

The Greatest Commandment

Mark 12:28-34

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Introduction

There are two types of people in this world as defined by Scripture:

Exodus 20:4-6 *You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. 5 You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate Me, 6 but showing love to a thousand of those who love Me and keep My commandments.*

We are either God-haters or God-lovers. To love God is to do what HE says and to love Him unconditionally. Note that God wants us to love Him by the heart. This is a heart issue. We cannot rely on the external acts to please God. We cannot please God by saying "I love You" with our lips or hands but we do not love Him with our whole heart. He alone deserves our wholeheartedly love.

It is interesting that the next group trying to trap Jesus as Him what is the greatest commandment in Scripture. Why?

Let us review what has been happening in Mark.

- Jesus had pretty much stonewalled the temple operations when He went through the temple courtyards and overturned the tables and prevented people from doing business there.
- The Sanhedrin (group of 71 men who are the top leaders of Israel) were angry because they controlled the business of the temple and were making a great profit. They were angry because Jesus was destroying their bottom-line. They want Him out of the picture, so they devised traps, hoping to catch Him so they could destroy Him.
- They sent out groups to try to discredit Him. They sent the first group: Pharisees and Herodians to trap Him with a tax question.
- Failing that, they sent the Sadducees to trap Him with the resurrection question.
- They even failed, so they sent scribes to try to incriminate Him.

Matthew 22:34-35 *Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. 35 One of them, an expert in the law, tested Him with this question.*

They gathered together. They were embarrassed by Jesus' words. This is a group of enemies that shared a common enemy. The Sadducees were delighted that the Pharisees were humiliated, but they could not allow Jesus to continue. When Jesus destroyed their no-resurrection belief, the Pharisees must have stood by in glee and in hatred. The enemies of Christ do not make sense except that they hated Jesus. They are getting desperate, so they sent the scribes to trap Him, yet there is one man who is actually honest and objective about this whole thing. He is actually interested in what Jesus says. Mark is the only one in the gospels to present us this man. Let us look closely at what happened.

Mark 12:28-34

28 Then one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, perceiving that He had answered them well, asked Him, "Which is the first commandment of all?"

- Scribes
 - The lawyers—extensive knowledge of the OT
 - This group from Pharisees
 - They planned to trap Jesus
 - Honest scribe
- The question
 - Matthew says that they planned this question
 - Seems like a legitimate question
 - How is this question a trap?
 - They believed that Jesus was teaching against the law

Note: He did not go against the Law. He was against their elevation of traditions as equal to Scripture. He always quoted Scripture.

- If He answered anything differently, then they could expose Him as a heretic
- Pharisees and Sadducees agree that the first five books of Moses are preeminent
- Elevation of Moses
 - They revered Moses
 - He was face to face with God
 - In their eyes, Moses has the purest words
 - If Jesus taught differently from Moses, then He is trapped
- The greatest commandment
 - Jewish rabbis taught there were 613 laws

Note: How did they arrive at this number? They reasoned that there are 613 letters in the Ten Commandments (in Hebrew), so there must be a law for each letter. 613 letters = 613 laws.

 - 248 positive laws (shalls) and 365 negative laws (shall nots)
 - Rabbis would debate endlessly over which law was the greatest (or heaviest)
 - They would divide the law into groups...the heavier law and the lighter laws
 - The heavier laws would be laws that would credit them the most righteousness

Matthew 23:23 *Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithes of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone.*

Note: For Jesus, the heavier laws are spiritual actions or attitudes. Ceremonies, diets, and all externals are all lighter laws.

 - Over time tradition began to be the Law upon themselves
 - They substituted the laws of God for traditions (**Mark 7:6-13**)
 - The question: what is the heaviest law?

29 Jesus answered him, "The first of all the commandments is: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. **30** And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' This is the first commandment. **31** And the second, like it, is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."

- Loving God
 - Jesus quotes from Deuteronomy 6
 - Jesus came to fulfill the law not to abolish it
 - He gives this answer as something foundational

Background: Deuteronomy means second law. Moses teaches the people in the span of one month, and this was before they entered the Promised Land. This is a new generation of people because the first law was given to the first generation that rebelled against God. That first generation was forced to wander the wilderness for 40 years, and all of them had died. Moses' purpose in teaching and writing Deuteronomy is to remind them they are to obey everything that the Lord has commanded them. They are to obey. He gives them the effects and consequences of obedience and disobedience. Essentially, Deuteronomy is a call to obedience.

Interestingly, Deuteronomy is actually anti-legalism because Moses is challenging them to obey God to the fullest; however, he challenges them to obey God with all their hearts. The true reaction of a believer should be, "How? How can I follow the Law at all? How can I perfectly keep the Law when I am a sinner before God?" Moses is telling them that the motivation to follow the law is love.

Deuteronomy 6:4-6 Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one! **5** You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. **6** And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart.

- The commandment
 - All your heart, soul and strength
 - This is a love of choice, purpose, sacrifice, and obedience
 - To really love God is to love God in all our personhood
 - This is very foundational

Deuteronomy 11:13 And it shall be that if you earnestly obey My commandments which I command you today, to love the Lord your God and serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul,

Deuteronomy 11:22 For if you carefully keep all these commandments which I command you to do--to love the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways, and to hold fast to Him--

Deuteronomy 19:9 and if you keep all these commandments and do them, which I command you today, to love the Lord your God and to walk always in His ways, then you shall add three more cities for yourself besides these three,

Deuteronomy 30:6 And the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.

Deuteronomy 30:16 *in that I command you today to love the Lord your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments, His statutes, and His judgments, that you may live and multiply; and the Lord your God will bless you in the land which you go to possess.*

- God calls us to love Him with an active, all-consuming love
- This is what it means to be a Christian
- Loving others
 - This is also just as important
 - Loving others as yourselves

Note: This does not mean that we ought to love ourselves more. This is what the world teaches (self-esteem), which is NOT what we need. What Scripture means here is that we take care of ourselves—we dress ourselves, feed ourselves, buy things for ourselves, and comfort ourselves. We are called to for others the same way we do for ourselves. This is self-sacrificial love.

- When we love God whole-heartedly, we will love others as well
- Pharisees never did, they looked down on anyone beneath their station
- Love fulfills the law (**Romans 13:9**)

32 *So the scribe said to Him, "Well said, Teacher. You have spoken the truth, for there is one God, and there is no other but He. 33 And to love Him with all the heart, with all the understanding, with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as oneself, is more than all the whole burnt offerings and sacrifices."*

- This is an unexpected response
- This scribe is honest
- He agrees with Jesus that the issues are internal, not external

34 *Now when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, He said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." But after that no one dared question Him.*

- He is not far
- He is not in the kingdom of God
- How can he be in the kingdom of God?
 - By believing in the person of Jesus Christ, the Son of God
 - Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life