

The Greatest Commandment

by: Jon Burgett / Blog #35

What is the *most important* scripture in the Bible? Some say it's John 3:16. Others might think it's Romans 8:28. The Church of God International, holds Ephesians 6:11 in high esteem. But when a lawyer asked Jesus what the greatest commandment was (Mark 12:28-30), He replied by quoting Moses' words in Deuteronomy 6:4-5. It begins like this: "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one!" (Deut. 6:4)

Moses wrote in Hebrew, and the Hebrew word for "one" is used the same way we use our English word "one". You could have *one* apple, *one* car, or *one* cell phone. At the same time, we could be "part" of *one* church congregation. When shopping, you might buy *one* bag of oranges (plural). There is *one* United States of America, featuring 50 states (aggregate). Our English language has an entire set of collective nouns that are simultaneously both one and multiple.

So "one" can mean one and *more* than one. There is one Godhead, but it includes both God the Father and God the Son. But, there is another way in which God is one. 1 John 1:6 says, "God is light and in Him is no darkness at all." The God of the Bible is not like the multiple gods of other religions, each with their own individual agendas. This God is not like the "Force" described in the movie Star Wars, or the yin-yang symbol of eastern mysticism, with a light side and a dark side, with each side balancing the other, each side swirling into each other, each side with a spot of the other within it. The God described in our Bible is not like that. This God is light and only light. "The LORD our God is one."

But that is only the beginning of this Greatest Commandment. What comes next after God describes Himself to us? "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength" (Deut. 6:5).

But here's where atheists and agnostics are quick to complain: "Isn't that self-centered? If the dictator of North Korea, or the President of Turkmenistan, or any other national leader demanded his people love him like that, wouldn't we denounce him as a conceited, insecure narcissist? What makes it okay for God to pronounce this commandment when it would be unthinkable for man to do so?"

*Lets think about this. Isn't this how God Himself loves us? **Doesn't God love us with all His heart?** Consider the very next chapter (Deut. 7:6-8), where He tells us He made Israel His special people – not because they were superior to other nations, but because He loved them.*

When God created humanity, He created us with emotions—why ? Because *God* has emotions. I didn't understand that when I was younger. I really didn't think God had strong positive emotions. And yet, the Word of God —and His Creation as well (Romans 1:20) —reveal a God that gave us our emotions so we could share His. God tells His people; "I have loved you with an everlasting love"(Jeremiah 31:3).

He continues in that passage with words of joy and promise. Isaiah 62 describes a millennial future in which God and His people will be like newlyweds in love. These are just a couple of examples --there are many more, even before we're introduced to the New Testament and its classic statements of love—**"for God is love" (1 John 4:7) and He loves us with all His soul !**

In discussing this, it may help to define our terms. The Hebrew word for "soul" describes life itself, usually as it is embodied in a physical form and sustained by physical, chemical reactions involving oxygen, proteins, minerals, etc. But, God is a spirit (John 4:24), so His life is not physical —yet, to understand Him, He does use the word "soul" to describe His life (Isaiah 1:14). And Jesus, when incarnate, had a physical body so He could live a physical life. John explains, as Jesus began His last 24 hours of human life, "having loved His own who were in the

world, He loved them to the end” (John 13:1). “Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends” (John 15:13). **That’s loving with all His soul !**

Finally, God loves us with all His might —with the might of His power, and with all the power of His mind? *Just what does that mean?* The Hebrew word for “might” or “strength” is used for both physical strength and mental power in the Old Testament. Consider the ways in which God took physical action, remembering how He parted the Red Sea to save His people. (Exodus 14). King David sings in a Psalm, “I will love You, O LORD, my strength” (Psalm 18:1). David then proceeds to explain how God rescued him from physical danger. “He delivered me because He delighted in me” (:19).

And what about the amazing power of God’s infinite mind? King David ponders how God can see him and guide him no matter where he is – and then turns his thoughts to God: “How precious also are Your thoughts to me, O God! How great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they would be more in number than the sand; When I awake, I am still with You” (Psalm 139 :17-18).

Realize, those are lyrics for a song. Interestingly, there’s an “*urban legend*” that claims someone decided to take those lyrics literally and do the math as an exercise. This person averaged the length of a human life, divided it by an estimated amount of grains of sand on all Earth’s seashores. He then came to the conclusion, taking these words at face value, the Creator of the universe thinks about you at least every four seconds!

Many of us have been in love. So, we know what it’s like to think about that person constantly. Yet, to think about someone every four seconds, 24 / 7 every week—well, that would take a mind so much more powerful than ours, and so much more in love.

Clearly, God – the God of your Bible – loves *you* with all His heart, loves *you* with all His soul, loves *you* with all His might and with all His mind. When you love somebody that way – when you love somebody that much —naturally, you want them to love you back?

This First and Greatest Commandment is not the dictate of a god who is full of himself, insecure, codependent, or narcissistic. Instead, this commandment is an *invitation* to share love with Him in a way you have never experienced before!

So you may be thinking; *Okay, I see the need to love God like this. But how do I do it? Where do I start?* Jesus says, start here: “If you love Me, keep My commandments,” (John 14:15). “He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him” (:21).

Jesus’ commandments, supported by many scriptures, are like a tutor, a professor that brings us to Christ (Galatians 3:24). The Bible describes what God the Father and Jesus Christ are like – how They think, how They act, feel, and how much They sacrificed . Unquestionably, as we learn to imitate God, we become more like Him —and we learn to love and sacrifice as He sacrificed and loves.

But remember; ask Him for understanding. “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him” (James 1:5). As you learn how to correctly apply His Word to the decisions you make in life, you will come to experience true freedom, as God is free —because this Number One Commandment is the very *foundation* of the Perfect Law of Liberty. You can read it in Matt. 22:36-38 !!