

Matthew 22:38

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

This is the first and great commandment.

Analysis

Jesus identifies the greatest commandment: 'This is the first and great commandment' (Greek: αὕτη ἡστὶν ἡ μεγάλη καὶ πρώτη ἐντολή, 'this is the great and first commandment'), referring to loving God with all heart, soul, and mind (verse 37). The word πρώτη means both 'first' in rank and sequence. Loving God supremely is foundational to all other commands. 'Great' (μεγάλη) indicates magnitude and importance. This quotes Deuteronomy 6:5, the Shema Israel prayed daily. Comprehensive love - heart (emotion), soul (will), mind (intellect) - demands total devotion. All ethics derive from primary love for God.

Historical Context

Jewish theology centered on the Shema (Deuteronomy 6:4-9), confessed daily. Jesus identifies this as supreme commandment when asked about Torah's essence. Rabbis debated which commands were 'heavy' (important) versus 'light.' Jesus establishes clear hierarchy - love for God first, then neighbor. Early Christians maintained this priority while extending neighbor-love universally beyond Jewish boundaries. The greatest commandment has sustained Jewish-Christian ethics for millennia, grounding moral obligation in relationship with God.

Related Passages

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. What does it mean to love God with all heart, soul, and mind in practical terms?
2. How is love for God demonstrated beyond emotional feeling?
3. What competes with God for supreme place in your affections?

Interlinear Text

αὕτη ἡστὶν πρώτη καὶ μεγάλη ἡντολή

This is the first and great commandment

G3778

G2076

G4413

G2532

great

G3173

commandment

G1785

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