

SESSION 5

THE GREATEST COMMAND

Leader pages on pp. 120-123

THE POINT:
OUR OBEDIENCE TO GOD
IS SEEN IN OUR LOVE FOR
HIM AND OTHERS.

MARK 12:28-34

²⁸ One of the scribes approached. When he heard them debating and saw that Jesus answered them well, he asked him, "Which command is the most important of all?"

²⁹ Jesus answered, "The most important is Listen, Israel! The Lord our God, the Lord is one.

³⁰ Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.

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³¹ The second is, Love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other command greater than these."

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³² Then the scribe said to him, "You are right, teacher. You have correctly said that he is one, and there is no one else except him.

³³ **And to love him with all your heart, with all your understanding, and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself, is far more important than all the burnt offerings and sacrifices."**

³⁴ When Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." And no one dared to question him any longer.

MEMORY VERSE

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KEYWORDS

Listen, Israel (v. 29)—Jesus quoted a passage identified as the Shema (Mark 12:29-30). The Shema became a confession of faith by which the Jews acknowledged the one true God.

As yourself (v. 31)—These words do not justify a self-centered or self-focused love. This kind

of love is loyal, unselfish, and benevolent toward others.

Far from the kingdom of God (v. 34)—This scribe's affirmation of Jesus's response to his question indicated the scribe's receptivity to Jesus's person as well as to His teaching.

HOW ARE WE TO LOVE GOD AND HIS PEOPLE?

"What's the one thing?" That's the beginning of many questions asked of those who are successful or at the top of their given profession. Whether it's in business, marriage, athletic performance, or just general success and happiness. The question usually gets asked something like this:

- "What's the one thing you did, know, or feel that got you to where you are?"
- "What's the one thing I need to do, know, or feel to get me to where you are?"
- "What's the most important piece of advice you've been given or can give to someone who wants to be successful?"

Sometimes the answers are a treasure, while others could be trash, depending upon the person's values and worldview.

Jesus was asked that "one thing" question. An expert in the Old Testament law witnessed Jesus verbally sparring with religious leaders. Impressed with how Jesus handled His accusers and their questions, the expert had to know something for himself. He approached Jesus and asked, "Which command is the most important of all?" (Mark 12:28). Jesus perceived his sincerity

and gave the man a clear, concise answer. Their interaction has fascinated preachers, philosophers, princes, and even paupers since it occurred.

Love God With Our Whole Being // Mark 12:28-30

The honeymoon was over. Just a few days removed from making His triumphal entry into Jerusalem amidst the cheers of the people, Jesus was again at odds with the religious elites. They were seeking to trap Him in an error so they could bring charges. This time it was the Sadducees. They were trading verbal blows over the resurrection, something they didn't even believe in.

On the periphery, witnessing the inquisition was a scribe. Scribes were scholars and experts in the Mosaic law. Their role was to copy, interpret, and write rules and regulations on how the law should be lived out for each generation. They counted 613 commandments, 365 prohibitions, and 248 positive commands in the Torah. While these experts wrote the Mosaic law procedure manual, they also attempted to summarize the whole of the law in as few words as possible.



THE POINT: OUR OBEDIENCE TO GOD IS SEEN IN OUR LOVE FOR HIM AND OTHERS.

After witnessing Jesus's resounding victory, the scribe approached Jesus alone. He inquired which commandment could be considered the most important. His tone was different. Three things point to the man's sincerity.

1. **The type of question.** The scribe asked Jesus to summarize the whole of the law in a nutshell.
2. **The man came alone.** Since Jesus's arrival in Jerusalem, He was usually approached by groups of religious leaders.
3. **Jesus's answer.** When Jesus perceived nefarious motives, He would answer questions with questions, or even reply in parables.

Jesus quoted the Shema found in Deuteronomy 6:4-5. Shema is so named because it is the first word of the statement in the Hebrew, a word that means "hear." The Shema was first delivered to the people of Israel, as they were about to enter the promised land. It was recited morning and evening by the Jewish people and was also the opening words of temple services.

It's a commandment to know God and to remind His people that He is One. The Lord is the only One. He alone is God; there is no other. He has no equal, no rival; He stands alone.

"All" is repeated four times to highlight the total response of love that's to be given to the Lord (Mark 12:30). In His covenant, God gives Himself totally to Israel; He expects it to be reciprocated. We're not to love God casually or half-heartedly, but in full measure with our every thought, emotion, feeling, word, and action. We are to pursue our love for Him in every aspect of daily life, with all that we are. The call is to love God with all your:

- **Heart.** To love God exclusively. We should have no other gods before Him. He alone has our heart's allegiance.
- **Soul.** To love God with all our souls means we find our purpose and meaning in Him alone. Our love for God must surpass our love for others and for all things.
- **Mind.** We love God with all our minds by choosing obedience because we know what He says is true. Jesus said we are to worship God in truth.
- **Strength.** To love God with all our strength is to love with perseverance. It keeps its commitment through all the trials and suffering of life lived in a broken world.

WHY WOULD THE COMMAND TO LOVE GOD BE GREATER THAN ANY OTHER COMMANDS?



DIGGING DEEPER GOD OF ALL GENERATIONS

Within Deuteronomy, the Shema was prescribed to remind God's people that they should not become idolaters. Once in the Promised Land future generations would be tempted to forget the Lord because of the wealth they inherited (Deut. 6:10-14). The current generation had experienced God's miraculous deliverance and understood the importance of what they had been given. But the future generations would become content because they did not have the same experience. The correction for this is to remember that God is "One," and that God is uniquely set apart from everything and everyone else. Achieving great wealth is not sinful if one remembers how it is acquired, through following God's commandments (Deut. 6:1-2). This is true of every good thing in life. Remembering that God is uniquely the only source of truth, is what will allow us to safely transfer genuine faith from one generation to the next.

What some practical steps that you are taking to ensure that the next generation understands who God is?

Love Others as Ourselves //

Mark 12:31

Isn't it just like Jesus to go the extra mile for someone who is truly seeking? Not only does He give the scribe a straightforward answer, but He expands upon it and brings something revolutionary to the table.

Within the listing of the Old Testament commands, the Shema (Deut. 6:4-5) and command to love our neighbors (Lev. 19:18), are two separate commands that are separated by quite some distance. This caused some religious leaders to treat them as two separate commands. Jesus, however, clarified that these commands were always meant to function together. Loving God is intrinsically linked to loving one's neighbor. We can see Jesus put into practice what He was speaking even in His response to this scribe.

CAN YOU IDENTIFY AT LEAST THREE WAYS THAT LOVING OTHERS WHOLEHEARTEDLY BEGINS WITH LOVING GOD WHOLEHEARTEDLY?

As mentioned earlier the command "Love your neighbor as yourself" (v. 31) is a quotation from Leviticus 19:18 and is found at least eight times in the Scriptures. Religious leaders of the day had not modeled following this command well. Jesus quoted the command without any limiting boundaries. Jesus summarized the totality of the law as love God and love others. The Ten Commandments define how to love God and others. The first four are about love for God, while the second six are love for others.

"Love others as yourself?" Loving ourselves doesn't sound Christlike, does it? If love means sacrificially working in another's best interest, shouldn't we also do that for ourselves? Jesus's command to love others as ourselves implies that we won't love others in the right way unless we love ourselves in the right way. Think about it this way: God loves you, so you can love yourself. God accepts you, so you can accept yourself. God treasures you as His unique creation, so you can treasure yourself. Loving yourself like that isn't just okay, it's what Jesus commands. By telling us to love others as we love ourselves, Jesus gave us permission to do two things:



- **Love ourselves.** We are created in the image of God. If God loves us, we should certainly love ourselves.
- **Set boundaries on that love.** Our tendency can be to be selfish, to think more of ourselves than we ought to. God wants us to be selfless, not selfish.

We are to love others "as" ourselves, not more than and not less than, not better than or worse than, but we are to love others like we love ourselves. Could this also mean that as we love others, we are loving ourselves? When we act in our neighbor's best interest, we're obeying God, and therefore nurturing our relationship with God, which is also acting in our best interest.

Love God Above All // Mark 12:32-34

What began as a situation described by the old English proverb "the enemy of my enemy is my friend," ends in mutual respect, admiration, and possibly an authentic friendship. The scribe was as pleased with how Jesus answered his question as he was with how Jesus responded to the Sadducees. The scribe answered Jesus with, "You are right, teacher" (v. 32).

The word translated "teacher" is a title of respect and dignity. It's possible the scribe was acknowledging Jesus's credentials as a Rabbi. While all the other groups had tried to trap Him, at least this scribe gave Jesus a measure of His due.

THE POINT: OUR OBEDIENCE TO GOD IS SEEN IN OUR LOVE FOR HIM AND OTHERS.

The scribe, while sincere in his question, and like the Pharisees and Sadducees before him, may have originally sought to render judgment upon Jesus. Initially, he may have questioned Jesus's understanding of the Mosaic law and therefore His credentials as a Rabbi. As a scribe, he did have the authority to bring judgment upon others for their knowledge and use of the law. But regardless of his initial intent, the scribe walked away knowing Jesus had the authority to judge on matters much greater, matters of the eternal soul.

Jesus implicitly revealed His identity. When Jesus witnessed the scribe's understanding and insight into spiritual matters, He declared him "not far from the kingdom of God" (v. 34). That judgment was more than just his understanding of the law; it was a judgment on the state of his eternal soul. Only God can judge eternal matters of the soul. Jesus revealed His authority to pronounce judgment on matters of eternal importance. When humans dare to sit in judgment of Christ, they find instead that Christ sits in judgment of them!

WHAT OFFERINGS AND SACRIFICES DO PEOPLE MAKE TODAY THAT ARE MEANT TO REPLACE THE HARDER SACRIFICE OF LOVING OTHERS?

DID YOU KNOW?

Within Mark 11:27-12:34, Jesus is questioned by several groups. First, come the chief priests, scribes, and elders (11:27). They question the very source of Jesus's authority, and they receive no response from Him. Second, are the Pharisees and the Herodians (12:13). They want to trap Jesus by asking Him about how God's people should deal with governmental policies. Third, are the Sadducees who ask him a philosophical question about the resurrection (12:16). In response, Jesus explains that the philosophy of Scripture points toward the philosophy of Heaven. This allows God's people to transcend the limitations of this world. Lastly, comes the scribe (12:28), who asks a genuine question that receives a genuine response. Collectively, as the church, we can rely on our different giftings to provide a defense for the faith.

Biblical Truth: "Now there are different gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different ministries, but the same Lord" (1 Cor. 12:4-5).

How has God gifted individuals to edify the Body of Christ in your local community?

LIVE IT

Does your life reflect a love for God that is modeled in a love for others?

Since Christians do not accept that every lifestyle choice is good, they are sometimes accused of being unloving. This is rooted in a fundamental misunderstanding of true love. Because righteousness is rooted in God, one must live according to God's word to love someone else (i.e., point them toward goodness). Below are some ways for you to grow in biblical love:

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- **Put God first.** What are the areas of your life that rival the place only God should occupy? Check your calendar and your bank statement. Where do you spend your time and money?
- **Seek God always.** To love God with your mind means you seek truth. What are you reading that will help you love God with your mind? Consider readings that will sharpen your understanding of biblical truth.
- **Love God with your strength.** Find a person in need in your church or community and gather a group to help meet that need. It could be yard work, maintenance, or even errands this person is incapable of completing.

DAILY READINGS

1. LOVE SETS THE TONE // MARK 12:30

After a long day, it's common for one to light a candle. The lighting of a candle creates an atmosphere of calm, setting the tone by preparing the mind for relaxation. For the believer, a deep love for Christ sets the tone for a life that honors Him. Jesus commands us to love God with our whole being. This commandment is vital in setting the tone of a believer's spiritual life. How so? Loving the Lord with your heart and soul positions Christ as revered and adored in our spirit. Loving God with our minds acknowledges His thoughts above our own. Loving God with our strength signifies a determination to set Him above everything that seeks to take His place.

Following Christ's commandment to love sets the tone for a life that honors Him.

2. LOVE THAT SERVES // 1 PETER 4:8-10

Christ commands us to love one another as we love ourselves. But how can we show love? We can show love through service to others. Serving others honors Christ as we show obedience to serve one another in love (Gal. 5:13). The act of service is self-sacrificing, humbling and selfless. God gives us gifts that we can use to serve others. Service follows the same path as Christ. He sacrificed His life so that we can have eternal life. What they see in our service is a direct reflection of Christ and illuminates a path to Him.

By serving others with love, we show the same love that Christ showed us.

3. FIRST COMES GOD // DEUTERONOMY 11:22-24

The Israelites were near the promised land, but before possessing the land of Canaan, they were taught the necessity of loving God above all else. It may seem conflicting to love God above everything else. Putting God above our dreams, careers, and relationships can prove difficult as we naturally feel passion for these things. Despite this, the greatest thing we can do is love

God above everything else. Prioritizing our love for God illustrates submission to Him, and our submission does not go unrecognized. Matthew 6:33 implores the believer to seek God first with the assurance that all other things that concern us will be provided for. Knowing this gives the believer spiritual and mental fortitude to make God first.

Our daily posture must be, God first, then everything else.

4. SURETY OF CHRIST'S RETURN // HEBREWS 9:28

One of my favorite songs present these lyrics "God said it, I believe it, I'm going to take Him at His word."¹⁰ Numbers 23:19 states that "God is not a man that He might lie, or a son of man, that He might change His mind." What this means is that every word from God is an absolute guarantee and will not falter or change. Christ promised that He will appear a second time for His believers that are patiently waiting for Him. This surety inspires, encourages, and empowers us to live righteously as we await His glorious return. Furthermore, this guarantee evokes a response of praise as we honor the Lord for being a promise keeper.

Because God cannot lie, we can trust in the promise of His return!

5. A PREPARED PLACE // JOHN 14:1-3

A handmade gift is often considered more remarkable than a store-bought one, because of the giver's time and effort to create. Receiving a handcrafted gift reveals a deep fondness for the giftee. Jesus promises to return to take believers to a place He's prepared for us, specifically so He can commune with us. His desire to commune with us shows His intense love for us. As He personally sees to us receiving the gift, He created for us. For those who believe in Christ, His determination rooted in love drives the believer to a closer relationship with Him.

"If I go away and prepare a place for you, I will come again and take you to myself, so that where I am you may be also" (John 14:3).

Week 5 – Into the Land, Judges, and Kings

Scripture Readings: Joshua 1; Judges 2; 1 Samuel 8; 2 Samuel 7

Israel entered the Promised Land, but their obedience wavered. In Judges, “everyone did what was right in their own eyes.” The people demanded a king to be like other nations. God gave them Saul, then raised up David, through whom He made a covenant promise: a king from David’s line would reign forever. This eternal King is Jesus Christ. Israel’s ups and downs with earthly kings highlight the need for a perfect King who rules with justice and righteousness.