

Title: **The Love Commandment**

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What is love? How do you define it? For years, popular musicians have attempted to answer those questions. According to Neil Genzlinger, there are over 10,000 songs on file at the U.S. Copyright Office in Washington, D.C., that begin with the words "Love Is ..." Here are some of these song titles from the 20th century that try to define love:

- "Love Is Like a Dizziness" (1905)
- "Love Is Like a Shoogy Shoo" (1912)
- "Love Is an I.O.U." (1925)
- "Love Is Like the Influenza" (1927)
- "Love Is Good for Anything That Ails You" (1936)
- "Love Is a Dimpling Doodle Bug" (1943)
- "Love Is Atomic" (1950)
- "Love Is Groovy" (1969)
- "Love Is a Four-Letter Word" (1975)
- "Love Is for Suckers" (1988)
- "Love Is Blindness" (1991)

Maybe music isn't our best source for discovering the "Extreme Love" of our Focus 40 experience. What do you think? Is love a state of mind or an action? Jesus made it a commandment!

A religious leader asked Jesus a straightforward and simple question. Of all of the commandments in Moses' teaching, which commandment is the greatest?

Jesus didn't hesitate. His answer was swift and even simpler than the question:

**Matthew 22:36-37**

*"Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?"*

*[37] Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind."*

**Love God.**

1. Simple answer!
2. And yet this answer is a very big deal.

\* If you were to take a poll asking, what does it mean to love God; you would get all kinds of answers. But Jesus points back to the command found in Deuteronomy 6, which specifies four ways that we should show our love for the Lord.

**Deuteronomy 6:5**

*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.*

**I. "With All Your Heart"**

A. The love commandment says we are to love the Lord our God with all of our heart.

\* I know that I love my wife with all my heart. It brings me great joy to see my wife happy. It brings me great pleasure to see that she is content. I am not ashamed to profess my love for my wife in any place or at any time. I love my wife with all my heart.

- B. Scripture says I ought to love God in the same way—with all of my heart.
- a. Nothing should separate me from the God of this great universe.
  - b. Everything else should take second place; everything else should pale in comparison.
  - c. When we consider the holiness of God, everything that surrounds him appears as shadows in his light.

\* A Harvard Business Review blog calls it Warren Buffet's "jerk doctrine." Buffett, one of the wealthiest people in the world, once said, "Of the billionaires I have known, money just brings out the basic traits in them. If they were jerks before they had money, they are simply jerks with a billion dollars."

If I don't love God with all my heart, hanging around the church just means that I am a jerk hanging around the church.

- C. So Christ puts the question to you and me: Do we love the Lord our God with our entire heart? Or do we allow other priorities to share his place?

## II. "With All Your Mind"

\* The United Negro College Fund launched an advertising campaign in 1972 that has raised more than \$2.2 billion and helped to graduate more than 350,000 minority students from college or graduate school. It is one of the most recognizable ad campaigns in history, and it has this simple slogan: "A mind is a terrible thing to waste."

A. As the people of God, we've been admonished to love the Lord our God with our entire mind.

- a. We should fill our minds with the things of God.
  - b. The world will give us more information and mental stimulation than we could ever absorb with our minds.
  - c. Those things will push more important things aside unless we choose to focus on God's priorities.
  - d. Certainly, there are seasons in life when it is more difficult for us to focus on the right things. But especially then, it is vital that we zero in on the things that we allow to occupy our minds.
- B. Your most important decisions are affected by what occupies your mind.
- a. Decisions about your children, your spouse, your church, your job, your relationships, and your ability to discern right from wrong.

- b. Everything is influenced by what you hold in your mind. Are you filling it with the things of God so that you can love the Lord your God with all of your mind?

### III. “With All Your Soul”

A. Then, Jesus says we are to love God with our entire “soul.”

\* The Greek word *psuche* is here translated as “soul.” That word is derived from a Greek phrase meaning “to breathe gently and involuntarily.” You don’t have to think about your own respiration; it just happens. Yet you must continue to breathe in order to live.

- a. Your “soul” is the very essence of your life, your life force.
- b. Our love for God should be such an essential part of our being that we need not remind ourselves to do it.
- c. We ought to love God so naturally that we would no more voluntarily step out of his will than stop breathing. To do either would bring death.

\* A Florida judge handed down an unusual sentence to a husband who had a domestic dispute with his wife.

During the courthouse hearing, Judge Hurley told Mr. Bray that he would he would need to figure out a plan for marriage counseling, but then Hurley added the novel part of the sentence:

[Mr. Bray] is going to stop by somewhere and he's going to get some flowers. He's going to get a card, he's going to get flowers, and then he's going to go home, pick up his wife, get dressed and take her to Red Lobster, and after that they're going to go bowling.

An attorney jokingly asked the judge, "Does he have to let her win?"

"No," Judge Hurley replied, but he also stressed that he wasn't joking. If Bray failed to follow through, he would be back in court.

Loving God should not require step-by-step instructions or a “How to” manual. I should flow naturally from our desire love and experience relationship.

- B. Do you love God as naturally as that, or do you find yourself struggling in your relationship with him?
- a. Are you often sidetracked and thwarted in your walk with God?
  - b. Do you tire of picking yourself up over and over again? If so, it may mean that you do not yet love God with all that is within you.

#### IV. “With All Your Strength”

- A. Reflecting back to the Old Testament, Moses records the need to love God with all of our strength.
- a. Part of loving God with every aspect of our lives.
  - b. Our entire person needs to be focused on giving ourselves to Him.

B. We want intimacy with God.

\* Can you see how our absolute love for God and others will impact our understanding of God’s will for our lives?

My choices in life were dictated by my love for self or by my love for God.

- Because of my love for God, I chose full-time ministry.
- Because of my love for God, I chose a Christian mate.
- Because of my love for God, I chose to live a life up-rooted from my family.
- Because of my love for God, I chose to live a life of trusting in God for my housing, possessions, health, and future.
- And because of my love for God, He has granted to me an intimacy with Him that surpasses any selfish desire that I ever have had.

**Conclusion:** Hear me! God has made each one of us for a life of victory.

- The Bible promises that God has a plan to prosper us.

***Jeremiah 29:11-13***

*For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. [12] Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. [13] You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.*

- However, God does not compel us to walk with him.
- He gives us the privilege of choosing a life with Him or another way of life that is characterized by frustration and defeat.

I want God's way of life, don't you? Such a life will be ours if we love the Lord with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength. God will do great things through us if we love him supremely. *(Ancil Abney is senior pastor of First Church of God in Bradenton, Florida.)*

Are you ready to make the commitment? Are you ready to embrace the "Love Commandment?"