

Victoria Fellowship Church
International & Interdenominational
Bible Study Worksheet – April 6, 2025

Theme: Returning to our first love

Topic: The first and greatest commandment

Main Text: Deuteronomy 6:1-9; Matthew 22:34-40

Key verse: Jesus said to him “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind” Matthew 22:37

INTRODUCTION: Much of Matthew chapter 22 is taken up with the religious authorities of the day trying to ensnare Jesus into saying something against Caesar or against God. He silenced the Sadducees, and when the Pharisees saw that, they pushed their best scribe (lawyer) forward to test Jesus with a question that they thought he could not answer without favoring one side or the other of an ongoing religious answer. Not for the first time, Jesus gave an answer that confounded them. Rather than rank one law against another as the Pharisees expected, Jesus summarized and restated the purpose of the law by quoting the Shema from Deuteronomy 6:4-5, which every devout Jew would recite twice a day. He went further, quoting Leviticus 19:18, to show that the great commandment was to be lived out in human relationships. The lawyer sent to test Him could only marvel at his wisdom (Mark 12:32-33) understanding that love for God and one’s neighbor (who is made in God’s image) is more important than burnt offerings and sacrifices.

1. (a) What does it mean to fear God? Do you think it is a good thing? Give reasons for your answer. (b) What does Moses mean by “hear” and “be careful to observe” in Deut 6:3 (see also Ps 119:60)? (c) Read Mark 12:28-33. What do you think the Pharisees were trying to get Jesus to say?

In the Bible, the proof of love is obedience, not sentiment. Moses reminded the Israelites that the law was given to teach them so that they would observe (do) them, that they would “fear the Lord”, keep his commandments and teach their children. Their spiritual and physical well-being and their distinctiveness as a nation under God depended on their obedience. Jesus said to His disciples, “If you love me, keep my commandments (John 14:15), and “he who has my commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves me”. This is not to be an obedience based on formal legalism. People were to think about God’s commandments, meditate on them, and talk about them so that the obedience would be a response based on understanding and a loving relationship with the one true God. The authenticity and freedom in such obedience would be a witness to their children and their community encouraging them to also seek the Lord who is God.

2. (a) Read Deut 6:3 and 8:1-10. Is there an automatic link between obedience and prosperity. Give reasons for your answer. (b) What do you understand by the phrase “the LORD our God, the LORD is one”? (c) Are there competitors to God for supremacy in your life?

“The LORD our God, the LORD is one”. The Lord is a person, and He is “**our**” God. We have a relationship with Him. The great and first commandment demands that we love with **all** our heart, **all** our soul, **all** our mind, and **all** our strength. (Matt 22:37), and “we are to love their neighbor as ourselves”. This is the command, not of a distant, impersonal God but of our loving, heavenly Father. Of ourselves and in our own strength, we know we cannot do it. The Israelites made the mistake of believing that they could fulfill the law in their own strength (Exodus 19:8). They were right to commit to obeying all the Lord hath commanded, and we should emulate that. Yet we should remember that, just as we were saved by grace through faith, so we live in obedience by grace through faith. Abundant grace is available for us; we must make the time to come with reverence to the throne of grace to obtain the mercy we need to live like children of grace so that we can show forth the glory of our God to the people in our circle, including the ones who know our faults.

3. Read Jer 4:14, Prov 4:23 and Matt 15:19 (a) How do you love God with ALL your heart soul and mind? (b) Let participants discuss what can be done when we fall short in loving God (See 1 John 1:8-9, 2:1-2)

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you are the LORD, our God. Thank you that you have given us the Holy Spirit to help us to love you with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength, and to love our neighbor as ourselves. Thank you that Jesus is our Advocate, and we can come boldly to the throne of grace to obtain mercy and find grace to help us to live obediently and witness powerfully. In Jesus’ name, we pray. Amen