



"Wherever bitterness is, there love is wanting. And where love is wanting in the married life, there is hell upon earth."

—Adam Clarke

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## **You Shall Love Your Neighbor (Part One)**

[Jesus](#) had just confounded the Sadducees' question concerning marriage in the resurrection, and their rivals, the Pharisees, were probably gloating at their discomfort. Now it was the Pharisees' turn to try to ensnare Jesus. They sought to find the most difficult question that they themselves disputed over and proposed to make Him squirm by asking it of Him.

They selected a lawyer, that is, a scribe well-versed in the law of [Moses](#), to do the asking. The lawyer had heard Jesus reasoning with the Sadducees and putting them to silence, and the Pharisees probably believed that the lawyer was better equipped to confound Jesus with a truly difficult question. The lawyer's job was to probe His understanding of the law, an area in which they thought He was weak.

The problem with the Pharisees is that they never grasped the simplicity of the law, much less the spirit of it, but gnashed at it, picked at it, and dissected it with the intent of being thought righteous because of their intellect. In doing so, they missed what [God](#) intended in giving the law. To see it from God's point of view would require change, and indeed, that could be a frightening thing.

"Then one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, and saying, 'Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?'" ([Matthew 22:35-36](#)). When one considers the Pharisees' penchant for nitpicking rather than acting from the heart, we can see how endless discussions and arguments could take place over this question. As it had stumped them, they felt it would surely befuddle Him.

The Jews had divided the commandments into greater and lesser commandments. In addition, the Pharisees were polarized in different camps, divided in their opinions regarding washings and other purification rites, laws of sacrifice and offering, circumcision, etc. In short, they were focused on twigs, missing the entire forest.

So, to ask Jesus which was the greatest commandment, a question they could not agree upon, seemed to be the ultimate way of drawing Him into their endless arguments. More than that, they figured it would finally put Him down in the eyes of the people.

In His answer, Jesus does not hesitate a bit, cutting through all the chaff and endless arguing, and placed the correct answer before them: "Jesus said to him, "'You shall [love](#) the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.'" This is the first and great commandment" ([Matthew 22:37-38](#)).

In effect, He says we are to love our God with the entirety of our being, more than the pleasures [Satan](#) sets before us, more than the individual escapes we run to when we are tired or down, more than the pulls of this flesh, more than the opinions of our peer groups, employers, or neighbors, and more than our own intellect and opinions. Simply, we are to put God and His instructions first in our lives in every way.

Jesus states it so simply it must have been difficult for His twig-focused audience to comprehend. This commandment, out of [Deuteronomy 6:5](#), is the first, the greatest of all in dignity and excellence, and is the foundation of all other commandments. It all begins with God and our wholehearted devotion to Him.

But Jesus does not leave it there. He continues in verse 39, listing the other part of the equation, a commandment that Israel had never been able to fulfill. He lists the commandment that requires [repentance](#) and change in each one of us, of every human being on this earth. He lists the commandment that will be the instrument or method that will assist in bringing and sustaining [peace](#) and harmony in this world among all nations and races.

Jesus tells the Pharisees: "And the second is like the first, 'You shall love your neighbor as your self.'"

When we consider these two great commandments, our attention automatically dwells on the first, complete love toward God. It is easy to understand why this is. God is the Creator, our Savior, our Healer, our Provider of all things, the One we must answer to, the One we pray to, and the [Merciful](#) One who forgives our sins.

However, we normally do not give more than lip service to the second great commandment, to love our fellow man. Again, it is easy to understand why. Our fellow man lies, cheats, steals, murders, commits sexual perversions, blasphemes, and generally makes life miserable for the rest of us.

Under Satan's guidance and in lock-step with the rest of [the world](#), our fellow man promotes lawlessness, spreads pornography throughout the world, and devises evil schemes to bilk millions out of their well-earned money. Our fellow man wars, tortures, kills, and commits horrendous crimes against the weak, and the frustrating part is that we have no power that we can exert at this time to change him.

Our fellow man persecutes those of us who follow the truth. He places obstacles in front of our taking our children out of school for the Feast, and he does not want us taking time off for it either. Our fellow man tries to insist that we work on the [Sabbath](#) and eat pork and shellfish, and when we persist in following biblical truth, he looks at us as if we have lost our minds.

In spite of this, our Lord instructs us in the second great commandment that we are to love him.

Jesus makes an additional comment in verse 40: "On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets." In other words, the entirety of Scripture is summed up in these two commandments. Another way of putting it is that everything else in the Bible flows from and depends upon these dual principles. *Both* commandments are vital to living as God wants us to.

If that is the case—that everything starts with these two great commandments—they will surely continue to be the guiding principles throughout eternity. As [Christians](#), we need to give them the time and effort they deserve. We will take a further look into the second of these next time.

- John O. Reid

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## From the Archives: Featured Sermon

### [Love God, Love Neighbor](#)

by Richard T. Ritenbaugh

Popular music trumpets the theme of romantic love as the answer to all the world's ills, yet the composers of these lyrics have no idea as to what love really is. The fuzzy definition of love is responsible for tolerance of sin, deviancy and liberal, multi-cultural mis-evaluations. We should have a more mature understanding of love for God and love for neighbor. The outgoing concern toward other beings begins with God the Father to Jesus Christ to us. Without godly love, real love does not exist. Real love does not exist in isolation; another being must always be the object of real love. God's plan involving the reciprocal sharing of love among members of God's Family began well before the foundations of the world, at which time a possible sacrifice for sin had to be factored in. While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. The love of God, through the mechanism of His Holy Spirit, works on our inner beings (our mind and spirit), making us like Him, demonstrating the love of God, loving God with all our minds (keeping His commandments) and our neighbors (including our enemies) as ourselves. The extent that we love our brethren may be an accurate gauge as to how much we love God.

## From the Archives: Featured Article

### [Passover, Obligation, and Love](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

In the Model Prayer, Jesus mentions the forgiveness of sin in terms of paying off debt. Anyone with an unpayable debt that was redeemed by another would feel an immense sense of gratitude and obligation to his benefactor. John Ritenbaugh discusses how Christ's redemption of us from our massive debt of sin obligates us to obey and serve Him by doing good in acts of love and service to others.

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