

The Great Commandment

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Table of Contents

Table of Contents	2
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By Uriah Smith

IN *Matthew 22:35-40*, we have the record of an interview between Christ and a certain lawyer who came to him tempting him, and saying, "Master, which is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." *GRCO 1.1*

The words, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart," etc., are quoted from *Deuteronomy 6:5*; and the words, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself," from *Leviticus 19:18*. The first, Christ calls the "first and great commandment;" and the other, the "second" commandment; and these are commandments "in the law;" but because Christ does not quote from the decalogue, some would argue that therefore the decalogue is not in any pre-eminent and special sense the "law of God." *GRCO 1.2*

"The lawyer asked only one question, namely, "which is the great commandment in the law?" In his answer, Christ goes beyond the question, and thus gives us to understand that he covers the whole subject involved therein. Thus he tells which is the "great" commandment, and then imparts the additional information that this is the "first," and that to the system there belongs another which is the "second;" and that this second is like unto the first; namely, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself;" that is, it embraces the same great principle of love, only giving it another direction. In the first, our love is directed toward God; in the second, our love is directed toward our neighbor. And these two principles embrace the whole of the law of which he speaks; for if there had been a third, the logic of the situation would have compelled him to state it. *GRCO 1.3*

The duty of loving God, therefore, and loving our fellow men, is the subject which he treats in answering the lawyer's question. But in stating these principles he does not quote from the decalogue? Very true; but have they therefore no connection with the decalogue? — No, says the objector, they are quoted from the law

of Moses. But the law of Moses was abolished at, and by, the death of Christ. Were these principles abolished? Could they for a moment cease to exist? How any one could ever suppose these principles were nailed to the cross, is a mystery to us; and why they should so claim is equally strange. Think of it! nailing to the cross the principles of love to God and love to man, and blotting them out as something “against us,” “contrary to us!” *Colossians 2:14*. The idea is preposterous.*GRCO 1.4*

What, then, is the relation of these principles to the decalogue? — They are simply a summary of the two tables. Take the principle of love to God, and let any man try to formulate this into specific commandments, and we challenge him to do it with anything less than the first four commandments of the decalogue, or to show that anything more is required. We are to give to God the supreme position, caricature him by no images or idols, hallow his sacred name, and devote his time, the holy Sabbath, to such uses as he specifies. When we love him with all the heart, we shall do these things. To do less is to come short, and it is not within the range of possibility to do more. And, conversely, when we do all these things from the heart, in that spirit which alone constitutes true obedience, then we love him with all the heart. And so with the second principle — love to our neighbor; the moment we try to carry that out into specific duties, we find ourselves writing down the last six commandments of the decalogue. We cannot do less, and we cannot go beyond them; for these cover all the social relations and duties of life.*GRCO 2.1*

We have, then, before us these two great facts: 1. When we attempt to enunciate the primary duties involved in the two great principles of “love to God” and “love to man,” by inexorable necessity we are confined to an enunciation of the ten commandments; for nothing else will express them; and, 2. Having stated the ten commandments, there we are compelled to stop; for these higher duties, comprehending all lesser ones of the same kind, cover the whole ground.*GRCO 2.2*

Here love has a field which is all its own. It may be illustrated by the following diagram:—

(TO GOD. — *First Four Commandments.*

LOVE (

(TO MAN. — *Last Six Commandments.*

The principles evolved into these commandments, cover every relation and every obligation possible to the human family, outside of those duties and services which have been made necessary by the advent of sin. Why men — we will not say, *cannot* — but why they *will not*, see that here is a class of relations and obligations as different in their nature, and as distinct, from the secondary duties growing out of man's changed relation to God when he became a sinner, as light is from darkness, is something we will not attempt to explain, but so it is. *GRCO 2.3*

Now when God came down upon Sinai to declare his will in the ears of men, he did not limit himself to a statement of the two great principles of love to God and love to man, but stated the specific duties involved in those principles. But the principles, clad in the panoply of eternal immutability, lay back of them, and existed with them in their high position of honor and authority throughout the Mosaic dispensation, as they had existed before. This being the case, is it anything strange that Moses should have occasion to mention them frequently in connection with the system of which he was minister? It would be strange if he had not. But such mention did not make them a part of his system, did not transform them into shadows, to meet their substance in Christ (*Colossians 2:17*), did not render them weak and unprofitable principles which it was necessary for Christ to annul. *Hebrews 7:18*. It makes no matter, therefore, from what portion of the Old Testament Christ quoted his statements. That does not change their nature, nor destroy the fact that they are but an embodiment of the ten commandments themselves. *GRCO 3.1*

But further, our Lord was careful to state the relation which these principles bear to the commandments, by immediately adding, "On these two commandments hang all the law." the word *kremannumi* being defined "to hang upon, to be referable to," as an ultimate principle. *Matthew 22:40*. — Bagster. *GRCO 3.2*

We ask the reader now to consider what answer Christ could have given, other than he did, to the lawyer's question. The question called for a statement of the highest and most sacred principle involved in law. This at once takes us into the realm of moral duties, which stand first in the list of obligations, and into those duties which we owe to God, which are the highest of this class. But, says the antinomian, if the ten commandments are the law of God, why did not Christ quote from the decalogue? — For the very obvious reason that it would be entirely wrong to discriminate between laws which come under the same principle; but, as we have seen, there are four which come under the principle of love to God, and six which belong to the principle of love to man. To quote any one of these alone would be but a partial and imperfect presentation of the subject. What does he do? — He takes the four commandments which specify our duty to God, sums them up into the grand principle out of which they all grow, and to which they all equally belong, — love to God, — and says that this is the first and great commandment. Then he takes the last six, sums them up into the principle, love to our neighbor, secondary only to the other, and says that that is the second. This covers the whole ground, and includes just the decalogue, nothing more. How beautiful and sublime was Christ's answer! It was a tenfold stronger testimony for the decalogue than it would have been if he had confined himself to any one of its single precepts.*GRCO 3.3*

The typical services of the Mosaic system, and of all ages before Christ, were only secondary duties growing out of a violation on man's part of his moral obligations. All the duties peculiar to the gospel are of the same nature. And in one sense the prophecies also hang upon these two great principles, as they are but a declaration of the ways in which God has purposed to work to bring all things into harmony with these at last, gathering out and removing all things which are contrary to them, as offenses which cannot be tolerated in his kingdom.*GRCO 4.1*

That Christ had no reference to the law or Moses is evident from the order in which he brings these principles to view, calling love to God the first, and love to man the second. In the books of Moses they are not so given, and have no such enumeration. There, the declaration, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself," was given

first, and thirty-nine years before the other words, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God,” etc., were spoken. This shows that these words were only a commentary through Moses to Israel upon the moral law, which God had given them, or a summing up of their principles, just as Christ mentions them. But Christ gives their order and relative importance.*GRCO 4.2*

James comments upon this same subject, and says that the law, “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself,” is the royal law; and then he shows that this law consists of particulars, two of which he quotes: “Do not commit adultery,” and “Do not kill,” thus demonstrating the fact that he refers to the decalogue, by bringing forward two of its precepts. *James 2:8, 11*. This law is to judge men at the last, however much they may seek to evade it now. *Verse 12*. And when face to face with that law, before the bar of God, they seek to plead the excuses by which they now justify a violation of its claims, the guilt of their course and the despair of their souls will make them speechless.*GRCO 4.3*

