

# Unit I: Fulfilling Our Obligations to Neighbors

## Love Acts

DEVOTIONAL READING: Proverbs 28:18-22

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURES: Nehemiah 4:15-23; Mark 12:28-34;  
Romans 15:1-7; Philippians 2:1-8; Colossians 3:12; 4:1; James 2:14-17

PRINT PASSAGES: Mark 12:28-34; James 2:14-17

### KEY VERSE

To love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love his neighbour as himself, is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices. (Mark 12:33, KJV)

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“To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices.” (Mark 12:33, NIV)

### Lesson Aims

As a result of experiencing this lesson, you should be able to do the following:

- Contrast the meaning of “knowing” the First Commandment (Mark 12) with practicing it in daily life (James 2).
- Identify sincere love for God, self, and others in your attitudes and motivations.
- Assess the immediate needs of your communities and provide goods and services accordingly.

### \*Key Terms

**Heart** (Mark 12:30)—Greek: *kardia* (kar-dee'-ah): the inner self—mind, character, will, intention.

**Love** (Mark 12:33)—Greek: *agapaó* (ag-apah'-o): reasoned, willful affection; wishing well to others.

**Mind** (Mark 12:30)—Greek: *dianoia* (dee-an'-oy-ah): disposition; thought; intellect.

**Neighbor** (Mark 12:31)—Greek: *plésion* (playsee'-on): one who is near; fellow human being.

**Save** (James 2:14)—Greek: *sózó* (sode'-zo): to rescue, preserve, or heal.

**Truth** (Mark 12:32, KJV)—Greek: *alétheia* (al-ay'-thi-a): divine reality and sincerity.

**Understanding** (Mark 12:33)—Greek: *sunesis* (soon'-es-is): practical insight and discernment.

\*(Word Study Supplement—Refer to page 2)



## The Biblical Context

The gospel of Mark places this teaching after Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem. On that day, the crowd's praise was high, and their personal and spiritual expectations of the Messiah were strong—although many had the wrong ideas about why Jesus had come. The people shouted “Hosanna,” or “save us.” This event took place just days before Jesus' arrest, trial, and crucifixion. When religious leaders tried to trap Him by asking which commandment was the greatest, Jesus' answer was clear: God's teaching was not only about belief but also about practice. The leaders designed the question as a trap, yet Jesus turned it into a lesson in faithful living. This setting matters. It reminds us that before His own sacrifice, Jesus emphasized the sacrificial nature of love—love for God and love for neighbor.

The epistle of James confirms the same truth. Faith cannot remain only inward or intellectual; it must be lived out. James teaches that belief without action is empty. His message shows the unbreakable tie between faith and works. Though the Gospels and epistles are different forms of writing, their message is shared: true love for God always expresses itself through love for others.

## Introduction

Jim and Mary planned a cross-country trip by car. They were excited because they had never seen many parts of the United States together. Both had grown up in Virginia and traveled mostly to the East Coast. The Midwest, Chicago, the Mississippi River, and the Rocky Mountains were only names on a map for them. They saved carefully and organized their journey. Along with tourist stops, they planned to visit several churches.

As they neared one congregation, they saw a traffic jam of people trying to reach worship on time. A family nearby held a sign that read, “*Homeless and Hungry.*” Their appearance confirmed their need, yet the would-be worshippers hurried past, eager for music and preaching. They had no patience for those in the way of “their praise.” Jim and Mary, however, felt moved. Even though they were strangers in this city, they saw the family as neighbors. They took the money they had planned as their offering and gave it instead to the family, who wept in gratitude.

### ANALYSIS OF THE BIBLICAL TEXT

## Jesus Breaks Down the Commandments (*Mark 12:28-34*)

### KJV

**28** And one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, and perceiving that he had answered them well, asked him, Which is the first commandment of all?  
**29** And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord:  
**30** 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.  
**31** And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these.

**32 And the scribe said unto him, Well, Master, thou hast said the truth: for there is one God; and there is none other but he:**

**33 And to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love his neighbour as himself, is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.**

**34 And when Jesus saw that he answered discreetly, he said unto him, Thou art not far from the kingdom of God. And no man after that durst ask him any question.**

## **NIV**

**28 One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, “Of all the commandments, which is the most important?”**

**29 “The most important one,” answered Jesus, “is this: ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.**

**30 “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’**

**31 “The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.”**

**32 “Well said, teacher,” the man replied. “You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him.**

**33 “To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices.”**

**34 When Jesus saw that he had answered wisely, he said to him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” And from then on no one dared ask him any more questions.**

At times, teachers struggle to explain truth when students prefer debate over understanding. This was the case with those questioning Jesus. Their aim was to trap Him, yet His joining of the commandments into two imperatives was brilliant.

Jewish leaders enjoyed debate and legal subdivision. By Jesus’ time, in addition to the Ten Commandments (see Exodus 20:1-17), there were 613 mitzvot (commandments) covering spiritual, civil, and judicial life. These included guidance on worship, family, business, festivals, diet, prayer, vows, and many other matters. With so many, it was difficult to entrap Jesus.

His first command was to love God with one’s entire being. This was not just emotion or intellect but the full use of heart, soul, mind, and strength. God is love (see 1 John 4:8). Loving Him completely leaves no room for sin or rebellion. Nothing can be greater than this command.

The second command was to love one’s neighbor. Measuring love by one’s care for self left no excuse to diminish another person. Leaders could not place themselves above the people they

served. Jesus' command also raised a deeper issue: how does one truly love oneself? Many fail even to value God's creation within themselves, which is why this, too, is a command.

## WHAT DO YOU THINK?

The religious leaders of Jesus' day overcomplicated God's law. Are believers today at risk of missing the kingdom because of making the same mistake?

### The Practicality of Faith (*James 2:14-17*)

#### KJV

**14** What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him?

**15** If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food,

**16** And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?

**17** Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.

#### NIV

**14** What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them?

**15** Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food.

**16** If one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it?

**17** In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

Some people see Christianity only as doctrine, precepts, or rules. Scripture memorization is necessary, but without practice, it is incomplete. Jesus made clear that God's commands are meant to be lived. James echoes this by insisting that faith and works cannot be separated.

As Jesus' earthly brother, James saw His life up close. Jesus taught multitudes from mountains, synagogues, and shorelines. Yet, His greatest teaching came through what He did. His substitutionary death on the cross was the high point. Even from the cross, He cared for His mother, gave hope to the thief, and offered salvation to all. James saw faith made visible in action.

His phrase "faith without works is dead" stresses the uselessness of empty religion. This does not contradict Paul's teaching that salvation comes by grace through faith. Instead, James shows that genuine faith naturally produces works. Words without action are hollow. Human needs require a real response.

James' message is practical: feeding the hungry, clothing the poor, visiting the sick, and caring for prisoners embody the Gospel. Saving faith must be seen, not just spoken.

