

**Focus Scripture:**

**Deuteronomy 6:1-9 and Mark 12:28-34**

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**“Shema and Greatest Commandment”**

The 2015 Passages for Azusa Pacific University are Deuteronomy 6:1-9, and Mark 12:28-34. The Deuteronomy passage contains what is known as the *Shema* (Hebrew, “hear”). The verse affirms that there is one God, and that we are to love God, obey God, and teach our children to do the same. The *Shema* continues to epitomize the central beliefs and worship of Judaism, which emphasizes love in relationship with God.

When asked about the “first” or “greatest commandment,” Jesus understandably turned to the *Shema*. But he added to it in two ways that I want to highlight. First, Jesus said that we are to love God, and that we are to do so “with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength” (Mark 12:30, NRSV). The change he made in the wording of the *Shema* was to add that we are to love God with our “mind” as well as our heart, soul, and strength. Our mind is not contrary to faith, hope and love; quite the opposite, it is integral to them. Indeed our mind represents, perhaps, our greatest God-given asset for spiritual understanding and formation in holiness.

Second, Jesus added to the words of the *Shema* that we are to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Mark 12:31). In these words, he alluded to Leviticus 19:18: “you shall love your neighbor as yourself.” From Jesus’ perspective, loving God and loving your neighbor (or neighbors) as yourself are inextricably bound up with one another. One does not love God without also loving one’s neighbor as oneself, and vice versa. In his own life and ministry, Jesus modeled how loving one’s neighbor involves more than caring for their spiritual well-being; it also has to do with caring for their physical healing, for their impoverishment, and for their social relations.

One of the challenges to loving one’s neighbor as oneself has to do with how Christians do not love themselves. So, how can they effectively love others, if they do not or cannot love themselves? In church history, some Christians have argued that self-love produces sin, but that represents a narrow interpretation of biblical texts. Although inordinate self-love may cause us to disregard God, we are to love ourselves appropriately, that is, in accordance with biblical teachings. Without appropriately loving ourselves, it is difficult to love our neighbor in ways that are redemptive, just, and healing.



**FOCUS QUESTIONS**

1. Do you as a Christian think of your relationship with God primarily in terms of love? If not, then in what terms do you think about your relationship with God?
2. What does it mean to love God with your mind? How may your mind help your faith and hope, as well as your love?
3. How ought Christians to express love to their neighbor: Spiritually? Physically? Socially? Politically?
4. How would you describe appropriate love for yourself? What may happen if you do not love yourself, as God loves you?

**Life/Discipline Application:**

What does this passage mean in your school or department - consider the implications of the passage to your day-to-day lives.

**Personal Reflection:**

What does this mean to you - examine the implications of the passage to your own day to day life.