

Wil Owens
The Greatest Commandments of All; Matt 22:34-40
GPBC
9.19.21

Introduction – Today’s passage is probably a familiar passage. We’ve read these verses before, maybe have even studied them. In rabbinic writings, it wouldn’t be uncommon to find the commandments of the OT placed into categories and ranked according to importance. In that way, it probably wasn’t an unusual question.

What is unusual is why the question was asked. A lawyer of the Pharisees asked Jesus this question in order to test Him. Now I’m not sure how this was a test. Possibly, there was already a commandment considered to be the greatest and they just wanted to show that Jesus was ill-equipped or not acquainted with what was commonly accepted. When Jesus answers though, it becomes clear the test is not for Him but rather for the Pharisees. And we may find as we study together this morning, the answer becomes a test for us as well.

- I. What Do These Two Commandments Mean?
 - a. Jesus says the first and greatest commandment of all is this: you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.
 - i. Jesus is quoting from Deut 6:5, in the Law, the first 5 books of the OT, and Jesus says that without a doubt it is clearly the greatest commandment that God has ever given.
 - ii. The greatest way to honor and glorify God in this life is to love Him with every aspect of our being.
 1. What does it mean to love God with all our heart? It doesn’t mean exclusively, that would contradict the next verse. It means supremely. I picture the heart like a well. We love a lot of things and a lot of people. We love certain foods. We love certain activities. We enjoy these things. So in our hearts they should be floating around on the surface.
 - a. But we also love people. We love friends, family, parents, children, grandchildren. So we would find those in deeper waters of our hearts.

- b. But down in the deepest part of our affections, as far as the bucket can sink, should be our love for God. A love that runs so deep that it defines and determines those lesser loves in our lives.
 - c. Jesus said it this way in Luke 14 – If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.
 - d. If our children or our spouse is at the bottom of our affections, if they are our greatest love, we are idolators and if we love someone more than we love God, we are actually loving them less than God intended. If we don't love God with all our heart, we'll never rightly love another.
2. What does it mean to love the Lord with all our soul? I believe that means everything else that defines who we are beyond our physical description. What makes Wil, Wil, besides his looks? His desires, his intentions, his personality, his disposition, his will.
- a. In other words, everything about me that makes me, me, should be Godward and not self. God created me to glorify Him not to glorify Wil.
 - b. I love Him with all my soul when everything about me is about Him.
 - c. Jesus said it this way in Matt 16 – If anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me.
3. What does it mean to love the Lord with all our mind?
- a. First it means casting any sinful, selfish, doubting thoughts out of our minds through prayer, Scripture, and the power of the Spirit. 2 Cor 10:5 - take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.
 - b. Second, it's not only what we empty our minds of but what we fill our minds with. Col 3:2 - set your minds on things above. Phil 4:8 - whatever is true,

whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

- iii. It all comes down to loving God with our deepest affections, every ounce of our desires and intentions, and every fiber of our thoughts. Love Him supremely with everything you've got.
- iv. You see my friends this is why I say saving faith involves more than just believing that everything the Bible says about Jesus is true. James says the devils believe that. Saving faith is not only when you believe all the Bible says about Jesus but you also love Him for it! You love that He came from heaven to earth for you. You love Him for living for you. You love Him for dying for you. You love Him for rising for you. You love Him for preparing a place for you in glory. You love Him for promising to come receive you into His kingdom! You love Him for everything you believe about Him.
- v. 1 Peter 1:8 – though you have not seen Him, you love Him!
- b. Then Jesus says a second is like it. After loving the Lord with every part of your being, the second commandment is like the first in that they both have to do with love (not loving yourself)
 - i. Jesus is quoting Lev 19:18 from the Law. In that passage the law has to do with how Israelites treat fellow Israelites. But now in the NT era when the gospel is going out to the ends of the earth, who is our neighbor? Remember Jesus answers that question in Luke 10 and the answer now is everybody. We are to love everyone as we love ourselves, even our enemies Jesus says in Matt 5.
 - ii. This commandment is kind of like The Golden Rule in Matt 7. There Jesus says whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets. Same connection – this is the Law and the Prophets. So it's like the Golden Rule but it's more than the Golden Rule isn't it? Not only are we to treat others as we desire to be treated, but we are to love others as we love ourselves. I look at this way – the Golden Rule is basically an application of the second

greatest commandment. How are we to love others as we love ourselves? Do to them what you wish they would do to you.

- iii. Sadly, this verse has been twisted often in this way: You shall love your neighbor as yourself, so first you need to learn how to love yourself. That totally misses the point of the passage.
 1. The Bible assumes we already love ourselves. As sinners, we are already incredibly selfish. We already think too highly of ourselves, too much ourselves. We already believe we deserve more than we deserve.
 2. The problem of a low self-esteem is not to learn to think more highly of yourself. Often the problem of a low self-esteem is that we've placed ourselves at the center of our lives instead of God. Of course we're going to feel low and depressed if we replaced God with ourselves. When our world revolves around self, that's often a downward spiral. When our world revolves around God, He lifts us up! Humble yourself in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.
 3. Sometimes low self-esteem occurs when we've been mistreated by others. We feel our lives are worthless because we've been treated as worthless. But our worth is not found in loving ourselves. The world says "Be you", the Bible says, "Be Christlike!" The world says, "Live your truth", Jesus says, "I am the truth!" Our worth is found in that we are created by God, in His image, for His glory. We are His! He loves us and values us and has purpose and meaning for us regardless of how others think of us or treat us.
 4. The point of the passage is that our love for ourselves is shown in that we want what's best for us. Love others that way. Do what's best for them. And the greatest thing for them is to know God, love God, grow in God.
- iv. The meaning of this verse is this: If the greatest thing you can do is love God with all your being, then that's also the greatest thing your neighbor can do. If you really want what's best for you, to love God, then want that for your neighbor too.

- v. We used the imagery of the well of our hearts to depict loving God with all our being. We could use the imagery of a chart to illustrate loving your neighbor as yourself. First commandment takes first place. In our list of our greatest loves, at the top of the list, number one on the chart is God. The second commandment takes second place. Love your neighbor. Then at the bottom, third place, is love yourself. The only way to truly love ourselves is to first love God, then love others. That's the secret to self-esteem. Put God first and everybody else second, and our lives will be full and rich and satisfied. For it is so much better to give than to receive.
- c. If we are leading your children to sin, if we are causing our friend or our spouse or our fiancé to sin, we aren't loving them. We are loving self more than we love God and more than we love them. We've flipped the chart upside down where we are at the top in first place and God is at the bottom in last place.
- d. Remember what Paul said to husbands in Eph 5 – love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her that she would be blameless. In other words, love her in such a way that you'll give up anything so that she will love God.

Conclusion – The Pharisees couldn't have asked Jesus a better question. This is exactly what they needed to know and what they needed to hear. They were so busy keeping a tally on how good they were at keeping the law, they had missed the entire point of the law. The law of God for our lives is God revealing to us this is how you love Me and this is how you love others.

It just might be that today this is exactly what we needed to know and needed to hear. Do we love God with all our being? Do we love others in such a way that points them to loving God too?