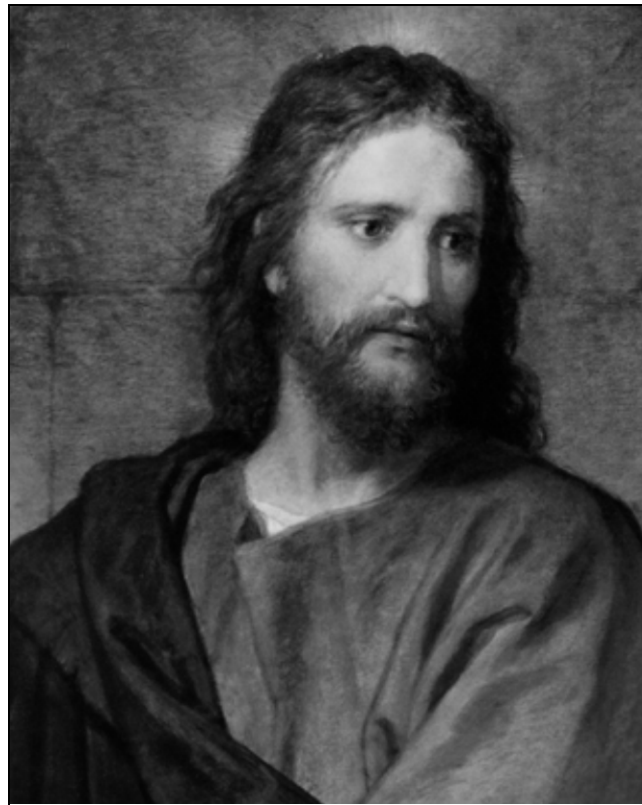


Without question, one of the most powerful influences in my life has been teachers and their message of the gospel. From a boy in a divorced and less-active family to one desiring to dedicate my life to gospel living and teaching, I now understand it is the miracle of gospel teachers that has made all the difference. I will forever be grateful to a diligent home teacher who never gave up and who offered unconditional friendship. I will also never forget the missionaries who dedicated their lives to the work and taught me to seek first to build the kingdom. Since my mission, my love for teaching and learning the word of God is the result of wonderful teachers. Finally, I gained the vision of living the gospel and having a Zion family from a scholar and a teacher.

This series of associations with teachers, as well as experiences with countless others, has been a miracle in convincing me that these individuals are all “teachers come from God.” I am not sure whether the examples I mentioned have even an idea of what they have done for me and my future family. Too often such things do not get expressed. However, their examples and teaching will always serve as a guide and inspiration for me, and I hope to continue the work they started. God be thanked for such gospel teachers and their legacy of miracles.



Heinrich Hofmann (1824–1911) detail of the painting  
*Christ and the Rich Young Ruler*

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## The Great Commandment: Principle or Platitude?

Howard A. Christy

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*“The first and second great commandments frame and prioritize life.”<sup>xl1</sup>*

All of us have occasionally shuddered at the evil that stalks the earth, and most of us have at some point felt helpless in the face of it. That evil has always been a dominating force in the world is repeatedly declared in the standard works; and God, seeing “that the wickedness of man was great in the earth” (Genesis 6:5), has more than once found it necessary to take drastic action. Classic examples are the destruction of all but a remnant of the Israelites and the total destruction of the Nephites. Nephi of old, nearly a thousand years before the annihilation of his people, lamented, “I . . . cannot say more; the Spirit stoppeth mine utterance, and I am left to mourn because of the unbelief, and the wickedness, and the ignorance, and the stiffneckedness of men; for they will not search knowledge, nor understand great knowledge, when it is given unto them in plainness, even as plain as word can be” (2 Nephi 32:7).

Does humankind today continue the ancient tendency to ignore “great knowledge” that is “plain as word can be”? It would seem so. But in our communities, we can, at least within our limited spheres of influence, see more clearly than that and, more importantly, do more about it. This essay focuses on what might be the most splendid element of that greater understanding. **The Great Commandment**

All Christians are familiar with Jesus’ instruction in Matthew 22:35–40. It may be the most quoted passage in all of scripture. Yet it seems to have little impact as principle—to say nothing of whether or not it is an imperative. Rather than give it high priority as commandment, more often than not we give it no more notice than any other platitude addressing the nice things that nice people do. We must not overlook the great commandment; therefore, a closer examination might be useful.

### **The Preeminence of the Great Commandment**

Recall that a lawyer representing the Pharisees, in an attempt to “entangle him in his talk,” asked Jesus, “Master, which is the great commandment in the law?” Jesus accommodated him by quoting from the law of Moses, but His answer was a combination of two commandments, both from the law—the first, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God” from Deuteronomy 6:5, and the second, “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself,” from Leviticus 19:18. In reporting so, He proved Himself a “master” of debate equal to the flattery with which he was addressed by giving His interrogator more than was asked for. Rather than provide the single “great” commandment requested, He went on to add another that was “like unto it”—both in kind and in gravity—and then proceeded to profoundly underscore the degree of greatness of the now twofold commandment by claiming that “on these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets” (Matthew 22:40), indicating that the great commandment was great to the point of being not only preeminent but also all-embracing.<sup>xli2</sup>

Further amplifying the all-embracing nature of the commandment, the words “thy neighbour” seem clearly meant to be used in the sense of fellowman or humankind—that is, to all persons, male or female, with whom we come in contact.<sup>xlii3</sup> Leviticus 19:18, Jesus’ law source for loving one’s neighbor, is part of what has been deemed the Lord’s “holiness code.” In verse 2, the Lord admonishes the people of Israel, “Ye shall be holy: for I the Lord your God am holy.” Then, beginning at verse 9, He sets forth counsel by way of commandment regarding the treatment of one’s neighbor that has no parallel anywhere else in scripture. Following is a paraphrase in part:

You shall leave gleanings of grain and fruit for the poor and for strangers. You shall not steal, deal falsely with, lie, defraud, or rob your neighbour, or be a tale-bearer. You shall not hate your neighbour; rather you shall honestly call attention to his wrongdoings that he might be saved from sin. You shall not curse

the deaf or put a stumbling block before the blind. You shall judge your neighbour righteously in all your dealings with him. You shall not avenge or bear any grudge; rather you shall love your neighbour as yourself. You shall honor the aged. You shall not vex a stranger or sojourner; rather you shall treat any stranger that dwells with you as if he was one born among you—and you shall love him as yourself. Remember, you were once strangers in the land of Egypt. (Leviticus 19:9–18, 32–34)

Note that God treats neighbors and strangers equally.<sup>xliii</sup> 4

The close linking of the two parts of the great commandment as set forth in Matthew is more strongly indicated in Luke's account of what apparently is the same incident (see Luke 10:25–28). The accounts differ, however, as to time, place, nature of the question posed by the lawyer, and Jesus' response. In Luke's account, the lawyer asked Jesus, "Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus responded with another question: "What is written in the law? How readest thou?" The lawyer answered, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself." Jesus then responded to the lawyer's closely linked double quotation from the law, "Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live." Interestingly, in this scenario, it was the lawyer who provided the great commandment as the answer to his own question. Luke's account is also splendidly instructive as to the meaning of "neighbour"; the lawyer immediately came back with the question "And who is my neighbour?" (verse 29), to which Jesus responded with the parable of the good Samaritan, the most elegant teaching in all of scripture regarding love and service—to brothers, neighbors, and strangers alike.<sup>xliv</sup> 5 Luke's account also links the great commandment with the gospel of Jesus Christ more specifically since the lawyer's initial question focuses on inheriting, or gaining, eternal life (salvation)—the ultimate objective of the gospel—rather than "mere" greatness of the law itself.

Luke 18:18–22 is another instance where Jesus was queried as to what a person must do to inherit eternal life. Jesus answered, "Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Honour thy father and thy mother." However, in the account of the same instance found at Matthew 19:16–22, Jesus responded to the query as to eternal life with the same elements of the Ten Commandments as found in Luke 18 but added importantly, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." Whether there is any direct relationship between the stories told in Luke 10:25–28 and Matthew 19:16–22, both Gospel writers, having quoted Jesus' verbatim reference to Leviticus 19:18, at least strengthen the argument regarding the importance of the great commandment.

The account given at Mark 12:28–34, although quite similar to that in Matthew, differs in two interesting particulars. Rather than ask for the "great commandment in the law," the lawyer (or scribe) asked Jesus, "Which is the first commandment of all?" The Savior responded with an apparently *threefold* answer: "The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; the Lord our God is one Lord: and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment. And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these." That is, Mark's account links the *Shema*, stated at Deuteronomy 6:4, which is so fundamental to Jewish faith and practice, with Deuteronomy 6:5 as "first" and then goes on to add love of neighbor as "second."

Another significant reference to the great commandment is found in the Book of Mormon. Arguably the most complete exposition of the gospel of Jesus Christ anywhere in scripture is

found at 2 Nephi 31.<sup>xlv</sup>6 From the second verse to the end of that chapter, Nephi carefully introduced, enumerated, and discussed the gospel (or, as Nephi called it, “the doctrine of Christ”) element by element and then concluded at verse 21 with the powerful admonition that it was “the only and true doctrine of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, which is one God, without end.” The great commandment appears in that discussion as the central focus of what each of us must do throughout life once we have accomplished the first principles and ordinances of the gospel: “And now, my beloved brethren, after ye have gotten into this straight and narrow path, I would ask if all is done? Behold, I say unto you, Nay; for ye have not come thus far save it were by the word of Christ with unshaken faith in him, relying wholly upon the merits of him who is mighty to save. Wherefore, ye must press forward with a steadfastness in Christ, having a perfect brightness of hope, *and a love of God and of all men*. Wherefore, if ye shall press forward, feasting upon the word of Christ, and endure to the end, behold, thus saith the Father: Ye shall have eternal life” (2 Nephi 31:19–20; emphasis added). Here, beyond being merely steadfast, Jesus seems to be closely linking acts of loving our neighbor with what He means by “enduring to the end.”<sup>xlvi</sup>7

All these scriptural accounts complement each other and, read together, indicate powerfully that, in the first instance, Jesus was doing far more than merely responding to a single lawyer’s catch question on canon law. He rather seems to have been seizing the occasion first to clarify and then to nail down for the benefit of humankind *the* single, all-embracing principle of His gospel.<sup>xlvii</sup>8 Its apparent intended impact is strongly reinforced by the fact that the essence of the story is repeated in all three synoptic Gospels. Even more important, *nowhere else* in the standard works is found a single commandment, or pair of commandments, claiming to encompass “all the law and the prophets,” stipulating that there are “none other . . . greater than these,” or stating that these are “more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices.”<sup>xlviii</sup>9 That is, these ennoblements are used exclusively to describe either the twofold great commandment or the second part, loving one’s neighbor, alone. Regarding loving one’s neighbor, James noted that it would “fulfil the royal law” (James 2:8); and Paul, in his epistle to the Romans, stated that it was the “fulfilling of the law” (Romans 13:8–10). But Paul was even more emphatic in his epistle to the Galatians, where he asserted that “*all* the law is fulfilled in *one word*, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself” (Galatians 5:14; emphasis added).<sup>xlxi</sup>10

Jesus repeatedly builds on this theme. His admonition that “Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets” (Matthew 7:12) is, in reality, the second part of the great commandment, though in different language. And His magnificent statement, “A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another” (John 13:34), essentially restates the great commandment (with emphasis on loving one another), only in a different and perhaps more eloquent way. Although Jesus does not attach a “law and the prophets” caveat, extra importance is at least implied by His giving us a “new” commandment. Throughout the closing chapters of the book of John, loving one another—loving one’s neighbor—is the central focus of Jesus’ teaching. Reading those magnificent passages in the context of historical time—the last few hours before Jesus’ Crucifixion and soon after His Resurrection—seems only to add to their importance.<sup>l</sup>11

### **The Universality of the Great Commandment**

The commandment to love one’s neighbor as oneself, along with its “do unto others” derivative, has come to be known as the maxim of the Golden Rule. Whether or not it has been taken seriously, it is arguably the most longstanding and universal principle known to humankind.

Corroboration of this is readily available. The book of Leviticus, one of the earliest-known written enunciations of the Golden Rule, has been dated as early as the seventh century B.C.<sup>li</sup> 12 Two centuries or more after Leviticus, but still five centuries before Jesus' mortal sojourn on earth, Confucius, in the remote province of Lu in far-off China, was asked by one of his disciples, "Is there any one maxim which ought to be acted upon throughout one's life?" Confucius replied, "Surely the maxim of charity is such: 'Do not unto others what you would not they should do unto you.'"<sup>lii</sup> 13 On a different occasion, another of Confucius' disciples "inquired as to the meaning of true goodness." Confucius said, "What you would not wish done to yourself, do not unto others."<sup>liii</sup> 14 These quotations are one of the best examples of the Golden Rule outside of Christianity—and indeed outside of religion itself—since Confucius was not a man of God and did not teach religion per se. Confucius' application of the Golden Rule strongly influenced the great philosophy—and religious movement—that eventually developed from his teachings.

H. T. D. Rost, a scholar of the Baha'i faith, largely citing Bhagavān Dās, another Eastern scholar, has found strong enunciations of the Golden Rule in virtually all the great religions of the world—including (in addition to Christianity and Confucianism) Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, Taoism, Zoroastrianism, Sikhism, Judaism, and Islam.<sup>liv</sup> 15 If not stated in so many words in the primary scriptures of these faiths, the principle is clearly stated, or at least strongly implied, in the most important religious discourses on those scriptures. Equal to their agreement as to the near universal existence of the Golden Rule is Rost and Dās's determination that the maxim is also commonly claimed to be of fundamental importance wherever found. A compelling example is from Hinduism, a religion far removed from Christianity. One of that faith's primary scriptural texts, the Mahabharata, states: "Do not to others what ye do not wish Done to yourself; and wish for others too What ye desire and long for, for yourself—*This is the whole of Dharma*, heed it well."<sup>lv</sup> 16

Yet another marvelous source is found in Judaism. In the Babylonian Talmud (at Shabbath 31a) is the story of a heathen (or gentile) who approached Shammai, one of Jerusalem's two greatest rabbis during the period immediately prior to the birth of Jesus, and asked him to "make me a proselyte, on condition that you teach me the whole Torah while I stand on one foot." Shammai "repulsed him." The heathen then approached Hillel, the other great rabbi, with the same proposition. Hillel answered, "What is hateful to you, do not to your neighbor: *that is the whole Torah, while the rest is the commentary thereof*; go and learn it." Jesus, when he responded to the lawyer's question, may have purposely cited Hillel (regarding the overarching importance of the great commandment) as well as quoted from the law (Torah). Whatever the case may be, it is apparent that the Golden Rule (or the like) was an important tenet of Jewish faith before Jesus forthrightly stated it as a commandment. Else the lawyer (as set forth in Luke 10:27), without apparent further prompting by Jesus, would not have hastened to answer his own question in the manner he did.<sup>lvi</sup> 17

## Love

It is apparent that the commandment to love God with all our heart, soul, and mind (or might)—the first part of the twofold great commandment—strongly implies reciprocating in full God's, and Jesus', love for us. And, again, since the second part is linked to the first by the words "like unto it," it is also apparent that we are intended to extend the same all-redeeming "pure love" to all with whom we closely share life here on earth. But what does this love mean? In his excellent essay in the *International Standard Bible Dictionary*, George A. Turner discusses the term in its several Hebrew and Greek derivations and then describes usage of those

terms by the Synoptic Gospel writers, by Paul, and by John. According to Turner, love as found in Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18, with which Jesus answered the lawyer, is *hesed*, the Hebrew word “denoting a deliberate choice of affection and kindness.” Turner further qualifies the term to mean “mercy” and “loving kindness,” in which acts toward others usually have the nature of being “unfailing” or “steadfast” and “reciprocal” or “covenantal.”<sup>lviii</sup>18 In Matthew 22:37 and 39, the Greek *agapao*, routinely employed in the New Testament in the same contexts, was used, one that Paul “raised . . . to the pinnacle of Christian graces” and that John claimed to be the “supreme badge of discipleship” (John 13:35). Further, it was love without which “no one can pretend to be a child of God” (1 John 3:14) and the possession of which or the lack thereof could mean the “difference between life and death.”<sup>lviii</sup>19

M. Scott Peck, in *The Road Less Traveled*, defines this same kind of love not in a biblical sense but surely in a gospel sense as “the will to extend one’s self for the purpose of nurturing one’s own or another’s spiritual growth.”<sup>lix</sup>20 His definition is backed up by experience as a psychoanalyst and by well-developed argument in his book. Of particular value for the purposes of this essay is his convincing argument that the kind of love that nurtures spiritual growth requires commitment, action, and courage. He places special emphasis on the words *extending* and *will*:

The act of extending one’s limits implies effort. One extends one’s limits only by exceeding them, and exceeding limits requires effort. When we love someone our love becomes demonstrable or real only through our exertion—through the fact that for that someone (or for ourself) we take an extra step or walk an extra mile. Love is not effortless. To the contrary, love is effortful. . . . By use of the word “will” I have attempted to transcend the distinction between desire and action. Desire is not necessarily translated into action. Will is desire of sufficient intensity that it is translated into action. . . . Love is as love does.<sup>lx</sup>21



Health missionaries serving in Guatemala, ca. 1972

Photograph of health missionaries © by Intellectual Reserve, Inc. Used by permission. Peck's definition may offer a clue as to why mankind so often fails to be obedient to the great commandment: a large part of the failure may be owing to inattention and laziness—that is, we may be too weak-willed to extend ourselves sufficiently to nurture each other. In this same context, Peck suggests that laziness probably plays an important role in society's proclivity for stumbling into sin and evil (wickedness). He elaborates further on this theme:

Extension of ourselves or moving out against the inertia of laziness we call work. Moving out in the face of fear we call courage. Love, then, is a form of work or a form of courage. Specifically, it is work or courage directed toward the nurture of our own or another's spiritual growth. We may work or exert courage in directions other than toward spiritual growth, and for this reason all work and all courage is not love. But since it requires the extension of ourselves, love is always either work or courage. If an act is not one of work or courage, then it is not an act of love. There are no exceptions.<sup>lxi</sup>22

### **Beyond Platitude**

Admittedly, loving both God and our neighbor with all our hearts is a tall order, and if Scott Peck is correct in relegating love to the realm of hard work, it is therefore appropriate to acknowledge that loving God and our neighbor is also hard work, perhaps too hard for most of us, especially if we look upon Jesus' great commandment and His other admonishments along those lines as mere platitudes. Hard work or not, as a society, we have largely capitulated in this regard. We may have sought an easier way and in the process degraded the Lord's great principle to nothing more than a glib, bland, meaningless evocation of the nice things that nice people do. By so doing, it also seems clear that in our general society, such a commandment as "Love thy neighbour as thyself," whether we agree with it or not, is often shrugged off by such rationalizations as "After all, we have our agency," or worse, "Oh well, boys will be boys," and the like.

Such rationalizations hint more of laziness than truth, since loving that can importantly nurture the spiritual growth of ourselves and others need not be as "effortful" as Peck implies. Even the *simplest and easiest* kindnesses and expressions of love can have an exceedingly beneficial, unforgettable impact on the lives of our neighbors, richly adding to the emotional and spiritual lifeblood that keeps us all alive and well. Additionally, the great commandment works anywhere and under all conditions—including the most *unsafe* kind, such as the many documented acts of loving-kindness on the battlefield—where one might expect that it could not possibly work with any real efficacy.

On the other hand, abuses of the great commandment, including the *simplest and easiest*, even to the extent of being entirely inadvertent or utterly devoid of harmful intent, can be immensely damaging. Such abuses, like viruses, can and often do follow us into the *safest* places, places such as the home and the church—safe havens where we should find solace amidst the harsh buffetings of the world. It is quite possible that all evils have small beginnings—in such places as our neighborhoods. In a *Newsweek* article, psychiatrist Robert I. Simon, Georgetown University School of Medicine, is quoted as saying, "There is a continuum of evil, of course, ranging from 'trivial evils' like cutting someone off in traffic, to greater evils like acts of prejudice, to massive evils. . . . But within us all are the roots of evil." He goes on to say that "the unmistakable lesson is that ordinary, 'good' people, devoted to their families, their religion and their country, are capable of inflicting horrific harm." Andrew Murr and Adam Rogers, authors of the article, then remind us of Hannah Arendt's chilling observation that "it is the banality of evil that is so horrific."<sup>lxii</sup>23 Murr and Rogers—and Arendt—are speaking to each of us as individuals and as neighbors.

Most of us are more vulnerable than we think; and for whatever reason, we tend not to be mindful enough of our potential either to bless or harm our neighbors. The Lord has, however, given us a powerful principle by way of a commandment, "supreme above all others."<sup>lxiii</sup>24 By its continual use, but never its abuse, it can *save* us, without exception and under all conditions—even in the valley of the shadow of death.

Two religious scholars have discussed the great commandment in terms of ethics:

[Jesus] sums up His teaching in supreme love to God and a love for fellow-man like that we hold for ourselves (Mark 12:29–31). This supreme love to God is a complete oneness with Him in will, a will which is expressed in service to our fellow-men in the *simplest and most natural relationship* (Luke 10:25–37). Thus religion is *ethical* through and through, as God's inner nature, expressed in forgiveness, mercy, righteousness and truth, is something not transcendental, but belongs to the realm of daily life. We become children of God and He our Father



in virtue of a *moral* likeness (Matthew 5:43–48). . . . With this clearly understood, [we are] to live in implicit trust in the divine love, power, knowledge and forgiveness. Hence [we attain] salvation, being delivered from sin and fear and death, for the divine attributes are not ontological entities to be discussed and defined in the schools, but they are realities, entering into the practical daily life. Indeed they are to be repeated in us also, so that we are to forgive our brethren and ask to be forgiven (Matthew 6:12; Luke 11:4). . . . Religion thus becomes thoroughly ethical.<sup>lxiv</sup>25

The above scholars conclude that “yet shall the Christian life go on—the life which finds its deepest utterance in the words of Christ, ‘Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and thy neighbor as thyself.’”

What is implied in all of this is the imperative, *not* the mere suggestion, that we all boldly, even heroically if needs be, make the ethical, or moral, decision to act—to make a strong commitment to follow Jesus’ commandment, backed up by His example, to first love God but then to *actively* love our neighbors and, *with resolution*, go about among them doing good. But also implied is the imperative to do no harm—ever—either in word or deed. In enunciating the great commandment, the Lord seems to have been teaching us that continually loving one another and serving one another, whether in the smallest and quietest ways or heroically, is implied in His appeal to “press forward, feasting upon the word of Christ, and endure to the end.” Further regarding the great commandment, is He not also warning us that “there is none other way . . . whereby [we] can be saved in the kingdom of God”? (2 Nephi 31:20–21).

Love is like the Polar Star.

In a changing world, it is a constant.

It is the very essence of the gospel.

It is the security of the home.

It is the safeguard of community life.

It is a beacon of hope in a world of distress.<sup>lxv</sup>26

## Notes

1. Neal A. Maxwell, “The Disciple Scholar,” in *On Becoming a Disciple Scholar*, ed. Henry B. Eyring (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1995), 7.
2. Since “law and the prophets” was the term commonly applied to the Old Testament in biblical times, Jesus was therefore stating that everything in the extant scriptures had its central focus in these two commandments.
3. John J. Hughes, in his article on the term *neighbor* in the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (Geoffrey W. Bromiley, gen. ed., rev. ed., 4 vols. [Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1986], 3:517–18, hereafter referred to as ISBE), states: “Most of the terms rendered by ‘neighbor’ in the [Old Testament] designate a fellow member of the community in covenant with Yahweh, i.e., one who shared in the rights and duties implied by membership in the covenant. All relations between members of the covenant community were sanctioned by divine law (cf. Job 16:21). So closely were God’s covenant people bound together that a neighbor was to be treated as a brother (cf. the frequent use of ‘brother’ and ‘neighbor’ as synonyms, e.g., Dt. 15:2f., 12; Isa. 41:6; Jer. 31:34). In fact, one was to treat one’s brother as one treated oneself (Lev. 19:18). . . . Jesus [in the New Testament] emphatically rejected the interpretation that limited one’s obligation to loving relatives and friends; He demanded love even for enemies, on the model of God’s love for all mankind (Mt. 5:43–48).” I am indebted to Richard L.

Anderson for recommending the *ISBE* as a useful reference on such historical matters as these.

4. Daniel J. Silver, in *A History of Judaism*, 2 vols. (New York: Basic Books, 1974), 1:36, states: “Twenty-four times, whenever the Torah deals with the rights of persons, protection for the ‘stranger that is within your gates’ is insisted on. Why? ‘Because you were strangers in the land of Egypt.’ (Ex. 22:20, 23:9, etc.). In most aspects the Israelite law of persons corresponds to what we know of the class structure and family relationships of neighboring peoples, but no other law of the time and area shows a similar concern for the resident alien. He enjoyed the same rights as Israelites before the courts (Deut. 1:16). He could own land, share in the produce of the sabbatical year (Lev. 25:6), and even participate in the festivals (Deut. 16:1 ff.); indeed, ‘you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt’ (Lev. 19:34).”
5. Hughes (in his article on *neighbor* cited in note 3 above) goes on to say that “Jesus’ teaching about loving others is presented graphically in His parable of the Good Samaritan. . . . The ongoing debate concerning the definition of neighbor lies behind the lawyer’s question, ‘And who is my neighbor?’ . . . Jesus’ parable was shocking in that it presented a despised outsider as the one who showed compassion. Jesus’ concluding question [‘Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves?’] (v. 36), reshaped the lawyer’s question, focusing on the subject rather than the object of the love command. . . . As T. W. Manson stated, the lawyer’s question ‘is unanswerable, and ought not to be asked. . . . The point of the parable is that if a man has love in his heart, it will tell him who his neighbor is; and this is the only possible answer to the lawyer’s question’ (*Sayings of Jesus* [repr. 1979], 261 f.).” *Ibid.*, 3:518.
6. I am indebted to Noel B. Reynolds for so compellingly pointing this out. See his splendid essay “The Gospel of Jesus Christ as Taught by the Nephite Prophets,” *BYU Studies*, summer 1991, 31–50.
7. Since the Luke and Mark accounts place more emphasis on the commandment’s being “first” rather than “great,” it is worthy of note that “first” could be seen to more appropriately fit the Luke account’s close linkage with the gospel of Jesus Christ in that the “first” commandment (a central element of the gospel’s “enduring to the end” [see 2 Nephi 31:20]) would fitly follow the gospel’s “first principles and ordinances.”
8. Hughes adds (again in his article on *neighbor* quoted in note 3 above) that “the command to love one’s neighbor as himself is the hallmark of [New Testament] ethics. . . . In Mt. 22:37–40 par. Mk. 12:29–31; Lk. 10:27 this command is combined with the command to love God above all (Dt. 6:5) to form a summary of the entire law.” *ISBE*, 3:518. Bruce R. McConkie strongly makes this point in his *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary: Volume 1, The Gospels* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1974), 609: “One eternal command!—supreme above all others; comprehending all lesser requirements; embracing the whole law of the whole gospel; blazing forth like the sun with a brilliance beyond compare—one divine decree! ‘Thou shalt love thy God and thy neighbor.’” 9. “Law and the prophets” is mentioned in sixteen separate places in the Bible. In none of the five instances in the Old Testament does the term refer specifically to any particular commandment. Of the eleven references in the New Testament, two—Matthew 7:12 and 22:40—are specifically linked with the great commandment, and the other nine are not specific to any particular commandment.

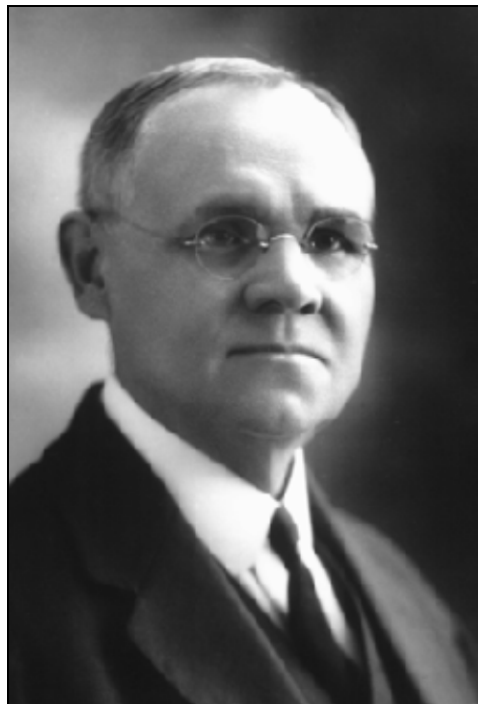
10. However, Matthew 5:17 (“Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil”) can be said to be indirectly linked to *all* the commandments, the great commandment included. Regarding Jesus’ authorship of the law and the prophets, see 3 Nephi 12:18–19: “For verily I say unto you, one jot nor one tittle hath not passed away from the law, but in me it hath all been fulfilled. And behold, I have given you the law and the commandments of my Father, that ye shall believe in me, and that ye shall repent of your sins, and come unto me with a broken heart and a contrite spirit. Behold, ye have the commandments before you, and the law is fulfilled.” This important passage is arguably an exception to the claim that all scriptural references to fulfillment of the law in the context of the commandments are specific to the great commandment alone. Since the 3 Nephi 12 passage, which, like most of the New Testament references, directly quotes Jesus Himself, it can be assumed, for purposes of this analysis, that He might have purposely contradicted Himself. Whatever the merits of such a criticism, in several scriptural accounts, Jesus is cited as having specified the twofold great commandment as being the fulfillment of the law. That He also states that He Himself and all He has commanded is the fulfillment of the law can be argued to be a contradiction or not, depending upon the context (see also Matthew 5:17–18).
11. See also Matthew 19:19, John 15:12–14, 1 John 3:23, and 2 John 1:4–6. I am indebted to John W. Welch for both his insights and for pointing out further valuable discourse on the importance of the great commandment. See, for example, E. P. Sanders, *Jewish Law from Jesus to the Mishnah: Five Studies* (London: SCM Press, 1990), 68–71; Georg Strecker, *The Sermon on the Mount: An Exegetical Commentary*, trans. O. C. Dean Jr. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1988), 150–55; David Flusser, “Jesus, His Ancestry, and the Commandment of Love,” in *Jesus’ Jewishness*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (New York: Crossroad, 1991), 153–74; W. D. Davies, *The Sermon on the Mount* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 116–19; and Jeffrey Wattles, *The Golden Rule* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996). Davies neatly ties into the context of the great commandment John’s superb “law of love” at 1 John 4 and Paul’s equally superb “hymn to love” at 1 Corinthians 13, particularly the closing verse of that chapter: “And now *abideth* faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity” (emphasis added).  
Regarding context as to place and time, according to the accounts in Matthew and Mark, when the lawyer confronted Jesus, it was in Jerusalem and only a few days or hours before Jesus was crucified. Indeed, the lawyer’s question was the last such attempt to entice Jesus into making a statement that might legitimately have been used against him in ecclesiastical court. Soon thereafter, in the upper room and immediately following the Last Supper, Jesus made His magnificent gesture of love and service to His Apostles by washing their feet (see John 13:4–15). Then, almost as if He felt the need to further elaborate on an already splendidly (and powerfully) well-made point, soon after the Resurrection, Jesus returned to make still another magnificent gesture of love and service at the lakeshore (see John 21). Whether Jesus’ enunciation of the great commandment was just before His Crucifixion can be questioned by Bible scholars. Still, placement as to time of that commandment in Mark and Matthew, regardless of historicity, is significant, in my opinion.
12. The book may have been *written* at this time, but important passages, including the holiness code set forth in an important part in chapter 19, could well have been in

existence as part of the *orally* transmitted law as early as the time of Moses—that is, circa 1200 B.C.

13. This selection is quoted from Lionel Giles, *The Analects of Confucius: Translated from the Chinese, with an Introduction and Notes*, collector's ed. (Norwalk, Connecticut: Easton Press, 1976), 37, originally published by the Limited Editions Club of New York in 1933. In a footnote to the word *charity*, which was translated from the Chinese *shu*, Giles states that “[James] Legge translates *shu* ‘reciprocity,’ apparently for no other reason than to explain the maxim that follows. But it really stands for something higher than the strict utilitarian principle of *do ut des*. Both here and in another famous passage . . . it is almost equivalent to *jen*, goodness of heart, only with the idea of *altruism* more explicitly brought out. It connotes sympathetic consideration for others, and hence the best rendering would seem to be ‘loving-kindness’ or ‘charity.’ The concluding maxim is really nothing more nor less than the Golden Rule of Christ, though less familiar to us in its negative form.” (Ibid.) See also Jeffrey Wattles, *The Golden Rule* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), chap. 2, for a fine discussion of the Golden Rule in Confucian thought.
14. Giles, *Analects of Confucius*, 29. See also *ibid.*, 19–20 and 106–7; and Wattles, *The Golden Rule*, chap. 2.
15. H. T. D. Rost, *The Golden Rule: A Universal Ethic* (Oxford, England: George Ronald, 1986). See also Bhagavān Dās, comp., *The Essential Unity of All Religions* (Benares, India: The Ananda Publishing House, 1947), 272–309, from which Rost draws much of his argument regarding the universal importance of the Golden Rule.
16. Dās, *Essential Unity of All Religions*, 272; emphasis added. Dās comments that the Golden Rule is “stated repeatedly in positive as well as negative form, in the Vedic scriptures.” *Ibid.*
17. The translated text is quoted from I. Epstein, ed. and trans., *The Babylonian Talmud: Seder Mo’ed* (London: Soncino Press, 1938), 140; emphasis added. Nathan Ausubel, in his *Book of Jewish Knowledge* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1964), 134, under “Doctrines in Judaism,” says of this same passage that Hillel, when “asked for an epigrammatic condensation for the entire Torah . . . replied with his celebrated formulation of the Golden Rule (adopted by Jesus in a slightly modified form, one generation later). . . . To this, Hillel added his own astonishing estimate: ‘The rest [of the Torah] is merely commentary.’” See also Flusser, “Jesus, His Ancestry, and the Commandment of Love,” 170–71 (full citation at note 11 above). There are many sources that discuss this aspect in Judaism. Jeffrey Wattles, in *The Golden Rule*, chap. 4, joins the others by arguing convincingly of the importance of the Golden Rule as an overarching tenet of Jewish faith.  
Dās, in his discussion of both the preeminence and universal importance of the Golden Rule worldwide, also quotes from highly important Islamic discourse. Muhammad states, in the *Hadis* (or *Hadith*, the Sayings of Muhammad): “*Noblest* religion this—that thou shouldst like for others what thou likest for thyself; and what thou feelest painful for thyself, hold that as painful for all others too.” Dās goes on to explain: “Stating the golden rule, Muhammad says, ‘This is the noblest religion’; Christ describes it as ‘This is the law and the prophets’; Vyasa, in *Maha-bharata*, laying it down, says, ‘This is the whole of Dharma.’” Dās, *The Essential Unity of All Religions*, 273. To this can be added that Confucius’ enunciation of the Golden Rule was in response to questions posed by

disciples as to “any one maxim” and the “meaning of *true* goodness” (emphasis added). See Giles, *Analects*, 19–20, 29, and 106–7. I am indebted to James Toronto for providing the following reference to the Hadith. Professor Toronto quotes from al-Arba’un al-Nawawiyya, *An-Nawawi’s Forty Hadith*, trans. Ezzeddin Ibrahim and Denys Johnson-Davies (Damascus: The Holy Koran Publishing House, 1976) that Mohammed states that “None of you [truly] believes until he wishes for his brother what he wishes for himself” (Hadith No. 13, p. 56). Toronto goes on to say that “according to Nawawi, each of the forty is one of the ‘great precepts of religion’ [that] are classified as ‘sound’ in the canonical Hadith collection and ‘every person wishing to attain the Hereafter should know these Hadith because of the important matters they contain’ (pp. 23–24).”

18. “Love,” ISBE, 3:174.
19. Ibid., 3:175–76.
20. M. Scott Peck, *The Road Less Traveled: A New Psychology of Love, Traditional Values and Spiritual Growth* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1978), 81 and passim.
21. Peck, *The Road Less Traveled*, 83.
22. Ibid., 120. See also *ibid.*, 81, 82, 116, 118, 131.
23. *Newsweek*, 21 May 2001, 32–35. See also Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, reprint (New York: Penguin Books, 1977), 276: “The trouble with Eichmann was precisely that so many were like him, and that the many were neither perverted nor sadistic, that they were, and still are, terribly and terrifyingly normal.”
24. McConkie, *New Testament Commentary*, 609.
25. George W. Knox and Sydney H. Mellone, *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, s.v. “Christianity,” 5:631, 637.
26. Gordon B. Hinckley, “Let Love Be the Lodestar of Your Life,” *Ensign*, May 1989, 66.



Elder James E. Talmage (1862–1933), Quorum of the Twelve Apostles