

The Great Commandment

In our text we come to an encounter between Jesus and a member of the Sanhedrin that is surprisingly friendly, and yet Jesus, once again, stuns His audience with the depth of His wisdom and with the power of His analysis of people's souls.

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.

Let's observe, first of all:

1. In order to obey God, we must love Him (vv. 28-30).

Someone might ask how we can possibly love someone who commands us to love him. Isn't this inherently contradictory? Can love be forced? The answer is found in verse 29 (Matthew does not include this), where Jesus cites Deuteronomy 6:4 to remind us why we love God: because He is lovely! He, unlike the Egyptian gods is one God, the only true God. Furthermore, He is our God, in covenant with His people, as demonstrated in His deliverance of us from slavery in Egypt. Then Jesus cites Deuteronomy 6:5 to tell us how to love God: with our whole being.

Jesus then adds a second commandment to teach us:

2. In order to love God, we must also love our neighbor (v. 31).

Notice how we are to love our neighbor—as ourselves!

You will remember that in Luke 10:29 a lawyer asked Him, "And who is my neighbor?" Jesus then told the famous parable of the Good Samaritan. As Haddon Robinson once said, "Your neighbor is the one whose needs you see, whose needs you can meet."

3. In order to love God and neighbor aright, we must change our relationship to Jesus Christ (vv. 32-34).

After what the scribe said to Jesus in verses 32—33, we might have expected Jesus to welcome him warmly into the band of disciples; but He didn't. He told him that he was not far from the kingdom. Why did He say that? Notice that the scribe said that Jesus was "right" and called Him "teacher," both of which were accurate—but not sufficient. Jesus is not just right, but good. He is not just teacher, but Lord and Savior. None of us has loved or will love God or neighbor as we ought. Amazingly, Jesus has done both and has alone provided both the atonement for our failures and also the power for our future endeavors. The only adequate response to Him is the one that every true believer gives: "Forgive me, Lord, and graciously receive me into Your Kingdom."

His answer leaves the world again in stunned silence before Him.

Discussion Questions

1. Why does God deserve our total love and devotion?
2. Describe what it means to love God with all your heart. Your soul. Your mind. Your strength.
3. Why is it impossible to love God if you don't also love your neighbor?
4. Who are the neighbors most difficult for us to love? How can we better love them?
5. Why is faith in Jesus absolutely essential for our obedience to the Great Commandment?

Going Deeper

1. How are you not loving God with your whole being? What changes do you need to make?
2. In what ways do you sometimes come to Jesus more like a scribe, rather than a disciple and worshiper?