading Proverbs, and I fell in love with God’s word. It has been a joy and delight to me ever since.

#### **E. Practices righteousness (will not practice sin)**

The book of first John gives evidences of a true believer. One of the evidences is that the children of God practice righteousness. No one born of God practices sin. Our lives are to be different than the lives of unbelievers. When someone looks at our lives, it should be obvious that we are believers.

(1 Jn 3:9–10) “No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. {10} By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother.”

When a person becomes a new believer, their lives may resemble their old life for a while, but their lives should be changing. The old things are passing away and new things are coming, because they are a new creation. Their old way of life was buried, and they have been raised up to a new life. The path of the righteous is like the light of dawn that grows brighter and brighter until the full day. The changes in our life should be obvious to those who know us, and when comparing our lives to unbelievers, it should be obvious to others that we are believers because we practice righteousness.

(2 Co 5:17) “Therefore if anyone is in Christ, *he is* a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.”

(Ro 6:3–4) “Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? {4} Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.”

(Pr 4:18) “But the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, That shines brighter and brighter until the full day.”

#### **F. Will not love the world**

God tells us that that we are not to love the world and the things in the world. He said if we love the world, the Father is not in us. If we love God, then we will not love the world, and the things of the world. Our heart, passion, zeal, and affections will be on God, not worldly things.

(1 Jn 2:15) “Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.”

#### **G. Will love his brother**

Another evidence of loving God is that we will love our brother. Joh wrote that if someone says they love God, but hate their brother, they are a liar. If we do not love our brother, who we can see, we cannot love God, who we cannot see. Loving our brother is very important evidence that we love God with all our heart.

(1 Jn 4:20–21) “If someone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. {21} And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also.”

I have heard many people tell me that they love God, and their relationship with Him is great. It is people that they have a problem with. Some do not go to church because they don't want to be around other Christians. The scripture is clear, if we love God, we are going to love our brother. We should love our brother by laying our lives down for one another. John wrote, “We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.” I have found that when you serve other people, it is not too difficult to get along with them. Very few people reject people that are serving and helping them.

(1 Jn 3:16) “We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.”

### **Conclusion and Applications**

Loving God is not just the greatest command, it is the foremost, meaning it should be our highest priority.

God’s desire for all of us is that we love Him with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength. He wants us to love Him with our total being. He wants us to love Him with our mind, emotions, will, and strength. One of my favorite words is enthusiasm. It comes from two Greek words, en + theos, meaning possessed by God. Believers should be enthusiastic and passionate, and this should be manifested in their love for God.

There are many evidences of our love of God. If we love God with all our heart, we will spend time with Him and worship Him. We will converse with Him, sharing our heart with Him, and listening to Him. We will read and meditate on His word, and be obedient to His commands. We will honor Him with our lives, our words, and our finances. We will not love the world or the things of the world. If we love God, we will also love our brother, which is the second greatest commandment, which we will look at next week.

### **Closing prayer**

Father God, thank You for Your love. We love because You first loved us. Help us to grow in our love for You, and to prioritize our time with You and in Your word. Our desire is to love You with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength. Help us to be passionate in our love for you. Help us to honor You in all that we do and say. May we live righteously, and may our lives give testimony and evidence to the world that we are Your disciples. We pray this in Jesus’ name. Amen.

## The Greatest and Foremost Commandment – Love God

**Introduction** (1 Ti 1:5, Mt 22:36-38)

1. **Context of the commandment** (Mt 22:15–40, Lk 20:20, Mk 11:18)
  
2. **The Greatest and Foremost Commandment** (Mt 22:37–38, Dt 6:4–5, Mk 12:29-30, 1 Thess 5:23, 2 Tim 2:15, 2 Sa 6:14-15, Ge 6:14-22)

### Heart

- **Seat of our affections.** (Ps 62:10)
- **Seat of our intellect.** (Ge 6:5, Lk 2:19)
- **Seat of our will.** (Ps 119:2, He 4:12)
- **Seat of our emotions.** (Ge 6:6, Ps 34:18, Ez 27:31, Nu 32:7-9, Dt 28:28, 28:47, Pr 12:25, 15:15, Job 29:13)
- **Character of a person.** (Lk 8:15, Pr 22:20, Ps 101:4-5, Jer 5:23, Job 9:4)
- **Core, Center, or Middle.** (Ps 46:2)

3. **All Other Commandments** (Mt 22:39–40, Ex 20:3-17)

4. **Applications and Evidences of loving God** (Re 2:4–5)

- A. **Knowing God** (Ps 27:4-8, Mic 6:8, Ge 5:24, Php 3:8)
- B. **Honoring God** (Ps 50:23, Pr 3:9, Mt 6:9-13, Ps 100:4)
- C. **Love for God’s Word** (Jn 8:31–32, 1 Pe 2:2–3, Ps 119:47–48, 97)
- D. **Obedience to God** (Jn 14:21)
- E. **Practices righteousness (will not practice sin)** (1 Jn 3:9–10, 2 Co 5:17, Ro 6:3-4, Pr 4:18)
- F. **Will not love the world** (1 Jn 2:15)
- G. **Will love his brother** (1 Jn 4:20–21, 3:16)

### Conclusion and Applications