

# THE THREE GREAT LOVE COMMANDMENTS



BE UNITED  
IN CHRIST

# THE THREE GREAT LOVE COMMANDMENTS



# The Three Great Love Commandments

*The Three Great Love Commandments Deluxe Edition*

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## Chapter 1

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# **The Three Great Love Commandments**





## The Three Great Love Commandments

The Bible contains many commands, but three matter most to God. We must love the Lord wholeheartedly, we must love our neighbors as ourselves, and we must love other believers as Christ loved us. These are the three great love commandments. We know so because Jesus said so.

Three days before His death Jesus was asked, “Which is the most important commandment in the law of Moses?” He answered, “‘You must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment” (Matthew 22:36–38). Loving God with all our being is the foremost command in Scripture.

Then Jesus added, “A second is equally important: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments” (Matthew 22:39–40). Loving people is a companion command to loving God, and both are required to fulfill the demands of the Old Testament.

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Mutual, Christlike love for other Christians is the distinguishing mark of a Christian.

Two days later Christ told His disciples, “I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are My disciples” (John 13:34–35). Mutual, Christlike love for other Christians is the distinguishing mark of a Christian.

Loving God wholeheartedly, loving other people as ourselves, and loving other Christians as Christ loved us are the three great love commandments.

### *God's Loving Priorities*

God is love, so love is His top priority. Love for God, our unbelieving neighbors, and other believers distinguishes the saved from the unsaved, for every saved person has the Holy Spirit dwelling within them, who produces Christlike love in every true child of God.

The person who loves God is the one whom God recognizes. (1 Corinthians 8:3)

They will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love Him. (James 1:12; see also 1 Corinthians 2:9; James 2:5; 1 Peter 1:8)

Owe nothing to anyone—except for your obligation to love one another. If you love your neighbor, you will fulfill the requirements of God's law. (Romans 13:8)

If someone says, "I love God," but hates a fellow believer, that person is a liar; for if we don't love people we can see, how can we love God, whom we cannot see? And He has given us this command: Those who love God must also love their fellow believers. (1 John 4:20–21)

God expects His children to love like He does. But He doesn't want us to love everyone the same way, for neither does He. God's love has priorities, and so should ours.<sup>1</sup>

First and foremost, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit love each other, for they fully deserve each other's love. So we, too, must love God before and more than anyone or





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## Chapter 2

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# Love in Action



## Love in Action

The book of Acts and the early church demonstrate the effectiveness of Jesus' love-based evangelistic strategy. Selfless love characterized the church from the very start and extended across geographic distances and racial lines. Christians clearly prioritized caring for one another and by doing so displayed the gospel in ways that unbelievers came to appreciate and increasingly embrace. The history of the apostolic and post-apostolic church proves the power of mutual Christian love to reach the world for Christ.

Surprisingly, the word *love* isn't mentioned in the book of Acts, but it is vividly presented in action. This sequel to Luke's gospel records the birth and expansion of the church from the Holy Spirit's arrival in Jerusalem to Paul's preaching in Rome. In three decades Christianity spread from the Jewish capital to the Roman capital, with churches multiplying in between. How did the early church spread so far so fast? God's Spirit enabled God's people to love their Lord and one another so radically that it led many of their neighbors to Christ.

### *Love from the Start*

Here is the Bible's description of the first church.

All the believers met together in one place and shared everything they had. They sold their property and possessions and shared the money with those in need. They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord's Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity—all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day

the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved. (Acts 2:44–47)

The believers worshiped and praised their Lord, for they loved Him. And they loved each other, opening their homes and sharing their meals and possessions. Their devotion to God and one another earned them the people's goodwill, and many joined their fellowship. The church's love for God and one another made disciples of their neighbors, just as Jesus intended.

When the Jewish leaders warned Peter and John “never again to speak or teach in the name of Jesus” (4:18), the church prayed for “great boldness in preaching” (4:29). Threatened with persecution, the believers remained united and continued to love one another selflessly.

All the believers were united in heart and mind. And they felt that what they owned was not their own, so they shared everything they had. The apostles testified powerfully to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and God's great blessing was upon them all. There were no needy people among them, because those who owned land or houses would sell them and bring the money to the apostles to give to those in need. (4:32–35)

*All* united, *none* needy—what a testimony! And what united them and motivated their sacrificial charity was Christ. The disciples' love for their Lord made them love one another. This pleased God, for His “great blessing was upon them all.”

Note that the church's charity was directed toward the “needy people *among them*,” not toward their unbelieving



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Paul's letter to the Galatians teaches us that the gospel does more than save us. It also unites us and frees us to love and serve one another. It obligates us to live in a manner worthy of its good news. And it gives us the Spirit who defeats sin and makes us like Christ.

### Mutual Christian Love in Ephesians

Paul's letter to the Ephesians begins by praising God's love.

Even before He made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in His eyes. God decided in advance to adopt us into His own family by bringing us to Himself through Jesus Christ.... He is so rich in kindness and grace that He purchased our freedom with the blood of His Son and forgave our sins. (1:4-5, 7)

Paul then thanks God for the Ephesians' faith in Jesus and for their "love for God's people everywhere" (1:15). For Paul, faith in Christ and love for Christians always go together (Galatians 5:6; 1 Thessalonians 3:6; 2 Thessalonians 1:3). Those who have saving faith are always expected to express it by loving other believers.

Mutual Christian love encompasses all believers, for Christ died to reconcile us not only to God but also to one another.

Christ Himself has brought peace to us. He united Jews and Gentiles into one people when, in His own body on the cross, He broke down the wall of hostility that separated us. He did this by ending the system of law with its commandments and regulations. He made peace between Jews and Gentiles by creating in Himself one new people from the two groups. Together as one body, Christ reconciled both groups to God by means of His



death on the cross, and our hostility toward each other was put to death. (2:14–16)

The Mosaic law separated Jews and Gentiles, but the new covenant integrates them to approach God together. “Now all of us can come to the Father through the same Holy Spirit because of what Christ has done for us” (2:18). In Christ believers are fellow citizens in God’s kingdom, fellow members of God’s family, and fellow parts of God’s new temple, the church (2:19–22).

Since God makes us one, we must work hard to stay that way. “Make every effort to keep yourselves united in the Spirit, binding yourselves together with peace” (4:3). How do we do this? “Always be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other’s faults because of your love” (4:2). Why do we do this? “For there is one body and one Spirit, just as you have been called to one glorious hope for the future. There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all, in all, and living through all” (4:4–6).

Using our spiritual gifts, we build each other up “until we all come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God’s Son that we will be mature in the Lord” (4:13). To do this we must also “speak the truth in love, growing in every way more and more like Christ, who is the head of His body, the church” (4:15). As we use our gifts faithfully and teach God’s truth lovingly, Christ “makes the whole body fit together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love” (4:16).

Healthy churches require healthy church members. So we must “let the Spirit renew [our] thoughts and attitudes” so we can become “truly righteous and holy” (4:23–24). As believers grow in truth and righteousness, our relationships become more loving.

Stop telling lies. Let us tell our neighbors the truth, for we are all parts of the same body. And “don’t sin by letting anger control you.” Don’t let the sun go down while you are still angry, for anger gives a foothold to the devil. (4:25–27)

Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behavior. Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you. (4:31–32)

Imitate God, therefore, in everything you do, because you are His dear children. Live a life filled with love, following the example of Christ. He loved us and offered Himself as a sacrifice for us, a pleasing aroma to God. (5:1–2)

To summarize, Christian unity requires trust, so we must not tell lies. Harmony requires peace and reconciliation, so we must not let anger linger and fester into resentment. We must ruthlessly eliminate bitterness, rage, slander, and harsh speech, and we must intentionally foster kindness, tenderness, and forgiveness. Finally, we must imitate God’s sacrificial forgiveness and Christ’s sacrificial love. Practicing these precepts promotes love-based unity in the body of Christ and protects us from strife and division.

We can’t do this on our own, however, so we must be continually filled by the Holy Spirit (5:18). When we are, He causes us to praise God gratefully, to submit to authority humbly, and to exercise authority lovingly. It is the Holy

Spirit who brings harmony to our church communities and homes (5:18–6:10).

Finally, Christians must stand firm together against the schemes of the devil by making sure that all God's soldiers wear all God's armor (6:10–18). Every follower of Christ needs to live in truth and righteousness, to have gospel peace and faith, and to understand salvation and handle God's Word accurately. Believers must also "stay alert and be persistent in [our] prayers for believers everywhere" (6:18). Spiritual warfare should not be fought alone.

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It is the Holy Spirit who brings  
harmony to our church  
communities and homes.

Paul concludes his letter to the Ephesians with four blessings, pertaining to the church's harmony and health. "*Peace* be with you, dear brothers and sisters, and may God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ give you *love* with *faithfulness*. May God's *grace* be eternally upon all who love our Lord Jesus Christ" (6:23–24).

### Mutual Christian Love in Philippians

Paul's first church in Europe was in Philippi, and it was diverse. Its initial members included a cloth merchant named Lydia and her household, a formerly demon-possessed slave girl, and a jail guard and his household (Acts 16:14–40). Yet despite their significant differences, they loved one another. And Paul prayed that their love would "overflow more and more" as they grew in their knowledge and understanding of



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## Chapter 4

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# Love, Love, Love



## Love, Love, Love

God assigns His children one main duty—love. Our Lord expects us to love Him with all our heart, soul, and strength, to love our neighbors as ourselves, and to love other believers as Christ loved us.

Our other duties express these three love commandments. We worship and obey God because we love Him. We bless our neighbors and tell them about Jesus because we love them. We serve and encourage our brothers and sisters in Christ because we love them. All we do every day should express love for our Lord, our unbelieving neighbors, and our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Days when we love well are well-lived. Days when we're unloving are wasted, no matter our other achievements. Without love we are nothing (1 Corinthians 13:2), but even small acts mean much to God when they're done in love. Therefore our main goal every day should be to love—to love God, our neighbors, and our fellow believers.

Each morning we should pray something like this:

Good morning, Lord; I love You. Thank You for giving me another day to enjoy, serve, and glorify You. Please enable me to love You with all my heart, soul, mind, and strength, to love my neighbors as myself, and to love my brothers and sisters in Christ as Christ loves me. Please let me live in love this day. Amen.

Then we rise and by God's grace love the whole day long.





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# **Inspiring, Bible-Based Resources**

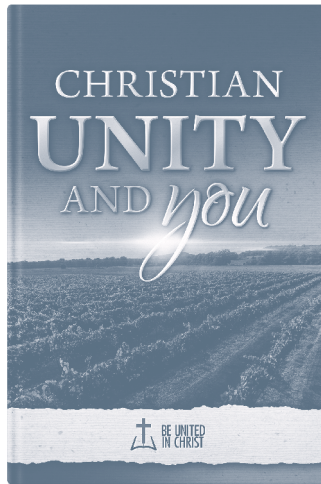


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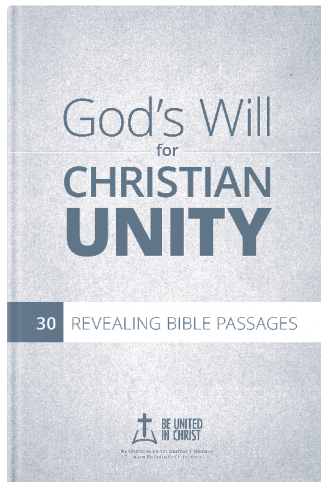


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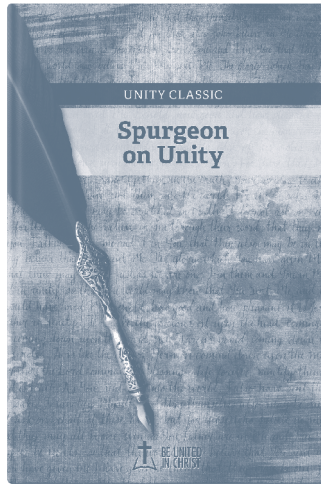
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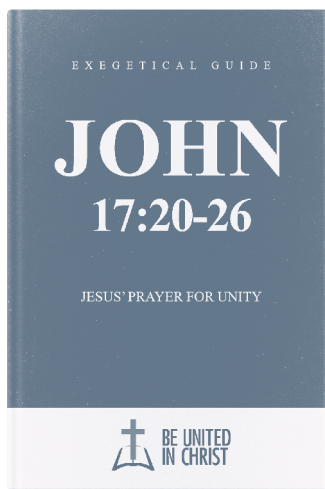
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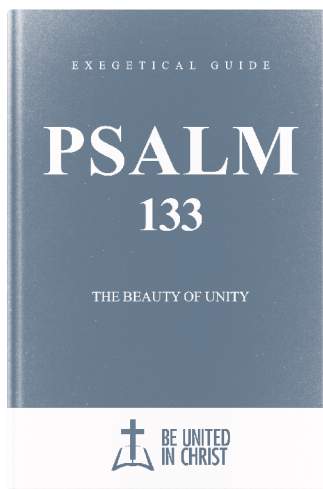
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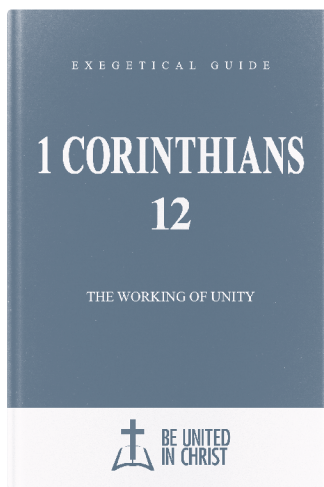
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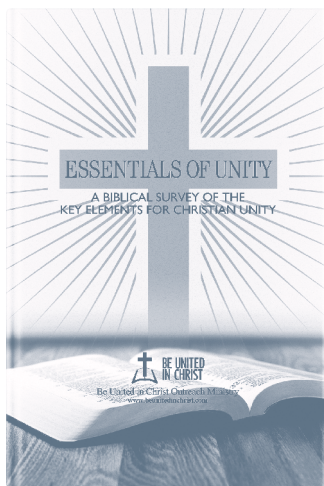
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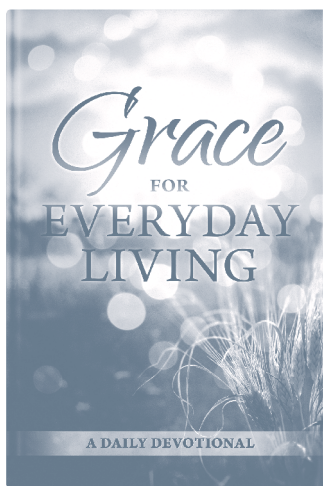


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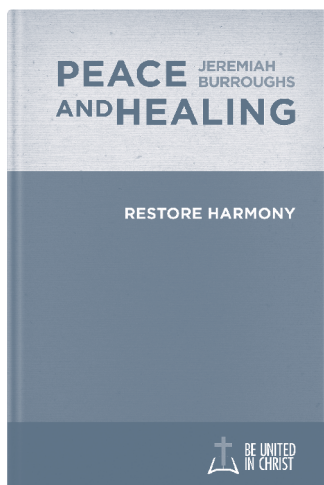
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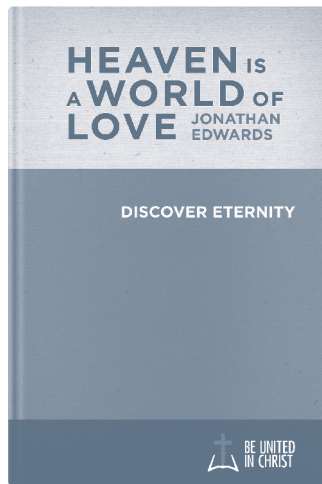
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# THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT.

The mission of the Be United in Christ Outreach Ministry is to teach and promote Christian unity in accordance with God's Word. Our goal is to bring about real change in the body of Christ by helping believers to better understand our Lord's will for His people to "Be United in Christ."

We thank our brothers and sisters in Christ who support this worldwide outreach ministry in three ways. First, we thank you for purchasing our Bible-based resources. Your purchase provides our ministry with financial support to continue to produce Bible-based resources to be distributed around the globe.

Second, we thank you for making tax-deductible donations to our ministry on [BeUnitedinChrist.com](http://BeUnitedinChrist.com) to help us promote a loving union between believers that draws people to the truth of the gospel.

Third, we thank all of our faithful family of believers who regularly pray for our continued impact around the world as we await the glorious return of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

## MAY GOD BLESS YOU FOR YOUR GENEROUS SUPPORT.



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**W**ithin every human heart is the desire to be loved and to show love. It is the mark of God on our lives — a God who embodies love, who IS love, according to the Bible. In His Word, God gives us three great commandments, rules for operating in love with Him, with others, and with our Christian brothers and sisters. These provide the foundation for everything we say and do.

*The Three Great Love Commandments* will transform your life and your relationships. It will help you to understand these three commandments and how they relate to each other. As you read, you will find the help you need to serve God with a pure and loving heart. Uncover these three great love commandments today.

**Editor's Note:** *The Three Great Love Commandments* is also available in a basic edition designed to provide a shorter overview.

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