

—Westminster Shorter Catechism—
Lesson 38—The Summary of the Moral Law, Q. 42

Mark 12.28-34—Which is the First and Great Commandment?

The Scribe's Question, v.28

- I. The Scribes were experts in the interpretation of the Law and often debated over which commandments were more important than others.
- II. This man's question argues him to be both sympathetic to Jesus and genuinely sincere in his desire to hear the Lord's answer.

Christ's Answer, vv.28-31

- I. Jesus says the whole law of God and the whole duty of man can be summed up in one word: *love*. In particular, He says:
 - A. Our love must be directed first of all towards God. He quotes the great *Shema* ("Hear") of Israel from Dt 6.4-5.
 - B. Our love must flow from every facet of human personality: from our heart, soul, mind, and strength.
 - C. Our love to God must exercise all our powers to the fullest.
 - D. Our love must also be directed towards men, Lev 19.18.
- II. Is this two commandments instead of one? Or is it one commandment which requires two expressions to fulfill?
 - A. Consider 1Jn 4.7-21 — Whoever doesn't know the *source* of love (God) cannot *exhibit* love toward his neighbor, because love *for* God releases the love *of* God to others.
 - B. *There is no other commandment greater than these*, Jesus says, because in these all the Law is fulfilled, Rom 13.10; Col 3.14; 1Pet 4.8; 1Jn 3.14; 1Jn 4.8.
 - C. So that if we make conscience of our obedience to love, then all other instances of obedience will follow necessarily.

The Scribe's Approval, v.32-33

- I. The scribe was so delighted that he not only repeated Christ's words, but added upon them by drawing from several other OT Scriptures (Dt 4.35; 1Sam 15.22; Ps 40.6, 7; 51.16-17; Isa 1.10-17; 45.21; Hos 6.6; Mic 6.6-8).
 - A. He also affirmed that God never delighted in the sacrifices any more than as they represented the sincere heart of the worshipper (cf. 1Sam 16.7; Mic 6.6-8).

Christ's Encouragement, v.34

- I. Jesus encourages him that he isn't far from the Kingdom of God because he'd seen that true acceptance before God wasn't in one's works or sacrifices, but in a personal relationship which manifests itself in genuine, sincere love.
- II. *No one dared ask Him any more questions.*

Application

- I. Note: your righteousness before God is rooted neither in your own obedience to God's Law nor in your love to God and neighbor.
 - A. For no man will be saved by the works of the Law, Gal 2.16; 3.21; Rom 9.31.
 - B. To be righteous before God, you must therefore abandon every effort to *become* holy by the keeping of any and all commandments and turn unto Jesus Christ, the Saviour of sinners, who *makes* you holy and enables you to love God and your neighbor, Rom 3.25-26; 10.4; Jn 15.4-5.

- II. Your religious duties have no meaning before God unless they are the sincere expression of your love to Him, 1Cor 13.3.
 - A. Love is the heart of religion, the grace after which Christ most inquires, Jn 21.17.

- III. Love for your neighbor is both the acid test and the expression of your love to God, 1Jn 4.20.
 - A. Loving your neighbor *includes* your enemy and underlines your Christian brethren.
 - B. If you find that you do not love as you ought, then:
 1. Wait upon the preaching of God's Word, which will beget the love of God in you, Isa 66.2b.
 2. Ask God for a heart of love and He will give it, Jn 15.7.