

## **The Greatest Commandment**

### **Mark 12:28-44**

Jesus answers the final question and climactic question in the temple: what is the most important commandment? We might say, what does God want me to do? This time it's a scribe who asks, but curiously not one who baits him (v34). This section is Jesus' last interaction with the authorities before his trial, and it leads up to his prophesy of the temple's destruction in chapter thirteen. He is preparing his disciples to understand God's good purposes in these coming trials and the victory of God in and beyond them.

### **The God of love**

Summaries and systemizations of Scripture are inescapable. God's law isn't a phone book, so Jesus cites the most important command, the *Shema* found in Deuteronomy 6:4-5. The law is immediately personal because it's a direct reflection of Yahweh's character, the named, known, covenant and promise-keeping God. Commands from God are never be cold or selfish, but personal and loving, as they should be when they come from us. The whole book of Deuteronomy is a set of instructions for blessed living in the land of promise. So the call is not to trust in any god, but the one and only living God of their fathers and the whole earth.

### **The Breadth & Depth & Height of Love**

The command to love God is total, requiring every faculty (heart, soul, mind and strength) and capacity (all). Our affections and desires, intellect and emotions, attitudes, dispositions, power, wealth and position all are directed in their entirety to God. No part of life is singularly "religious" and able to be compartmentalized off from the rest; better, we can't keep anything from Him. Because God is love, and He is sovereign, it's possible to love Him in all and with all. All of life connects and coheres in love, which means God is easy to please. We don't respond to this by being frantically religious but able to enjoy all life as we eat and drink, as we live and move and have our being in Him (1 Cor. 10:31; Acts 17:28). This view of love includes emotion but emphasizes action, the thing we can more clearly control.

### **The Freedom of Love**

The call to love is unbelievably freeing. Jesus isn't modifying or dumbing down the law; he's describing it (Matt. 22:40). James calls the law "the perfect law of liberty" (1:25). Augustine said "Love God and do as you please." Love is freedom *from* worshiping ourselves. Self-love is not commanded here but assumed. You don't have to do anything to make sure you love yourself. If you're hungry, you feed yourself, and there's nothing wrong with that. We're to love people "as ourselves", to have interest, time, desire and resources for the welfare of our neighbors. And who are they? The hurting people on the other side of the road (Lk. 10:25-37). The scribe knows this stuff, so he is *near* the kingdom (v34). But he ought to follow Jesus and get in. The scribes as a group love to be seen, acknowledged, and honored; the widow loves to give (vv38-44).

### **The Triumph of Love**

This is a Pentecost sermon because Jesus fulfilled these commands on our behalf by the power of the Holy Spirit. But God enables us to do them by that same Spirit. What is poured out into our hearts (Rom. 5:5)? There's a school that says every commandment you read is fundamentally meant to be read in light of your failure, like telling your kid to do something so he'll remark upon how lame and incapable he is of doing it well. God forbid! He put his law in our hearts and minds so we'd know him and be empowered to do it. This is the point of the new Covenant (Heb. 8:8-12). For every Christian, this is the direction of the gospel in your soul. We can backslide, but we're pushing against, and grieving, the Spirit. This is optimistic because it's realistic. The Spirit is at work. But more than for us individually, Jesus is reigning until his enemies are his footstool. Pentecost didn't happen in a bunch of bedrooms. The Spirit fell on the church and He is working his way through the world.

## NOTES FOR LITTLE SAINTS

**Today's Passage: Mark 12:28-34** 28 And one of the scribes came up and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, asked him, "Which commandment is the most important of all?" 29 Jesus answered, "The most important 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 and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' 31 The second is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these." 32 And the scribe said to him, "You are right, Teacher. You have truly said that he is one, and there is no other besides him. 33 And to love him with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as oneself, is much more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices." 34 And when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." And after that no one dared to ask him any more questions.

1. Have you ever met anyone that you thought didn't like you? Many scribes didn't like Jesus, but Jesus keeps an open mind, loving this scribe who came to him. What did Jesus say about him at the end of the conversation (verse 34)? How should we act toward those who may not like us?
2. Sometimes we think of laws as cold and strict, but the apostle Paul tells us that love is the fulfilling of the law—God law, his rules, teach us how to love him and others. Which one is the most important according to Jesus (verse 30)?
3. Sometimes we think of love in terms of emotion—how we feel. Biblical love is better defined as obedient action. What are we supposed to love God with (verse 30)?
4. The second greatest commandment is to "Love your \_\_\_\_\_ as \_\_\_\_\_" (v31). Draw a picture of you doing something to love your parents.

### Memory Verse to Recite Next Week:

*Jesus answered, "The most important 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 and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' --Mark 12:29-30*