

The Greatest Commandment

Robert R. Roxas

Religious people normally care about eternal life, and they normally know that they should keep the commandments of God in order to obtain eternal life. It is useless to keep the commandments of God if there is no assurance of eternal life. So these two are not mutually exclusive. The Bible gives us some passages that can strengthen the idea that these two are not mutually exclusive. Before studying the teachings of Christ, let us first hear from the Preacher. King Solomon calls himself as “the Preacher” in Ecclesiastes 1:1-2. In Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 we can read, ***“Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man's all. For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil.”***¹

As we can read, man's duty is to fear God and keep His commandments. Why do we need to fear God? Jesus emphatically advises us to fear God in Matthew 10:28. Jesus said, ***“And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.”*** Another reason is what the Preacher has to say in Ecclesiastes 12:14, ***“For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil.”*** If today were the Judgment day, what secret things would bring us into judgment? What would God see in us that will make us worthy of His commendation? Or what would God see in us that will make us worthy of His condemnation?

If we study the Bible, we can confirm that the care about eternal life and keeping His commandments are really not mutually exclusive. In Luke 10:25-28 we can find this care was cited, ***“And behold, a certain lawyer stood up and tested Him, saying, ‘Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?’ He said to him, ‘What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?’ So he answered and said, ‘You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.’ And He said to him, ‘You have answered rightly; do this and you will live.’”*** Here the answer of the lawyer was confirmed positively by Christ.

In another occasion, Jesus said something with more emphasis. Matthew 22:35-40 tells us how important this commandment is! The story is as follows: ***“Then one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, and saying, ‘Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?’ 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. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.’”***

In these two occasions, the commandment ***“You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.”*** is being emphasized as number 1 or the greatest of all commandments. Loving our fellowmen is just second in priority. This is the will of God, so we have to submit to it to be blessed. We cannot go against it. Jesus Christ even discussed this in Matthew 10:34-39 by saying, ***“Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man's enemies will be those of his own household. He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter***

¹ All Scripture quotations are taken from the New King James Version (NKJV) of the Bible.

more than Me is not worthy of Me. He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it.” And in Luke 14:26 Jesus said, *“If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple.”* Here “to hate” means to “love less” or less priority.

So it is clear that God wants us to prioritize Him over our fellowmen. Let us examine ourselves. Do we pass the test of putting God first in our lives? In what way can we say that we do pass the test? Or if we rate ourselves from 0 to 10, where 10 is the most desirable rate in the eyes of God, what would our rating be? If we rate ourselves low, then we have to ask why? Could it not be that we prioritize our earthly friends over our heavenly Father?

From Jesus very own mouth, we have read that we shall love the LORD our God with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our mind. Take note of the phrase “with all,” i.e., “with all your heart,” “with all your soul,” and “with all your mind.” What do this mean? How can we fulfill this and get a high score in our scorecard? **Do we love God with all our heart?** In order to assess ourselves, we have to ask the question, “Is God always in our hearts?” **Do we love God with all our soul?** In order to assess ourselves, we have to ask the questions, “Does it pain us to put God last in our priority? Do we feel guilty of not putting God first in our lives?” **Do we love God with all our mind?** In order to assess ourselves, we have to ask the questions, “Do we keep God in our daily and weekly plans? Do we always remember Him?”

In Luke's account, the lawyer included “with all your strength.” Brethren, this is neither Luke's addition nor the lawyer's. In Deuteronomy 6:4-5 we can read, *“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.”* So it was already written long time ago. **Do we love God with all our strength?** How do we know that we love God with all our strength. So let us think about this question carefully. What is the extent of what we can do? Do we also do things for God to the limit of our strength? Or do we love God, if we have problems only? Brethren, let us think about what we normally do and examine whether or not we also do that for God's work and/or worship.

Let me cite this as example to help us understand how to love God with all our strength. I accompany my kids to CNU from Monday to Thursday and arrive there around 7 a.m. and reach UP around 7:15 a.m. God cannot not consider me loving Him with all my strength if I cannot come here at 9 a.m. because this place is very near to my house. I can reach a far place at earlier time, and then I cannot reach this near place at a later time? If I can reach UP at 7:15 a.m. for 4 days, but I cannot come here at 9 a.m. for only 1 day, God cannot count me as loving Him with all my strength. I even tried reaching UP Diliman at 8:30 a.m. directly coming from Cebu. God cannot see me loving Him with all my strength if I cannot come at 9 a.m. in this place, which is just about 200 meters away from home.

When I was a college student, I could not remember being absent from my classes. I was absent on the second day from my first final exam in college because I got sick. That was what I was capable of doing. Do we think God can see me as loving Him with all my strength if I am absent during the Lord's Day or Sunday? When I was teaching at Cebu Doctors' College, I could not remember having any absences. When my father died, the students expected to have no classes for a couple of days, but they were surprised to see me handling classes on the first Monday right after that Saturday when my father died. Do we think God can see me as loving Him with all my strength if I am absent during the Lord's Day or Sunday? I don't think. That is why I always try my very best not be absent on the Lord's Day.

I would be putting earthly matters above God if I will miss the Sunday assembly. I would be sinning willfully if I am absent on the Lord's day (Hebrews 10:24-27). I cannot please God if I give Him the least of my strength.

Now why strive by all means to come on the Lord's Day? Let us be reminded that the two commandments that Jesus mentioned in Matthew 22:37-39 are just the summary of the Ten Commandments. The greatest commandment is the summary of the first four commandments of the Ten Commandments. The second great commandment is the summary of the last six commandments of the Ten Commandments, which includes honoring our parents, not stealing, not murdering, not bearing false witness, etc.

So what are the first four commandments of the Ten Commandments that are summarized by Deuteronomy 6:5 that says, ***"You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength."***? Let me read to you from the NKJV. In Exodus 20:1-11 we can read, ***"And God spoke all these words, saying: 'I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before Me. You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments. You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain. Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.'"***

The last of the four talks about Sabbath, which is the rest from work. This is the seventh day of the week and intended for a holy convocation. In Leviticus 23:3 we can read, ***"Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, a holy convocation. You shall do no work on it; it is the Sabbath of the LORD in all your dwellings."*** So God wanted the Israelites to have a day of rest from their work and a holy convocation for their spiritual refreshment or nourishment. God wanted them to make it a holy day, that is, a special day for the LORD.

Brethren, we are not keeping the Sabbath in our days because we can read in the New Testament that Christians met on the first day of the week and not on the seventh day of the week anymore. Proof to that is found in Acts 20:7 wherein we can read, ***"Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight."*** In 1 Corinthians 16:1-2 we can read, ***"Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also: On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come."*** So if they met on Saturdays, why come on Sundays just to give their collection? So clearly they met on Sundays and not Saturdays. The Seventh-Day Adventists keep on challenging us to show that in the New Testament Sunday is the Sabbath day. Brethren, Sabbath is still Saturday, but the early Christian met on Sundays.

Brethren, all of us do not want to die. So the gift of eternal life is the best choice or something that we should aim to obtain. Let us strive to have it especially when our lives are over. And let us not forget loving God above all because these two are not mutually exclusive. They must be exercised or practiced all the time at the same time.

Thank you very much. May we all strive to love God above all and get hold of eternal life in Christ Jesus!

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