

**The Purpose of West Hampden Baptist Church: The Exaltation of the Savior
(Our Genuine Commitment to the Great Commandment)**

Matthew 22:34-40

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Introduction: As we review our ministry here together, I believe it would serve us well to consider our purpose as a church. Our church constitution provides us with a Statement of Purpose. It reads: “The purpose of this church shall be to glorify God & to carry out the commands of Christ...” I would like to summarize what is stated there this way: “West Hampden Baptist Church exists to exalt the Savior, to evangelize the sinner, & to edify the saint.” This morning we will look at the first of these reasons for our existence as a church. What does it mean to “exalt the Savior”? Reading again from our constitution, “The purpose of this church shall be to glorify God...” How do we then *glorify* God? Might I suggest a mission statement for our church this way: “West Hampden Baptist Church is to have a genuine commitment to the Great Commandment & to the Great Commission.” Let’s consider first of all this morning what it means to have a genuine commitment to the Great Commandment. Note the context of this Commandment. Perhaps you have heard the expression, “Politics makes strange bedfellows.” It speaks of those who are normally enemies but are willing to set aside their differences for a time in order to achieve their political goals. Here in Matthew 22 we find 3 groups who were usually at great odds with each other. But now they put aside those differences in their attempt to discredit their common “enemy” – Christ. The Herodians were a Jewish party that supported Herod & sought to appease Rome at all cost. They were named the party of “peace at any price.” The Sadducees were primarily upper-class Jews, many of whom were of the priesthood. They were known for what they denied: the resurrection of the dead, future punishment & reward, & the existence of angels (see Acts 23:8). The Sadducees also accepted only the first 5 books of Moses (the Pentateuch) as being authoritative. Therefore they have been referred to as the “Sad - you - sees.” Then there were the Pharisees who held to orthodox doctrine & who were zealous in their desire to keep the law. They were more influential in Jewish life than either the Herodians or Sadducees. Here in Matthew 22 these groups take turns putting forth representatives to entangle Christ if they can. The Herodians ask a question of revenue (yet are shown to be involved in a religious scam). The Sadducees ask a question of resurrection (& are shown to be involved in a religious sham). And then the Pharisees ask a question of requirements (& will be shown to be guilty of a religious show). Our attention this morning is directed to verses 34-38 as we see the *asking*, the *answering*, & the *analyzing* of the great commandment. My challenge for you today is this: Do you have a genuine commitment to the great commandment?

I. The asking of the great commandment (:34-36)

A. The implication (:34)

1. Consternation of the Sadducees > Christ establishes evidence of the resurrection of the dead.
2. Observation by the Pharisees > Glad to see the Sadducees “silenced”? (“made speechless” as in 22:12; “muzzled” as in I Corinthians 9:9).

B. The intention (:35)

1. His identity > “*which was a lawyer*” – a scribe who was also an expert in interpretation of the law; he was an authorized copyist of the law – well-educated & versed in Scripture.
2. His intention > “*tempting Him*” – “put to the test.”

C. The interrogation (:36)

1. The background:
 - a. Classifying of the commandments by the Rabbis – they had distinguished 613 commandments in the O.T. (365 – negative; 248 – positive).
 - b. Controversy of the 10 commandments by the Pharisees – they argued as to the greatest of the 10.

2. The “bait”:
 - a. To trap Christ into favoring one command above another.
 - b. To see if He would exclude some by the exalting of another.

Note: “*Which*” – “of what kind” > What sort of commandment is first of all? Which ones are to be ranked in the highest place, of principled importance? Consider those Rabbis seeking a basic principle to summarize the law > “What is hateful to thyself, do not to thy neighbor; this is the whole law, the rest is commentary” (Rabbi Hillel). [Comparable to the Golden Rule but note the negative emphasis compared to the positive emphasis of Christ..]

II. The answering of the great commandment (:37-38)

A. The O. T. quotation – Deuteronomy 6:5

1. Its **context** > part of the “*Shema*” (from the Hebrew word “Hear”).
 - a. The Shema recorded – Numbers 15:37-41; Deuteronomy 6:4-9; 11:3-21.
 - b. The Shema repeated – recited by every pious Jew in his worship (devotions?) of God; both morning & evening. [These & other Scripture passages were placed (1) on the “*mezuzah*” (doorpost), using a small metal box or leather pouch & then touched when leaving or entering the house; or (2) in a “*phylactery*” – a leather pouch worn on the forehead or on the left arm. The basis of such was Ex. 13:9, 16 & Deut. 6:8; 11:18.]
2. Its **content** >
 - a. A confession of faith – monotheism (“One Lord, One God”); contrasted with polytheism & idolatry of the heathen peoples.
 - b. A consecration of the faithful – Jehovah (Yahweh) claiming Israel as His chosen people.

B. The N. T. qualification (:38)

1. The “*first*” commandment > its priority
 - a. That which is demanded of God first from us should be devoted to Him first of all.
 - b. That which demands our obedience to love assures our obedience in all other areas.
2. The “*great*” commandment > its primacy
 - a. Greatness in its importance.
 - b. Greatness in its supremacy.

III. The analyzing of the commandment (:37) [Do you love God in this way??]

A. “*With all thy heart*” – the **emotional** response (an act of our heart, seat of the personality)

Proclamation > for what God does:

1. Praise & thanksgiving should be natural (I John 4:19) & continual (present tense).
2. Praise & thanksgiving should be effectual (Psalm 40:3) & beneficial (John 13:35).

B. “*With all thy soul*” - the **intellectual** response (an act of our “mind,” self-conscious life)

Proclamation > for Who God is:

1. Appreciation (realizing His love).
2. Meditation (remembering His love) [example: Lord’s Table – I Corinthians 11:26]

C. “*With all thy mind*” – the **volitional** response (an act of our will; rational faculties)

Proclamation > for what God can & will do:

1. By our obvious talk – verbal witness (see II Corinthians 5:19-20).
2. By our obedient walk – visual witness (see John 14:15).

Summary: The emphasis is not so much on the distinct elements of man’s nature, but rather the comprehensiveness of this duty to love God with all of one’s being.

Conclusion: The question as to the great commandment has been asked, answered & analyzed. The summary statement is given by Christ in verse 38, "*This is the first & great commandment.*" He uses part of the question (:36) in giving His answer. Christ declares that this command (to love God with all one's heart, soul, & mind) is both the first & great commandment. He emphasizes its priority ("*first*") & its primacy or supremacy ("*great*"). If we are honest with ourselves this morning, we would have to admit that we are incapable of such love, that is, the unqualified surrender of our whole being to God. But this is the love we are commanded to demonstrate. Do we find here a contradiction or an impossible command? Can we determine some solution? Such love is unattainable in our own strength, yet it is attainable by Divine grace. Romans 5:5 says, "*...and the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.*" There is a direct correlation between being Spirit-filled & being God-loving. As we allow the Spirit of God to have full control of our lives, He ministers God's love to us & manifests God's love through us. However, when we grieve the Spirit of God (Ephesians 4:30) or quench His working (I Thess. 5:19), we are not loving God with all of our heart, soul & mind. Will we as a church evidence a genuine commitment to this great commandment? Is there evidence of such love in your life? If you have never experienced the love of God personally in salvation, I invite you to come today & receive Christ as your own personal Lord & Savior.