

# What is the Greatest Commandment?

Matt 22:34-40 Jesus is asked and Verses 37-39 read “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 greatest and the first commandment. The second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

## 1—2—3

- First note: Jesus gives *two* ‘greatest’, **not one**. Is the second editorial or interpretive?  
Psalm 62:12-13 “ One thing God has said; two things I have heard: Strength belongs to God; so too, my Lord, does mercy,  
Exodus 34:1 “The LORD said to Moses: “Cut two stone tablets like the former, that I may write on them the words which were on the former tablets that you broke...”
- Second Note: Three Ordered Loves –God, Neighbor and Self!

Jesus is quoting/piecing Old Testament Passages together:

*Deuteronomy 6:5 ‘Love the Lord Your God...’ & Leviticus 19:18 ‘Love Neighbor as Self’*

Refer to Parallel passages of ‘Two Great Commands’ are in Mark 12:28–34; Luke 10:25–28.

**In the NT, James & Paul** also summarize the many laws of God into a ‘Greatest Command’.

James 2:8 “However, if you **fulfill the royal law** according to the scripture, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing well.”

Galatians 5:14 “For **the whole law is fulfilled** in one statement, namely, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

Romans 13:8-10 “Owe nothing to anyone, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. The commandments, “You shall not commit adultery; you shall not kill; you shall not steal; you shall not covet,” and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this saying, [namely] “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Love does no evil to the neighbor; hence, **love is the fulfillment of the law.**”

## New Covenant of Jesus = New Commandment of Jesus

Luke 22:20 “This cup is the **new covenant** in my blood, which will be shed for you...”

John 13:34 “I give you a **new commandment**: love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another.”

The Rich Young Man Encounter: He’s been following all commandments; but which is the greatest?

Matthew 19:16-22 “Now someone approached him and said, “Teacher, what good must I do to gain eternal life?” He answered him, “Why do you ask me about the good? There is only One who is good. If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments.” He asked him, “Which ones?” And Jesus replied, “‘*You shall not kill; you shall not commit adultery; you shall not steal; you shall not bear false witness; honor your father and your mother’; and ‘you shall love your neighbor as yourself.’” The young man said to him, “All of these I have observed. What do I still lack?” Jesus said to him, “**If you wish to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to [the] poor**, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.” When the young man heard this statement, he went away sad, for he had many possessions.*

*Why need to summarize the commands/laws of God? Were they so numerous or complicated? (Deut 33:4)*

The Jewish rabbinic community had traditionally said Moses gave 613 commands to Israel.

613 laws: 365 negative ones (shall nots) that correspond to the number of days in a year, and 248 positive ones (thou shalls) that correspond to the number of parts of a human body.

Before we think that it is only a “Jewish thing” to multiply commands found in scripture, keep in mind that in 2011, a Christian Assemblies Conference identified 1,050 commands found in the New Testament. Also remember that the Catholic Church Code of Canon Law contains 1,752 canons.

Old Testament Rabbinic attempts to reduce/summarize number of commands

- 1) Some taught that all of Torah is summarized in whole chapter of Leviticus 19 or Exodus 20.
- 2) Some taught that King David in Psalm 15 reduced Law to eleven great commands.
- 3) Some taught that Isaiah first reduced the Law to six commands (Isa 33:15), “Whoever walks righteously and speaks honestly, who spurns what is gained by oppression, Who waves off contact with a bribe, who stops his ears so as not to hear of bloodshed, who closes his eyes so as not to look on evil....”
- 4) Some taught that Isaiah later reduced it even further to only two commands 56:1 “Observe justice and do righteousness”
- 5) Some taught that Micah reduced the Law to three (Micah 6:8) “Only to do justice and to love goodness, and to walk humbly with your God.”
- 6) Some taught that the Prophets Amos 5:4 “Seek Me that you may live” and Habakkuk 2:4 “The Just one will live by Faith” shrunk the Law to only one command.

One Rabbi named Bar Kappara taught that all of the Law hung upon this small verse of scripture: “In all thy ways remember God, and He will direct thy paths” (Proverbs 3:6).

Matthew 23:23 “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites. You pay tithes of mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier things of the law: judgment and mercy and fidelity.

***[But] these you should have done, without neglecting the others.”***

***Is Jesus saying that we should not maximize one part of the law, to the detriment of another part of the law?***

Other Scripture passages that offer guiding principles for devoutly following entirety of the Law:

Galatians 5:1 “For freedom, Christ set us free” And 5:13 “For you were called for freedom. But do not use this freedom as an opportunity for the flesh; rather, serve one another through love.”

Romans 7:6 “But now we are released from the law, dead to what held us captive, so that we may serve in the newness of the spirit and not under the obsolete letter.”

2 Corinthians 3:5-6 “our qualification comes from God, who has indeed qualified us as ministers of a new covenant, not of letter but of spirit; for the letter brings death, but the Spirit gives life.”

1 Corinthians 10:23-24 “*Everything is lawful,*” but not everything is beneficial. “*Everything is lawful,*” but not everything builds up. No one should seek his own advantage, but that of his neighbor.”

Compare/Contrast to 1 Corinthians 6:12 “*Everything is lawful for me,*” but not everything is beneficial. “*Everything is lawful for me,*” but I will not let myself be dominated by anything.”

***St Paul warns that one’s freedom must not scandalize or tempt a brother or sister.***

Matthew 5: 21-22 “You have heard that it was said to your ancestors, ‘You shall not kill; and whoever kills will be liable to judgment.’ ***But I say to you,*** whoever is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment,.....and whoever says, ‘You fool,’ will be liable to fiery Gehenna”

Matthew 5:27-28 Law about adultery/lust

Matthew 5:33-34 Law about false witness /dishonesty

Matthew 5:38-39 Law about retaliation/vengeance

Matthew 6 True Spirit of Genuine Alms 6:2, Genuine Prayer 6:6 & Genuine Fasting 6:16

Matthew 5:20 “unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter into the kingdom of heaven.