

THE GREATEST COMMANDMENT OF ALL

Matthew 22:34-40

INTRO: Tomorrow is New Year's day. I will give a new year's message today, since this is the Sunday. For the new year I want to remind us of the one commandment which is above all other commandments. There is no other commandment as big or as important as the one I want to share with you this morning. You can go through all the commandments given from the beginning of man until today and you will not find a commandment more important than this one. How do I know it is the greatest of all commandments? The Creator of the universe and of man said so.

So, our subject this morning is the greatest commandment of all commandments. If you were to choose what is the greatest of all commandments, what would you say it is? Well, one day Jesus was having a discussion with the Saducees. Turn to Matthew 22. They don't believe in a resurrection so they gave the story of one woman whose husbands kept dying. In all she had seven husbands and they all died. So the Sadducees said to Jesus, "In the resurrection (which they didn't believe in but which Jesus claimed there was), in the resurrection, whose wife will she be?"

Well, Jesus showed them wherein their error lay. What was that? They didn't know the Scriptures. That is always man's problem. If they had known the Scriptures they would have known that after the resurrection people don't marry any more. Well, a certain lawyer had heard this discussion and realizing that Jesus had real answers he came to Him. And so we'll begin reading in Matthew 22:34:

34 But when the Pharisees heard that He had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together.

35 Then one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, and saying,

36 "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?"

37 Jesus said to him, "'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.'

38 "This is the first and great commandment.

39 *"And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'*

40 *"On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."*

There was Jesus' answer for this lawyer. He gave the two greatest commandments there are, and the first is the greatest of all commandments. There is no greater commandment. And this is the commandment I want to share with us for this New Year's Eve. You see, you will find that first commandment as a summarization of the first four commandments of the famous ten. The second most important commandment of all is a summarization of the last six of the ten commandments. The first is expressed in love for God, and the second in love for man. Love for God is the greatest of all commandments.

So, according to the creator of the universe and everything in it, here is the greatest commandment of all commandments: *You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.*

I want to challenge us for the new year be seeking to answer these questions: Who? What? Whom? And how? I will cover numerous things I have taught before, but we will look at them as they relate to this commandment.

I. WHO?

We go then to our first question, who? Who is to love the Lord God with all they have? You! And who is 'you'? You is a personal pronoun. Now let me give you a proposition this morning. Proposition: 'You' is that part of the whole of man that one cannot possess. For example, I can say, "This is my hand." Since I can speak of my hand in the possessive case, therefore my hand is not 'I'. Whatever you can speak of in the possessive case is not the real you. It is a part of the sum of your possessions.

If that proposition is correct, then in this very verse we learn that the real you cannot be your heart, your soul, or your mind. Notice they are all in the possessive case; *your heart, your soul, your mind*. Now my proposition is that anything about you that you can speak of in the

possessive case is not the real you. The real you possesses all those parts. So what is the real you, the one who is to love God?

Well, we have to go to creation to find out. So turn to Genesis 1. You see, there is only one part of an entire human being that cannot be spoken of in the possessive case. We go to verse 26:

26 Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."

27 So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

Man is made in the image of God. What that means, as I see it, is that man is a person. Personhood is what man has in common with all three persons of the Triune God, and what man does not have in common with any other animated beings. And what is it about man that you cannot speak of in the possessive case? Personhood! The pronoun 'you' is a personal pronoun and stands for your personhood. You are a person. All human beings are equally persons. When God said, "Let us make man in our image", that image, that likeness, in my view, is personhood. God the Father is a Person. The Holy Spirit is a Person. Jesus Christ is a person, and you are a person. All other animated beings are not persons. Therein lies that huge difference between man and all other animated beings!

In Genesis 1:21 God created the animal kingdom. Look at it:

21 So God created great sea creatures and every living thing that moves, with which the waters abounded, according to their kind, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.

Then in verse 22 God commanded them. Look at it:

22 And God blessed them, saying, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.

Now let me ask you what choice do the animals have in obeying that command? None. Why? They are not persons. They are programmed. When God gave that command He programmed them.

Then in verses 26-27 God created man. Now look at verse 28:

28 Then God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.

Now I ask you, is man programmed in such a way that he has no choice but to do what he was commanded? Was he programmed and he can't help but obey? Today we don't want to obey God's to fill the earth. We use all kinds of methods to disobey and we abort all kinds of unwanted humans. We disobey God. Adam and Eve were commanded not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, but they did. Man was created with a free will and the capacity to disobey God's commands.

And in our text, who is commanded? 'You!' The person. And you and I can disobey that command. So that is the 'who'. Now the 'what' question.

II. WHAT?

Our next question is, "What?" What is the real 'you' to do? The answer lies in the only verb of this entire command. It is to love. The word for love, of course, is *agapee* love. I will not take time to deal with the four different Greek words. We only have the one word 'love'. But let me say this, *agapee* love is the least esteemed love by the Greeks, and for most of those who would know what this word means, it would be the least esteemed by them as well. You see, it is a love that can be commanded. And why can it be commanded? Because it is not based on feelings. It is based on knowing the truth and doing it.

Because we have only one word for love, we cannot rid ourselves of the notion of feelings when it comes to the word love, but that is what we must do with this word.

To love God means to do what is right to do and to not do what is not right to do, regardless of how we feel. Love and obedience are very closely linked. Jesus said in John 14:15, "If you love Me, keep My commandments." In John 15:10 He said, "If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love."

When we choose to lie we have chosen not to love God. If we loved God we would not lie. If we love God we will believe His Word. If we love Him we will believe in Jesus. Insofar as we sin, to that extent we do not love Him. Insofar as we obey Him and keep His Word, we love Him with agapee love. In so far as other things are more important and take more of our time than He does, in that far we do not love Him. And so that brings us naturally to the question: Love whom?

III. WHOM?

Whom are we to love? God! Capital G God! There is only one capital G God, and that is the One we call Jehovah God. You see, the vast majority of mankind that claims to have a God has a different god. Let me remind you once more of what Tozer said. If the God I have in my mind does not match the God of the Bible, even if I am using and reading the Bible, I am worshipping a false god.

He said we must be ever so careful to get into our minds an accurate picture of who God is. I believe that if we see God as a God of unconditional love, or unconditional grace or unconditional forgiveness etc... we are getting a wrong idea of who God really is. And many who follow teachings like, 'love wins' are worshipping a God who does not even resemble the God of the Bible and they are worshipping a false god. The God we are to love is the God of the Bible, and that means my view of who He is must be accurate enough to indicate the true God.

I don't want to take more time here because I want to deal the rest of our time on the question, "How?" How do we love God? Well, it is the Creator of the universe that gave this command, and it is He who will now tell us how or by what means we are to love Him.

IV. HOW?

A. With Our Heart

And so, in the 'how' we go first to loving God *with all our heart*. What does this mean?

Let me read Matthew 22:37, our text verse again:

37 Jesus said to him, "'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.'

I have recently been diagramming sentences in Plautdietsch so here is some grammar. When it says we are to love God with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our mind, all three prepositional phrases beginning with the word 'with' are adverb phrases. And adverbs answer these questions: where, when, why, how and sometimes how much.

So look at the first phrase: You shall love the Lord your God *with all your heart*. The prepositional phrase 'with all your heart' tells us how to love God, and so do the other two phrases and we'll look at them one by one and see what they mean.

Now earlier I gave you a proposition. Here is the proposition: *The real you is that part of man that one cannot possess*. If that is correct, the heart is not you. When it says 'with all your heart', the pronoun 'your' is a possessive pronoun. So the heart is not the 'you', the person. It is a possession of the person. And so it tells us with what and how to love God. We are to love God with all our heart.

Now what does that mean? Well, I have told you before that the Greek has no word for 'mind' that includes all of what our English word includes. When the

Hebrews spoke of that which we call the 'mind' they called it the heart. That is to use the physical heart to show us what the mind does in man's spiritual part.

So before we go further let me show you man's major components.

ILLUSTRATION: Turn to 1 Corinthians 6 while I explain some things here. This box represents a human being. A human being, according to the Bible has three major components: they are body, soul and spirit. The body, as we know because we can see it, has many members or parts. Paul speaks of our body as our tent. And because we can speak of it in the possessive, it is not the real person either. It belongs to the real person. Soul and spirit reside within the tent. Furthermore, the body is not included in our verse? It does not say we are to love God with our bodies. Why not? Because we do not love God with our bodies.

Look now at 1 Corinthians 6:20:

20 For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.

So in my illustration we have body soul and spirit. Now notice according to 1 Corinthians 6:20 that we glorify God in our body and in our spirit. I do not have time to deal with that this morning but it is a very, very important subject. It includes such things as what we eat, drink or wear, or our prayer life etc...

But you will notice that the heart, soul and mind are not included in that verse. Why not? Because we do not glorify God in those parts. We love Him with those. And if we love Him with those, we will glorify God in our body and in our spirit.

-Data storage

So back to the heart now. How do we love God with all our heart? Well, the heart in Scripture means what we mean with the word *mind*. The first part we want to look at is what the Greek of the NT calls the *nous*,

and I have mentioned that to you many times. It is the storage part of our mind. When it says we are to love the Lord with all our mind that is one part of the 'all'. What does that mean? Everything I let into my mind gets stored; every sight, every sound, every taste, every touch, and every smell. I use this illustration. My grandfather smoked cigarettes. And when you would go into that old log house it had a peculiar smell. And even today, if I walk into a place that carries that smell, immediately I am back in my grandfather's house. All that is recorded in my mind. That is how I recognize it when I come in contact with it again. And we are to let into our minds only that which God approves of. That is a tall order.

Now there is a very interesting thing about this part of the mind. I have told you about the boy who went to school where my wife went. He would pull the fire alarm handle sometimes and they would get some time off school while the school was evacuated and checked for fire.

One day they had the police come and they powdered the fire alarm handles, and not long later they caught a boy who was desperately trying to cut the purple dye off of his fingers, all to no avail. That is what sin does to this part of the mind, and when this part of the mind has purple in it, we are doomed for hell.

But the good news is this: If we repent, the Lord cleans up the purple. There is no way I can describe this so we can really appreciate what that means. And then there are those who say repentance is a gift, and if you don't get the gift you can't repent. Others say repentance is a work, and therefore it is not necessary for salvation. Those are very sinful teachings in my estimation. And the word, to repent, comes from this part of the mind, and it means to change the mind. What does that mean? When I have lied to someone, if I repent I will go and confess and ask for forgiveness. Oh how we dislike repentance, and oh

how important it is. This is a small part of how we love God with just this one part of our heart.

-Data processor

Then there is in the heart, or mind the data processor. It is called the *phreen* in the NT. And loving God with all our heart includes this. Our minds process all kinds of information and numerous of these have been translated *to think* in the NT. We do not have time to consider those. But these all have to do with the *phreen*, the data processor. Here is what the Bible says: As a man thinks in his heart, ...? We become what we think. May I ask you how you think? You see, take the internet, or videos or music or any kind of social media, when we use them they tell you what to think. We could spend the whole message right here, but we go on to consider more parts.

-Memory

There is another part we call the memory. We are to love God with all we remember. There are some things we should forget. Forgetting does not mean to erase. We can't do that. It means to not allow them time in our thinker, or phreen. But there are good things to remember. Peter wrote his books to bring things to the believers memory, or to remind them.

Now, let me say this: This part of our minds can destroy us. It wants to catch up with us when we get older. They say old people can remember that which is way in the past, but can't remember what happened yesterday. Well, I can vouch for that. So the older you are, the more meaningful what I am about to say will be to you.

Turn to Philippians 3. Here is one of the crucial things of the mind and you can check me out the next time your mind is idle. The older you get, the more crucial you will find what I am about to tell you. When you get older, your mind has a lot of things to go back to. Many times failures want to overwhelm you. Past bad experiences can ruin your present life, and

are the reason many commit suicide, no doubt. The Apostle Paul could have let his past defeat him. He could have dwelt on how he apprehended Christians and even had them killed. But he did not. So we go to 3:13. Paul says:

13 Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before,

14 I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

He says, "I count not myself to have apprehended..." Apprehended what? The mark where the prize is given for the upward call in Christ Jesus. I think this prize is Christlikeness. He says, "I haven't achieved that yet." And then he gives us a huge key to Christian victory. It is, 'forgetting those things which are behind.' There is memory.

Now there is something very important here. He does not say, "I have forgotten..." It is a present tense forgetting. So what does this mean? The past keeps coming at me to tear me down, and I keep on putting it out. I say to myself, "You can't dwell on those things. I will not allow it."

"But", you say, "you can't just shut the things out. They come and they come and they come and you are hopelessly at their mercy." No, that is not correct. You see, what Paul did is replace those things which are behind, with those he wanted to accomplish ahead of him. Listen to him again:

13 Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before,

14 I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

When you reach forward, it has to occupy your mind, and crowd out what is coming after you from the past. Let me ask you, how many of you have struggles with the past? Paul tells his mind to go forward and press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. All this is easy to say, it is a supreme battle to achieve, but it is here that victory lies. So turn to Philippians 4. We begin in verse 6:

6 Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God;

7 and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

8 Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things.

9 The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you.

So, here is the command: Be anxious for nothing, literally, not even one thing. Now when we are anxious that of course consumes our mind when we are not otherwise occupied. And there are many things we must give attention, but we must be able to discern between those that we should give time and those we should not. So, here is one of those things we can do when we are anxious. We can pray and say, "Lord God, here are the things that worry me. I give them over to you to worry about." And once more this deserves a whole message. You might ponder Psalm 37:5.

Paul says if we do this the peace of God will mount guard over our hearts, that is our mind. Now let me ask, how many of you have had worries and finally you prayed about it and committed it to the Lord and peace

came? But there are times when it is a very huge battle to get there. Sometimes it may take quite a while before we are ready to submit all to God.

Now look at 4:8-9:

8 Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.

9 Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you.

So, if we begin to think on the things Paul mentions here, we are well on the way to victory. Then if we set about doing the things Paul or the Lord has instructed, we begin to get busy with that which lies ahead.

Well, we are to love God with all our mind, and memory is part of it. We can let it destroy us, or through the Word of God and the power of Christ's shed blood, we can win over memories that might otherwise destroy us.

-Conscience

Then there is another part of the mind we call the conscience. The Lord convicts us through our conscience. You see, when the Lord speaks to us through our conscience, it is that which comes to our mind through our spirit and lights up our conscience. Now we have the option of obeying it or not obeying it.

B. With All Our Soul

So we are to love God with all our heart which includes quite a few things. But there is another part of our being with which we are to love God. It is the second piece of information we are given on how to

love God, and that is we are to love Him with all our soul. And just what does that mean? Well, let me tell you what I understand the soul to be. First, it is an immaterial entity, just like the spirit. If you want to know how complicated this is, study secular writers who don't acknowledge the immaterial. They know there is more to man than the physical, but they have no idea what it is.

The secular world has all kinds of teaching they call psychology, but they don't usually acknowledge a soul. And how can you have psychology without a soul. You see, the word 'psychology' means the teaching of or doctrine of the soul. The 'psychee' of psychology comes from the word soul. So they call it psychology but many or maybe most don't acknowledge the soul. Quite brilliant, don't you think? They have psychologists, but there is no soul. That is like having a logger without logs, or an electrician without electricity, or a farmer without land.

Secondly, the soul, as I understand it, is the place where the heart and the self reside. It is the home of self. And thirdly, it is not the same as the spirit. And here is, in my understanding, the most important thing about the soul. As I understand it, it is the interface between the body and the real you, and the spirit and the real you.

Let me explain. My body lets data into my soul in five different ways. These are the five senses; sight, sound, touch, smell, taste. The organs are the eyes, the ears, the skin, the nose and the tongue. What does the soul have to do with this? It interprets the data from the outside world to the self, the real you. Based on the interpretations the soul makes, the self makes decisions on what to do.

Maybe the smell is that of fresh bread baking, and it makes the self want to go and eat. Or maybe it is the smell of a skunk and it makes you want to run. The soul interprets all this and sends the data to the

self, via the brain, or the heart, or as we call it; the mind.

You see, we speak of the five bodily senses. But these senses are not part of the body, they are part of the soul. The body relays the messages of the senses, but the soul interprets them. You say, "Woa! Woa! Not so fast! You can't tell me the senses are not part of the body! I have gone to school long enough to know better! Well, may I ask you, have you read your Bible enough to know better? Jot down these verses: Deut. 12:15-21; 14:26; Matt. 6:25; Lk. 12:16-21. Then study them.

Let us go to Luke 12:16-21:

16 *Then He spoke a parable to them, saying: "The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully.*

17 *"And he thought within himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?'*

18 *"So he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods.*

19 *'And I will say to my soul... Just a minute. I will say to what? My soul! And what will I say to my soul. Listen. "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; (soul) take your ease; (soul) eat, (soul) drink, and (soul) be merry."'*

The senses are part of the soul. The body is the vehicle. Now look at verse 20:

20 *"But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?'*

21 *"So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."*

The soul interprets all the data that comes in through the body and informs the self. The self then decides what to do.

Now the self has stored in the mind all kinds of information as to what we should or should not do. And maybe the sound is the sound of music we should not be listening to, or the sight is the sight of what we should not see etc.. The self will choose whether to obey or not to obey. So our text is the greatest commandment of all commandments, telling us what to do. It is to love God with all our heart, soul, and mind.

But not only does our soul interpret data from the physical realm. It takes in data from the spiritual realm. In 2018 I want to teach our young people all of this from the OT tabernacle, because it shows us the entire psychology of man. There are five gates through the body to the soul. There are four through the spirit to the soul.

You see, the body picks up physical information and sends it to the soul. The soul interprets it and sends it to the self. But our spirits pick up spiritual information, and the soul interprets that information, and sends it to the self as well.

The soul interprets all that data that comes to us through the spirit and sends it to the self as well. We are often listening to spirits and we have no idea where it is coming from. But we need to know what to do with that information or how to recognize what spirit is communicating with us. All of this we are to learn from the Bible.

Today we are almost entirely oblivious to the work of evil spirits and Satan as they communicate to us through the spirit. We make many bad decisions because we have listened to the voice of the evil one in our mind. Turn to Ephesians 6. We believe all kinds of things spirits tell us and we are often discouraged because we have listened to evil spirits. But we have not learned to discern because, as Christians, we live in such a way as to be almost entirely unaware of the work of evil spirits. Let's begin in verse 10:

10 *Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might.*

11 *Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.*

12 *For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.*

13 *Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.*

14 *Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness,*

15 *and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace;*

16 *above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one.*

Most Christians are almost entirely unaware of this realm and how these spirits communicate with us through our spirits. In the physical realm we learn to discern between different smells and sounds and tastes etc.. In the spiritual realm we hardly even notice what is happening. But we are to love God with ALL our soul. That includes the physical and the spiritual.

C. With All Our Mind

Third, we are to love God with all our mind. This is the third way we are told how to love God. Now you will say again, "I thought you said the Greek language did not have a word for mind." Well, that is still true. Translators find it difficult to translate some of the words related to the mind or thoughts.

The word translated 'mind' here is not mind at all. It is the word *dianoia*. It is made up of two words, *dia*, through; and *nous*, the storage part of the mind. Like repentance is not part of the mind, but it happens

there; so it is with this word. Here is how I would translate this word. "You shall love the Lord your God with all your thinking through." It is not the same as saying we are to love Him with all our thoughts. This thinking has to do with things we pull out of the storage part of our minds and we rehash it. Here is one of the greatest secrets to living victoriously as a Christian.

When a person's mind is idle, or not occupied with things it has to think about it will think anyway. Those who empty the mind and think of nothing allow the evil one to come in through the spirit part of man and occupy the mind. It does not shut off. And what this passage tells us is how to love God. There are many things your mind has to be occupied with. When you are learning something complicated your mind is entirely occupied with learning. But once you learn your job, often your mind can go all over the place. It is that which this word speaks of. At night when you can't sleep, your mind is running to and fro as well. It can go all over the world. It can beat people up or love them and what not. It is those times this word is speaking of.

So here is the secret. Take control over your mind when it is not otherwise legitimately occupied. How do you do that? As you can see, this is closely related to our earlier subject of memory. Here we draw some information already stored elsewhere in our mind, and we rethink it. How much of our time is used up with this? A lot. Paul said:

13 Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before,

14 I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

When Paul says he is forgetting those things which are behind, he says, "I don't allow my mind to rethink

those things." Here is something to practice in the new year. Put your mind under the control of the Holy Spirit. How do you do that? Make your mind think that which the Holy Spirit would have you think. There is not much better for this than Bible memory.

CONCL: And in conclusion, let me read our verses once more:

35 Then one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, and saying,

36 "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?"

37 Jesus said to him, "'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.'

38 "This is the first and great commandment.

Usually we are a week or two into the new year and we have already forgotten what was said. But we can set to do what this passage says, love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind or thinking through.