

The Greatest Commandment

December 10th 2006

Tough Questions

How well do you respond to commands from others?

What is the most difficult question you have ever been asked?

Tonight we are going to study a question that the Pharisees asked Jesus. We find this story in Matthew 22. Matthew 22 is a chapter of questions. Jesus' parable of the wedding banquet in 22:1-14 clearly angered the religious authorities so they set out to trap Jesus with three questions asked by three different groups:

Question #1 – Should we pay taxes(22:15)? The Herodians asked this question, trying to get him in trouble with the Romans.

Question #2 – Question on Marriage and the resurrection (22:23). The Sadducees asked this question because they did not believe in resurrection.

Question #3 – Which is the Greatest Commandment (22:34)? The Pharisees asked this question to try to get him to leave out important parts of the law and have grounds to accuse him.

Question #4 – Jesus then asks them a question that perplexes them all Whose son is the Messiah (22:41)?

In this study we will focus on the third and final question they asked Jesus – “Which is the greatest commandment?”

Text

Matthew 22:34-40

What scriptures did they have in Jesus' day?

- The Old Testament

What books in the Old Testament do we normally associate with commandments ?

- Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy

Take a guess of how many commandments Jesus had to choose from in the Old Testament?

- 613 commandments
- 365 – prohibitions – “thou shall nots”
- 248 – mandates – “thou shalls”

Greatest Commandment

From all of these possibilities Jesus is asked to pick the “greatest.” It is a

trick question. If he leaves something out, they can accuse him of thinking less of those commandments. They believed that any answer would be a wrong one. They weren't interested in the answer. They were trying to get Jesus in trouble.

If you were asked this by the people who knew the law better than anyone else, where would you look? Would you look to the ten commandments for some help? Would you go to the Levitical laws and regulations? Jesus had the perfect answer for those who were trying to trap him in his words.

What commandment did Jesus say was the greatest?

- To love God with all your heart, soul, and mind.
- This is from Deuteronomy 6:5

What makes loving God with all of who we are the greatest of the 613 commandments Jesus had to chose from?

- It is God centered
- If we love God this way we won't have any trouble obeying the rest of God's commandments.

Commandments require obedience. When God tells what we should do He expects that we will do them. There are two attitudes by which we can obey God's commandments:

- 1) We can obey God through **fear**. That is, we can do all the things God asks because we fear the consequences of doing something wrong. Jesus could have just as easily gone a few verses further in Deuteronomy 6 and cited 6:13 as the greatest commandment – "Fear the Lord your God." Fear can certainly generate obedience but in the end it is not what God desires.
- 2) We can obey God through **love**. Jesus said all of the other commandments are summed up in our love for God. If we love God, we will want to follow the rest of His commands. We obey Him because we love Him.

1 John 4:16b-21

John says that love casts out fear. He is probably referring to the fear of final judgment and punishment from God. Many people today live lives of fear toward God, terrified that they will do one wrong thing and be punished. That is not what God asks for. Jesus and John call us to live in love for God and for others. That doesn't mean we disrespect God's other commandments. In fact, we will keep them even better when we are obeying God out of love.

What is it about really loving God that "casts out fear"?

- We realize that He wants the best for us and that He loves us.

Loving God With Our Whole Life

Second Command

Defining "Neighbor"

- We don't have to live in a constant state of anxiety concerning our salvation.

Does obeying God out of love rather than fear mean we lose respect for his authority and power? Why?

- No.
- It means we appreciate it even more because he has the power and authority to punish us but loves and forgives us instead.

The love we have for God is not skin deep but is lasting and from the deepest areas of our life.

What three areas of our lives did Jesus say we are to love God from?

- Heart
- Soul
- Mind

How well do these three areas sum up every area of our lives?

- This is all of who we are – spiritually, emotionally, and intellectually.
- Heart, soul, and mind is our identity. It is who we are.

In the second command, who did Jesus say we are to love?

- Our neighbor – from Leviticus 19:18

Jesus said this second command is like the first one. *In what way is loving our neighbor like loving God?*

- We are thinking and loving beyond ourselves.
- There is a children's song called J.O.Y. – "Jesus first, Yourself last, and Others in between."
- When we think about the needs of others and how we can help others, we are reflecting Christ to the world.

Who is my neighbor? Does this only apply to the few people who live immediately next to me? In Luke 10 Jesus answers the question of "who is my neighbor?"

Luke 10:30-37

Who qualifies as our neighbor according to Jesus' parable?

- Just about anyone. Not just those living near us. We are to treat all people as our neighbors.

What about our enemies? Are they are neighbor?

- Even those who have hurt us qualify as neighbors. We are to treat people as God/Jesus would treat people.

Jesus said that loving God and others upholds all the Law and the prophets. In Romans 13:8-10 Paul wrote that loving one's neighbor is the

“fulfillment of the law” and that it summed up all the other laws. *How does loving our neighbor “sum up” the other laws of God?*

- If we love our neighbor we will not steal or lie or murder them.
- If we love our neighbor we will treat them right.

Jesus answers their question perfectly because the two laws he names encompass all of the rest. Jesus is saying they are all important but the most important thing is living out of an attitude of love.

Application

What area do you find hardest to love God with: heart, soul, or mind? Why?

In what ways do the “neighbors” in your life make it challenging to love them?

How can we show God and others just how much we love them?

Putting it Into Practice

This week show God how much you love Him. When you love someone you can’t wait to spend time with him. Take a few moments each day this week to just talk with Him. Let Him know how you are feeling and what is going on in your life. Let him know you love him with all of your life—heart, soul, and mind.