

The Four Great “Love Commandments”

The Scriptures reveal four specific areas in which we are to express outgoing love.

Without question, the **first and greatest commandment** is to *love God* intensely. “And one of [the Jewish leaders], a doctor of the law, questioned *Him*, tempting Him, and saying, ‘Master, which commandment *is the* great commandment in the Law?’ And Jesus said to him, ‘**You shall love *the* Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is *the* first and greatest commandment**’ ” (Matt. 22:35-38). We express our love for God by keeping the spiritual intent of His commandments with a humble spirit and willing heart as led by the Holy Spirit. The anchor and foundation for consistently doing so is based on our relationship/fellowship with God the Father and Jesus Christ through daily prayer and Bible study.

This is how we are to live before God and worship Him in spirit and truth. “[T]he hour is coming, and now is, when **the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth; for the Father is indeed seeking those who worship Him in this manner.** God *is* Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and in truth” (John 4:23-24).

But there are three remaining “love commandments,” wherein we are to express love and outgoing concern toward others.

The second great “love commandment” is love *toward neighbor*, as Jesus taught: “And *the second one is* like it: ‘**You shall love your neighbor as yourself.**’ On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets” (Matt. 22:39-40). Jesus also said, “Therefore, everything that you would have men do to you, so also do to them; for this is the Law and the Prophets” (Matt. 7:12). The world has it backwards. They consider themselves *first*, and then *maybe* their neighbor. In fact, since people don’t really understand the *love of God*, rarely do they ever love their neighbors as themselves, because loving one’s neighbor is based on loving God *first*.

The third great commandment is to *love the brethren*. Jesus gave this commandment—which He called a “new commandment”—because it reflects His own personal love for us and His personal love for God the Father. On His last Passover night, He told His disciples: “A new commandment I give to you: **that you love one another in the same way that I have loved you, that *is* how you are to love one another.** By this shall everyone know that you are My disciples—if you love one another” (John 13:34-35).

Christ reiterated this new commandment, emphasizing that it is based on how He and the Father love each other. “If you keep My commandments, you shall live in My love; **just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and live in His love.** These things I have spoken to you, in order that My joy may dwell in you, and *that* your joy may be full. **This is My commandment: that you love one another, as I have loved you**” (John 15:10-12). Later, John again emphasized how we are to love each other: “Beloved, **we should love one another because love is from God; and everyone who loves has been begotten by God, and knows God.** The one who does not love does not know God because God is love” (I John 4:7-8).

The fourth great “love commandment” is without a doubt the most difficult because it runs contrary to human nature. “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ **But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you,** so that you yourselves may be *the* children of your Father Who *is* in heaven; for He causes His

sun to rise on *the* evil and *on the* good, and sends rain on *the* just and *on the* unjust. **For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have?** Do not the tax collectors practice the same *thing*? And if you salute your brethren only, what have you done *that is* extraordinary? Do not the tax collectors practice the same *thing*?” (Matt. 5:43-47).

Perhaps the most outstanding example of “love for your enemies” is that God demonstrated this kind of love toward us while we were still sinners and enemies of God. How so? By having Jesus die for us. Jesus took upon Himself our sins, as well as the sins of the whole world, when He was crucified and died on Passover day! “For even when we were without strength, **at the appointed time Christ died for *the* ungodly**. For rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, although perhaps someone might have the courage even to die for a good man. **But God commends His own love to us because, when we were still sinners, Christ died for us**. Much more, therefore, having been justified now by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His own Son, much more *then*, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life” (Rom. 5:6-10).

The apostle Paul was perhaps the most prominent example of this. As an enemy of the Church, he ruthlessly persecuted the brethren—causing many to be jailed or put to death. Acting under orders from the high priest in Jerusalem, Paul thought he was actually serving God.

Paul would always remember this fact about his life and calling: “And I thank Jesus Christ our Lord, Who has empowered me, that He counted me faithful, putting *me* into the ministry, **who was previously a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent person; but I obtained mercy because I did *it* ignorantly in unbelief**. But the grace of our Lord abounded exceedingly with *the* faith and love that *is* in Christ Jesus. ***This is a faithful saying, and worthy of full acceptance: that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief***. But for this reason I was shown mercy in order that in me first Jesus Christ might demonstrate all long-suffering, for an example to those who would afterwards believe on Him unto eternal life” (I Tim. 1:12-16).

If we will truly *give diligence* to develop the love reflected by these four great “love commandments”—toward God, among the brethren within the Church and toward those of the world around us—we will truly become “lights of the world,” showing forth the love of God through the power of the Holy Spirit.