

Mark 12: 28-34 (NIV)

²⁸ One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?"

²⁹ "The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. ³⁰ 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: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these."

³² "Well said, teacher," the man replied. "You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him. ³³ To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices."

³⁴ When Jesus saw that he had answered wisely, he said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." And from then on no one dared ask him any more questions.

The greatest Commandment

1. After hearing Jesus' answer the others so well, a scribe (attorney) has a question for Jesus
 - a. His question is about the law of Moses

- I. **What** is the greatest commandment?
- II. **Why** is it the greatest?
- III. **How** does one follow it?

I. What is the greatest commandment?

1. What commandment given by Moses is the most important?
 - a. Which one carries the most weight?
2. From Jesus' response to this scribe, it seems like it was a sincere question
 - a. He really wanted to know
 - b. God welcomes our questions

3. This was an important question because the Commandments were to provide guidelines on how to live
 - a. The law serves the purpose of how to live a life pleasing to God
4. This scribe is asking
 - a. Of all the laws written, which is the heaviest, most important?
 - b. What is God really looking for?
 - c. What's His perspective on life?
 - d. How can I please Him?
 - e. The Jewish Rabbi's had 613 laws they attempted to follow
 - i. 248 of them were positives and 365 were negatives for each day of the year
 - ii. It became clear quickly that there is no way to be able to keep them all
 1. So they began debating which are the big ones, the heavy ones
 2. And which ones were less important
5. All this was an effort to earn God's favor and make it to heaven
6. Jesus leads him to the O.T passage about acknowledging and loving God
7. He funnels all the questions toward the Love of God
8. Vs. 29 "The first of all the commandments *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, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' This *is* the first commandment.
9. This comes from the O.T
 - a. **Deut 6:4** "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. "And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the

way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

- a. Orthodox Jews had leather bands on their arms and leather boxes on their foreheads with this inscription
- b. They followed the letter of the law and missed its meaning.

2. Jesus begins with the **Shemah**, the Jewish statement of faith

3. "I want you to hear what I'm saying to you"

- a. Faith comes by hearing
- b. Please hear what I'm saying to you about how to live

4. He begins by saying that God is one

- a. In a pagan society where multiple gods are worshipped and acknowledged, The LORD makes the clear distinction that the LORD IS ONE
- b. There is
 - i. One LORD
 - ii. One Purpose
 - iii. So please focus on Him and only Him
- c. With multiple conflicting gods in their society, each wanting to be pleased in a certain way
 - i. It can become very confusing quickly
- d. God is saying, "Hear and listen closely"
- e. There is ONE GOD
 - i. God is a good God
 - ii. He's a loving God
 - iii. He's a merciful God

iv. A Gracious God

- f. **Psalm 73:25** Whom have I in heaven *but You?*
And *there is* none upon earth *that* I desire besides You
- g. **Psalm 121:1** I lift up my eyes to the hills-- where does my help come from?
- h. Love the Lord your God with all your heart...

II. Why is this one the greatest?

- 5. **Deut 10:12-13** "And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you, but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways and to love Him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, ¹³ *and* to keep the commandments of the Lord and His statutes which I command you today **for your good?**
- 6. Hear and understand that what I'm about to instruct you with is **for your own good**
- 7. These commandments that begin with loving God are for your good
 - a. It's for your sake.
 - b. It's not to please God or earn His favor
 - c. Picture a fish living in water
 - i. Take that fish out and it'll die
 - 1. That's what happens to us when we are not living in the love of God
- 8. When you are troubled, when you do not know what to do first, when you feel you do not have enough resources to handle something, or are puzzled and bewildered, start with God and love him. (**Stedman**)
- 9. When we think about our own lives, we have to admit that we seldom start with loving God.
 - a. Almost always we start with the demands made upon us, instead of looking to the God who will lead us through the puzzle, the problem and the pressures that confront us.

- b. We are so wrapped up with the problem that we can't get our minds off it and onto God.
- c. He says to start with loving God. When you start with God you start with one who sees the whole problem -- not just a part of it -- but the whole problem and everything involved in it.
- d. Our trouble is that when we start with our own situation, we are so limited that we do not see it in the right perspective. And so we are to start with God's thinking, with God himself. (**Stedman**)

10. Loving God and putting Him first allows me to see with the proper perspective

- a. That's why when we pray, we say "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name..."
- b. If I begin with God, my needs will all be met
- c. If I begin with me, I won't see God or His loving heart

11. We begin by what God says in His Word

a. God declares that He is our Father

- i. **Isaiah 64:8** And yet, O Lord, you are our Father.
We are the clay, and you are the potter.
We all are formed by your hand.
- ii. **Psalms 103:13** As a father pities *his* children,
So the Lord pities those who fear Him.

b. He's a husband

- i. **Hosea 2:19** And I will betroth you to me forever. I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy.
- ii. **Isaiah 54:5** For your Maker is your husband, the Lord of hosts is his name; and the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer

c. As Friend

i. **James 2:23** so Abraham was called God's friend.

12. In order for any of these dynamics to be true, a father, a husband , a friend, genuine love must be present

13. **Why**

a. For my own good

III. How?

1. By responding to the love initiated by God

a. **1 John 4:19**: "We love, because he first loved us

b. **John 3:16** For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life

c. **Rom 5:8** God demonstrates His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us

d. **1 John 3:1** Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God

e. **Hosea 11:3** "I taught Ephraim to walk, Taking them by their arms; But they did not know that I healed them. ⁴ I drew them with gentle cords, With bands of love, And I was to them as those who take the yoke from their neck. I stooped *and* fed them.

f. So we believe God's Word and love Him out of reflection of His love

2. **Love the Lord your God in this order**

a. Heart

b. Soul

c. Mind

d. Strength

- i. The heart in the Hebrew understanding is the core of your identity, the source of all your thoughts, words, actions (**Spirit**)
 - 1. I begin with the core of who I am
 - 2. That deepest part of me that is the quietest, but very real
 - a. Some identify it as that gut feeling - intuition
 - b. I'm to find a place quiet enough daily to acknowledge God from that place
 - c. To love Him from the core of who I am

- ii. Soul has to do with your emotions

- 1. Seat of feelings and desires
 - a. Getting to that quiet place begins to move my emotions
 - b. We need to be ok with allowing our emotions to get engaged in worshipping God
 - i. We're not be ashamed to express our love with the emotions

- iii. Mind refers to the "**intellect**, the power of purpose

- 1. As we understand Who God is, as He revealed in His Word, we respond to that truth by focusing the power of the intellect to worship Him and to love Him
 - a. The more I search for God in His Word and begin to understand, I'm to love God with my mind as I'm convinced intellectually that He is my beloved

- iv. strength, the reference to physical energy

- 1. Speaks of "**our might, our power and our abilities.**"
 - a. The final piece is with our physical bodies
 - b. Every ability, every gift, every talent, every strength is to be mobilized to love the Lord.

3. So the spiritual, emotional, intellectual and physical elements of personhood all combine to love the one true God. It is an intelligent love, it is an

emotional love, it is a willing love, and it is an active love. It is an all-consuming love

4. No other love is to rival this love for God
5. Loving God makes it easier to obey Him
 - a. Every other act of obedience is empty if we do not love God first (**Guzik**)
6. **Love your neighbor as yourself**
7. Treat people the way you want to be treated
8. Walk into a room and break the ice with people by acknowledging them and greeting them
 - a. You find that you are relaxed and enjoy your time
9. Walk into that same room and ignore people and worry about yourself
 - a. You feel very uncomfortable and want to leave
 - i. It may be the same venue, same people, same food & music
 - ii. The difference is who you give priority to
10. Parents are happiest when they love their children/grandchildren
11. A husband is in the zone when he's loving his wife
 - a. Same is true with friends
 - i. All of these relationships are a picture drawn by God to illustrate our relationship with Him

12. Loving those around us goes hand in hand with loving God
 - a. **1 John 4:20** Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen.
13. The scribe began to understand and agrees with Jesus
14. "Loving God and loving one's neighbor as oneself, is more than all the whole burnt offerings and sacrifices"
15. Jesus said to him, "**You are not far from the kingdom of God**"
16. Understanding that it's it's an internal issue, more than ceremonies
17. This is the first step
18. But knowledge alone is not enough
 - a. Agreement with Jesus is not enough
 - b. Acceptance to His marriage proposal is what's required
19. A loving relationship with God is the foundation.
 - a. Acknowledging Him and loving Him gives life meaning
 - b. Because He first loved us
20. There was once a young man from Chicago who went down to the bluegrass regions of Kentucky where he met and wooed a young woman who ultimately came back to Chicago as his bride. They enjoyed three lovely years of marriage, and then one day in the midst of a certain sickness, the young woman lost her mind. When she was at her best, she was a bit demented. At her worst, she would scream, and neighbors complained because the screams cut the air and it was hard to live with.

And so the young businessman left his home in the middle of Chicago, went out to one of the western suburbs, built a house, determined that there he would try to nurse his wife back to health and sanity again. One day the family physician suggested that perhaps if he were to take his wife back to her Kentucky home that something in those familiar surroundings would help her restore her sanity, and so they went back to the old homestead. Hand in hand they walked through the old house where memories hung on every corner. They went down to the garden and walked down by the riverside

where the first cowslips and violets were in bloom. But after several days nothing seemed to happen.

So, defeated and discouraged, the young man put his wife back in the car, and they headed back to Chicago. When they got close to the house, he looked over and discovered that his wife was asleep. It was the first deep, restful sleep she had had in many weeks. When he got to the house, he lifted her from the car, took her inside, placed her on the bed, and realized she wanted to sleep some more. So he placed a cover over her and then just sat by her side and watched her through the midnight hour, watched her until the first rays of the sun reached through the curtain and touched her face. The young woman awoke, and she saw her husband seated by her side. She said, "I seem to have been on a long journey. Where have you been?" And that man, speaking out of days and weeks and months of patient waiting and watching said, "My sweetheart, I've been right here waiting for you all this time."

And if you ask me, "Where is God?" the answer is very much the same. He's right here, right here waiting for you to respond with love to love, waiting for you to respond with trust to promise, waiting for you to cast yourself with a reckless abandon upon the grace of God, and waiting for you to discover what it means to be loved by God.