

Mark 12:30

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment.

Analysis

Jesus quotes the Shema (Deuteronomy 6:4-5), Judaism's central confession recited twice daily, declaring it the "first" commandment. The command to love God "with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength" expresses total, comprehensive devotion—God deserves and demands our entire being. The Greek *agapēseis* (ἀγαπήσεις, "you shall love") uses the future tense with imperatival force, making this a command, not merely a suggestion. This love isn't primarily emotional but volitional—choosing to prioritize, obey, treasure, and serve God supremely. The fourfold description (heart, soul, mind, strength) emphasizes totality, not distinct faculties—Hebrew parallelism reinforces one concept: love God with your entire being. Reformed theology teaches that fallen humans cannot obey this command apart from regeneration; the law reveals our inability and drives us to Christ, who perfectly loved God in our place and, through the Spirit, enables us to love God increasingly though imperfectly in this life.

Historical Context

This exchange occurred during Passion Week when various groups questioned Jesus to trap Him or test His authority. A scribe asked which commandment was "first of all" (Mark 12:28)—a rabbinic debate concerned which of the 613 Torah commandments was most important. Some rabbis ranked commandments hierarchically; others insisted all were equally binding. Jesus' answer elevated the Shema, which faithful Jews recited morning and evening, prayed with phylacteries

on foreheads and doorposts (Deuteronomy 6:8-9). By identifying this as the first commandment, Jesus made love for God the foundation of all obedience—a radical simplification that fulfilled, not abolished, the Law (Matthew 5:17). The early church inherited this understanding: love fulfills the Law (Romans 13:8-10; Galatians 5:14), and loving God produces obedience (John 14:15, 23-24; 1 John 5:3).

Related Passages

1 John 4:8 — God is love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Psalm 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Study Questions

1. What rivals compete with God for your supreme affection and devotion—career, relationships, possessions, comfort?
2. How does recognizing this as a command (not a suggestion) change your understanding of what God requires and your inability to obey apart from His grace?

Interlinear Text

καὶ ἀγαπήσεις κύριον τὸν θεόν σου ἐξ ὅλης τῆς
And thou shalt love the Lord G3588 God thy with all G3588
G2532 G25 G2962 G3588 G2316 G4675 G1537 G3650 G3588

καρδίας σου καὶ ἐξ ὅλης τῆς ψυχῆς σου καὶ ἐξ
heart thy And with all G3588 soul thy And with
G2588 G4675 G2532 G1537 G3650 G5590 G4675 G2532 G1537

ὅλης τῆς διανοίας σου καὶ ἐξ ὅλης τῆς ἴσχύος σου
all mind thy And with all G3588 strength thy
G3650 G1271 G4675 G2532 G1537 G3650 G3588 G2479 G4675

αὕτη πρώτη ἐντολή¹
this is the first commandment
G3778 G4413 G1785

Additional Cross-References

Deuteronomy 6:5 (Love): And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.

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