

**Rev. T. Jefferson Rogers Jr.**  
**Text: Matthew 22:34-40**  
**Title: The Greater Commandments**

Intro:

Jesus was often confronted by the religious leaders in an attempt to silence Him. In the Temple, Jesus was confronted by the religious leaders concerning His authority. In response, He told three parables to help them see where they stood in relation to Him.

Jesus was also confronted by the disciples of the Pharisees along with the Herodians. They wanted to trap Him. They asked Jesus was it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not? If Jesus answered that it was right to pay taxes to Caesar, He would be siding with the Romans against Israel and most Jews, including the Pharisees, would consider Him a trader. However, if He said taxes should not be paid to Rome, He could be accused of being a rebel who opposed the authority of Rome, and the Herodians would be against Him.

Jesus was likewise confronted by the Sadducees. The Sadducees who did not believe in the resurrection tried to trick Him by asking a question about the resurrection.

In verses 34-40, Jesus is confronted again by a lawyer. Lawyers were those learned or skilled in the Law of Moses. Lawyers were teachers and expounders of the Mosaic Law. They were also called scribes according to Mark. Lawyers were thought to have kept more closer to the spiritual meaning of the Law than the Pharisees did.

Verse 34 says, “But when the Pharisees heard that He had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together.” They came together out of anger and trouble at the success and popularity of Jesus. Some were troubled and vexed by His superiority in theological dialogue. Jesus knew the Law of Moses far better than the religious leaders did.

While they were gathered together a lawyer asked Jesus a question.

- I. **The Request:** Verse 36 *“The lawyer asked Jesus which is the greatest commandment in the law?”* Which is the greatest commandment out of 613 laws? The Rabbis would rank the 613 commandments as greater and lesser commandments. Some thought that keeping the Sabbath was more important than all the rest of the laws. Others thought that the observance of the ceremonial law was the most important of the laws.
  - A. The lawyer asked Jesus a question to “tempt” Him. The word “tempt” means to make proof of, to attempt, to try, to put to test. The word “tempt” can be positive or negative. The context determines the sense intended. By way of the context “tempt” is negative. Verse 15 *Then the Pharisees met together to plot how to trap Jesus into saying something for which he could be arrested.*

Verse 18 ***But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, Why make ye trial of me, ye hypocrites?***

In asking Jesus to choose one great commandment, he hoped to make Jesus show neglect for another area of the Law.

- B. The lawyer asked Jesus a question because they were missing the essential truths of the Law. Instead reading and receiving from the Law they were so bent on trapping Jesus that they were distorted in their understanding of it. The Law was not given to trap people, it was given to direct people to Jesus Christ to be freed (Galatians 3:24-26). They were missing the essential truths of the Law with their wide and varied external applications. In other words, they missed obeying internally—in thought and heart.

**II. The Response:** Verses 37-40 say, ***“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind, this is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”***

Deuteronomy 6:5

Jesus answers to reveal the core principles of the law. The Lord commands that we have absolute love for God and sincere love for our neighbors. Absolute love for God, and sincere love for our neighbors essentially encompass all commandments.

- A. The intent of these two commandments. The intent of these two commandments is relationship. Relationship on the vertical and horizontal axis. Relationship is at the core of Christian living.
  - 1) The first is to love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind. This means to love God with your entire being.  
God commands us to love Him. God does not force us to love Him; forced love is no true love; it is not love at all.

The Lord commands us to love Him with all our heart, soul, and mind. The heart is the central of our being; the soul, the seat of our affections and desires; the mind, the home of our thought and reason (Pulpit Commentary).

Love produces love:

1 John 4:19 says, “We love Him because He first loved us.” God made the first move. Your love for God is simply a response to His love for you.

To love God first is to put Him first.

Matthew 6:33 ***But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.***

Luke 14:33 *In the same way, those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciples.*

To love God is to obey God. Jesus said in John 14:15, ***“If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.”***

- 2) The second is to love your neighbor as yourself. Love does not begin with self-love; love begins with God’s love. Through Jesus’ word, loving God is linked inextricably to loving other people. John echoes this statement when he says, “If anyone says he loves God but hates his brother, he is a liar.” (1 John 4:20)

Leviticus 19:18

Loving neighbors like loving yourself does not mean loving yourself before you can love your neighbor. It means that in the same way you care about yourself, you should care for your neighbor. In the same way you are concerned about your own life, you should be concerned about your neighbor’s life. Love does not express feeling, affection, and passion; it expresses reverence and respect. We are commanded to honor all men; to respect their rights, their feelings because all men have the image of God (Imago Dei). All people are precious in God’s sight. God so loved humanity He sent Christ to ransom humanity with His life and redeemed humanity with His own precious blood. In consideration of God’s love for us as we care for ourselves, we must care for those around us. Our love for others must be like the love with which we regard ourselves.

Our love must be without pretense: Instead of pretending to love our neighbor, our love must be genuine. Through our actions, we show how genuine our love is. Romans 12:9 ***Don’t just pretend to love others. Really love them. Hate what is wrong. Hold tightly to what is good*** (NLT).

Our love must be without prejudice: We cannot love certain people and despise others. We need a love for all people. This would condemn racism. We are to do good to all men (Gal 6:10). We cannot single out certain groups to help, while we ignore other groups. James 2:8-9 ***“Yes indeed, it is good when you obey the royal law as found in the Scriptures: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” But if you favor some people over others, you are committing a sin”*** (NLT).

- B. The importance of these two commandments. All the other commandments and the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments.