



Is Your Bible Study Method Working?

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”

John 13:34-35

*Now, what is the biblical definition of “commandment”? Some people think **everything** in the Bible is a “commandment”, but strictly speaking that’s not true. Psalm 119, which tells us much about how God uses and organizes Scripture, uses nine terms to describe different aspects of it: “Law”, “Testimonies”, “Precepts”, “Ordinances”, “Word”, “Ways”, “Judgments”, and “Commandments”. Strictly speaking, a “commandment” is something spoken by God which details the responsibilities of human beings to live in a covenant relationship with Him. In others words, they’re the specific fulfillment of our obligation to keep our contractual obligation with Him, what we once called the “old covenant” but now refer to as the “new covenant”.*

Of course, we’re all familiar with the original Ten Commandments written by God’s own hand. We envision Moses coming down the mountain with two tablets, and scholars often ascribe the first four commandments to the “first tablet” and the last six commandments to the “second tablet”. This is because the “first tablet” refers to our relationship with God as in worshiping Him alone, not taking His name

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in vane, not making graven images, and resting on the Sabbath. The “second tablet” are all commandments referring to our relationship with other people such as do not murder, do not covet, etc.

But Jewish scholars tell us that in addition to the original Ten Commandments, there are an additional **603** commandments in all of the original five books of the Bible given through Moses. They can actually name all 613 which are required to completely keep an Old Testament covenant relationship with God. But if that sounds overwhelming, consider that they didn’t even believe 613 commandments were sufficient. They were determined to define and refine them even further and began adding their own corollary supplements. By Jesus’ time, just on the 4th Commandment to observe the Sabbath, Jewish religious authorities had created an additional 2,000+ laws defining what could and couldn’t be done on the Sabbath! You can only imagine how many thousands of extra laws they invoked based on the original 613.

So it should be no surprise that a certain scribe approached Jesus in Mark 12: 28-34 with the question, *“What commandment is the foremost of all?”* In this confusing sea of law upon law created by man to the point of almost completely obscuring the original commandments given, it really wasn’t a stupid or rhetorical question. So Jesus summarized it for him...

Jesus answered, “The foremost is, ‘HEAR, O ISRAEL! THE LORD OUR GOD IS ONE LORD; AND YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND, AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH.’

Mark 12:39-40

In other words, Jesus summarized the “first tablet” as “love God”. And then He further stated...

“The second is this, ‘YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”

Mark 12:41

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Jesus summarized the “second tablet” as “love others”.

But when the scribe affirmed the truth and wisdom of Jesus’ response, Jesus says something very interesting...

*When Jesus saw that he had answered intelligently, He said to him,
“You are not far from the kingdom of God.”
Mark 12:34a*

Jesus didn’t say, “You’re absolutely right”, but rather that the man was **close**. It was a way of stating that if he kept to the path he was currently on, he’d get to the right place, but he wasn’t quite there yet. Why was the scribe only close?

In just a few hours after this, the Gospel of John would record Jesus’ final teaching on earth in which He gave the new commandment mentioned at the top of this article.

*“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another.”
John 13:34*

How is this “new”? Isn’t Jesus just re-summarizing the “second tablet” again? No, He is stating that He’s replacing all 613 commandments required to keep the Old Covenant with 1 single commandment for the New Covenant. This one, new commandment – to love one another, fulfills the **WHOLE** Law and keeps the **WHOLE** covenant. How do we know this for sure? Because from this time on, for the rest of the New Testament, no one ever again quotes from the “first tablet”!

Paul tells the Romans...

*Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for **he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law.** For this, "You shall not commit adultery, YOU SHALL NOT MURDER, YOU SHALL NOT STEAL, YOU SHALL NOT COVET," and if there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this saying, "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF." Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore **love is the fulfillment of the law.***

Romans 13:8-10

Paul doesn't quote anything from the "first tablet" about loving God. The fulfillment of the **WHOLE** Law is entirely dependent upon loving others. To the Galatians Paul states...

*For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For **the whole Law is fulfilled in one word,** in the statement, "YOU SHALL **LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.**"*

Galatians 5:13-14

James and John each tell the Early Church...

*If, however, **you are fulfilling the royal law** according to the Scripture, "YOU SHALL **LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF,**" you are doing well.*

James 2:8

*By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother. For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should **love one another;***

1 John 3:10-11

Here's the bottom line: The New Testament standard is that you cannot love God if you do not love others.

I know that there are people out there who believe their love for God is so great that it gives them license to treat certain other people poorly. That's not biblical. There are those who love their church or their denomination or even their ministry more than people at times. That's not biblical. You can't truly love God if you don't love others.

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But let's take it one step further. Since we're talking about applying the truth of God's Word – you know, His "commandment" to our life, what this also means is that there is one absolute, undeniable way to prove whether or not your Bible study technique is working.

I don't care if you employ the Inductive Study Approach, or Historical-Grammatical Exegesis, midrash, or any variation of Systematic Theology. There is one absolute proof as to whether or not your Bible study approach is working or not: Your personal relationships.

If you are properly applying God's Word to your life, you will ultimately be in compliance with His commandment to love others. Are your personal relationships changing? Are they becoming more loving? Are you treating people with the same love with which Christ loves you? If you are, then your Bible study technique is working. If not, then you're actually failing to achieve the ultimate goal of Bible study, to uphold the New Commandment.

In closing I want you to consider Jesus' teaching in Matthew 24-25, what we call the Olivet Discourse. After giving us a lot of information about the Last Days, Jesus tells us about an event which will determine who has and has not kept His Word, the dividing of the sheep and the goats. (Mt. 25:31-46) Note very carefully on what basis Jesus separates them, taking the sheep with Him into eternity and sending the goats away into eternal punishment...

"Then the righteous will answer Him, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry, and feed You, or thirsty, and give You something to drink? And when did we see You a stranger, and invite You in, or naked, and clothe You? When did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?' The King will answer and say to them, 'Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me.'

Matthew 25:37-40

Jesus never mentions whether either group loved God, made graven images, took God's name in vane, or kept the Sabbath. In other

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words, Jesus never quotes from the “first tablet”. His sole basis of judgment is how they treated others – whether or not they kept His one and only New Commandment to love others. Jesus proves who truly loves or loves not God by the quality of their personal love for others, for the degree to which they kept the whole Law by keeping the one commandment He provided to love one another.

No matter how formal or casual, how educated or ad hoc your Bible study method and habits may be, their degree of success is judged not by the depth of information gleaned, but the degree to which your personal relationships are changing.

In His Love,

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