

Mark 12: The Great Commandment pt.1

People love to play the “who or what is the greatest?” game:

The greatest composer, artist, singer, ball player – baseball, basketball, soccer, football QB, RB, the greatest President, rock band, world empire, bar-b-que, etc

This is nothing new. It’s at least as old at the days of Jesus.

v. 28 One of the scribes came and heard them arguing, and recognizing that He had answered them well, asked Him, “What commandment is the foremost of all?”

29 Jesus answered, “The foremost is, ‘Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is one Lord; 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 The scribe said to Him, “Right, Teacher; You have truly stated that He is One, and there is no one else 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 himself, is much more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices.”

34 When Jesus saw that he had answered intelligently, He said to him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” After that, no one would venture to ask Him any more questions.

Jesus responds to an important question with a response that reveals our hearts, souls, and what we cherish as supreme in our lives.

Here in Mark, we see a scribe who seems more sympathetic and seems sincerely interested in what Jesus has to say.

Apparently, he has not come to argue or trap Jesus; He recognizes that Jesus has answered them well and he has an astute follow-up question. OR SO IT SEEMS.

Matthew 22 gives a different vibe...

34 But when the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered themselves together. 35 One of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, 36 “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?”

The word in v.35 “testing / tempting” is the same word as in Mk 10:2, 12:15 as others came to test or tempt Jesus. It is also the word used when Jesus was led into the wilderness to be tempted by the Devil. So, Matthew gives a bit of important clarity regarding the intentions of this Scribe.

What commandment is the foremost of all?”

It seems like a simple question; at least it does to us because we don’t actually know many of the 613 commands of the OT.

Twenty years before Jesus, Rabbi Hillel had answered a similar question with a negative version of the Golden Rule: “What you would not want done to you, do not do to your neighbor. That is the entire Torah, everything else is interpretation.” (Rayburn)

We are familiar with the response that Jesus gives as he does the quick analysis of all the OT COMMANDS and comes up with the one situated in Deuteronomy 6 and Leviticus 19. His answer also echoes the command of Exod 20:3 “You shall have no other gods before or besides Me.

HOW DOES Jesus RESPOND?

LOVE God SUPREME v.28-30

LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR INTUITIVELY v. 31

THESE TWO LOVES REFLECT THE ORIENTATION OF YOUR HEART v. 32-34

LOVE God SUPREME v.28-30

It doesn't say, "Love God exclusively", but love for God is to be Supreme.

There is no other reference to loving anyone or anything else with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. That supremely complete love is to be toward God alone.

EX: This rubs against a culture that has tried to keep anyone's success from being too far above the crowd. The big movement over the past few decades in terms of professional sports, especially the National Football League has been parity – an effort to make the league more balanced.

NEWS FLASH: God is NOT interested in spiritual parity when it comes to who or what we love and worship.

Jesus says it plainly and clearly, and He is not making it up on the fly. His words come from Deut 6:4-9

"Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one! 5 You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.

These two verses, cited from Deut. 6:4-5, are known as the *shema* and would have been recited morning and evening by pious Jews. The text continues...

6 These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart.

7 You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. 8 You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. 9 You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

As we see in Deut 6, the command is to love God supremely AND to teach this supreme love of God to our children as part of our daily routine.

As Christian parents, we have to exercise discernment to know when the hearts of our children are pulled toward some other supreme love.

Our culture has given us a term that describes the spiritual compromise that God opposes: DEI

God is not looking for spiritual DEI where we love diverse 'gods' or things alongside Him.

He is not looking for "equity" in terms of how our love is given to God and other things.

He is not looking for us to "include" other people or things in terms of our supreme love.

It is only right that our supreme love would be directed towards the God who is supremely loving.

1 Jn 4:19 tells us that We can only love God because He first loved us.

God initiated it out of His gracious nature of love – "God is Love." The eternal nature of the love of God is seen in that God is Triune – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The three persons of the Trinity are bound together in an infinite, unbreakable, incomprehensible, mutual, eternal love. By its very nature love must have an object. There is an eternal experience of love in the Trinity, and we who are made in God's image have an innate sense of a need for love. Sadly, the entrance of sin into the world distorted our understanding of the nature of love.

God is the great initiator of love, and the people of Israel were the recipients of that covenant love of Yahweh.

The history of Israel shows that it really was a ONE WAY LOVE –

Deut 7:7 "The Lord did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any of the peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples, 8 but because the Lord loved you and kept the oath which He swore to your forefathers, the Lord brought you out by a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

Martin Luther described our sinful condition as being “incurvatus in se,” turned in on itself.
<https://learn.ligonier.org/podcasts/things-unseen-with-sinclair-ferguson/turned-in-on-ourselves>

It's what Saint Augustine meant when he said that there are two ultimate loves: love of God and love of self. We can only love ourselves in the proper biblical sense when we see ourselves as created by God as His image-bearers, and we live as His likeness and for His glory. When we turn away from that in our sin, we fall short of His glory. Something becomes distorted. We focus on ourselves, and everything we do, either obviously or subtly, becomes part of a new liturgy of self-centeredness.

There is a remedy to this distorted soul shape – Jesus Christ and His lordship over our lives, our submission to Him as our Savior, begins the marvelous reshaping of our souls. That's why the Son of God came from heaven.

The reshaping and redeeming love of God is rooted in His eternal love, as Romans 8 explains “*In love God predestined us to be conformed to the image of his Son.*”

A lifestyle of Repentant faith enables us to be reshaped so that we might glorify God and enjoy Him. The fruit of that is that we are able to live out the second commandment that Jesus mentions.

LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR INTUITIVELY v. 31

Love for God should lead to love for those created IN HIS IMAGE.

Love of self is part of our human condition. It is a given that we naturally love ourselves. Jesus calls us to measure our love of neighbor with our love of self.

Taken together these two commandments expose the reality and depth of sin. Disordered love leads to disordered lives or what the bible calls sin.

Richard Lovelace...In its biblical definition, sin cannot be limited to isolated instances or patterns of wrongdoing; it is something much more akin to the psychological term complex: an organic network of compulsive attitudes, beliefs and behavior deeply rooted in our alienation from God. Sin originated in the darkening of the human mind and heart as man turned from the truth about God to embrace a lie about him and consequently a whole universe of lies about his creation.

If you ever struggle with seeing your own sin, just ask these questions:

Do I act in every way out of love for God with ALL my heart, soul, mind and strength?

Do I give the same degree of concern, time, and attention to the well-being of others that I give to myself?

THE GREAT TRANSGRESSION IS TO FAIL TO LOVE God and Others as Jesus taught.

The gravity of our sin is NOT in the nature of the sin committed but in the greatness of the One sinned against – God Himself. (Vov -Humiliation)

DO YOU SEE WHY WE NEED A SAVIOR?

The scribe asked for one commandment and Jesus gives him two because together they show a fuller vision of the will of God i.e. a Kingdom OF LOVE.

The eternal love within the Trinity has an interior dynamic and an outbound dynamic. God's love is expressed toward the objects of His affection....first the people of Abraham and then in a fuller way His beloved children in Christ.

In a similar way, we experience the love OF God and love FOR God as inner realities, but that love also has an outward face – love your neighbor as you love yourself.

This love of self is not some selfish love turned in on self; it is a rightly measured love of self in light of our condition as God's image bearers. God is the template and standard, not us.

What happens If you get the order wrong?

The whole system crumbles under the weight of a man-centered worldview.
God is love, but love is NOT God.

When #2 replaces #1 you get the fear of man rather than reverence for God. People become BIG and God is made small. You get spiritual compromise in order to please others. You get a greater willingness to tell people what they want to hear rather than what they NEED to hear.

When #2 replaces #1 then you get Toxic Empathy

Empathy is an emotion, but love is a conscious choice to seek the good of another person. That requires a standard of what is good, what is right, what is true.

Toxic empathy tries to exploit Christian love and compassion through an emotional argument to deceive Christians to affirm initiatives that contradict the Biblical teaching of what is good, right, and true. Such toxic empathy may relate to significant issues including abortion / reproductive health, gender issues /being true to myself, sexuality/ we should celebrate all love,etc.

As Allie Beth Stuckey notes..."Toxic empathy extorts a real and good desire that most people have, which is to be, and to be perceived as, kind."

Empathy was modeled on *sympathy*; and it was coined in the early 20th century as a translation of the German *Einfühlung* ("feeling-in" or "feeling into"). (Meriam Webster)

<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/empathy>

It has become a popular social buzzword that gives one a way to virtue signal that you are a good person. Empathy literally means to *be in the feelings* of another person.

The cultural demand today is that you have some empathy, which is typically code for: "You must agree with me."

Toxic empathy bullies us into believing that the unwise, immoral, and unbiblical position is actually the righteous one.

The biblical command to love is deeper than empathy.

Empathy is centered around one's feelings. Love is centered around God honoring behavior.

When you start with #1, with true love for God, it will lead to love for others. But if you make love for others #1 then there is no natural connection to love for God.

THESE TWO BIBLICAL LOVES REFLECT THE ORIENTATION OF YOUR HEART v. 32-34

Hosea 6:6

For I delight in loyalty rather than sacrifice,
And in the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.

The external ritual of a burnt offering can mask a heart that is far from God.

Jesus displays His discernment as he makes an evaluation of the Scribe.

We don't know what happened to that man, but one would think that he'd be encouraged by the words of Jesus. There's also the possibility that he would be looked at skeptically by the other religious leaders.

The discerning word from Jesus was, "You are not far from the kingdom of God."

Even though he was trying to test Jesus (Matt 22), he was doing it with a legitimately important question. He's close to the kingdom, but not in yet.

He's close because he gets the connection between Law and Love.

Law without love = rigid rule keeping with wrong motives- fear and pride

Those aren't great or even good motives because they can also be the motives for why we do the wrong thing.

Love without Law leads to "everyman doing that which is right in his own eyes". "Just follow your heart" can be dangerous advice.

We are often confused in thinking that love and law work against each other.

Love is NOT in conflict with the law of God. In fact, without the law we would not know *how* to love and we would certainly not know how *best* to love. (Dr. Rayburn)

Jesus shows that love for God and love for others are connected since God gave us His 'law' i.e. Good instruction BECAUSE HE LOVES US.

The Scribe seems to get a grasp of the principle that the morality of love has priority over ritual obligations, so he is 'not far from the kingdom of God.'

The Scribe is close to the kingdom because he does admit that God requires Love for God and love for others.

What does he need to understand so that he might become a kingdom insider?

He needs to see that he is incapable of obeying the Great commandment and bow before Jesus in repentant faith. The King of Love is there before him ready to receive him if he'll come to Jesus by faith

The same is true for YOU today if you don't know Christ.

You may have some understanding of Christ; you may be near the kingdom of God. But do you know that Jesus is the DOOR and the Way, Truth, and Life?

Without knowing the love of God in Christ, love For God and Love For others are burdens that will crush us.

The power and the freedom to love God and others is ours when we receive and embrace the love of God manifested through the gift of eternal life in Jesus Christ.

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