

## **The Greatest Commandment** **Matthew 22:34-46**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text opens with these words. *But when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?"*

To understand what is going on, we need to hear what came just before our text, for it is part of a larger section of questions by the Jewish leaders. There was subterfuge afoot, for just before our text we are informed, *Then the Pharisees went out and laid plans to trap Jesus in His words.* They had asked Jesus about whether they should pay taxes to Caesar, and He answered them so well, they were amazed and went away.

But, that was only the beginning. The Jewish leaders had an amazing hatred toward Jesus. While the Pharisees had been stumped, there were still others available, so, *That same day the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to him with a question.* (Matt. 22:15)

Of course, Jesus answered so well that they too were silenced. Matthew concludes that questioning of Jesus, *When the crowds heard this, they were astonished at his teaching.*

That brings us to our text. the Pharisees tried another tact, they were going to bring in an expert, one of the elite, the creme-de-la-creme, the wisest of the wise, surely He could ask a question whereby they could entrap Jesus, "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?"

Jesus answered them, "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

So, the Pharisees huddled together to talk about this. It was the correct answer, but they wanted to test Jesus, they were pondering an appropriate follow-up question. They were trying to make Him look bad, only it wasn't working.

Jesus, however, had a greater point, He asks them about the Christ whose son is He? They respond that He is the Son of David. Jesus explains some things from Psalms, that David Himself called the Christ "Lord", and then presses the point by asking, "If then David calls Him Lord, how can He be His Son?"

Again the Pharisees have no answer. Or is it because they didn't want to answer? Whatever, from that day on, no one dared to ask Him any more questions.

So, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?

The Pharisees were all about the Law. They pointed to themselves, and they loved to look around

at other people. They saw themselves as obedient and loving to God, but all their heart, and all their soul, and all their mind were not completely loving toward God. They believed they were keeping God's commandments by doing what He wanted – but they had forgotten love.

Love of neighbor as yourself is the second greatest commandment. Of course, the Pharisees were not thieves or murderers, they did nothing against the outward appearance of the law. But again, Jesus' response cut to the heart of the matter and proclaimed that love was at *the heart* of keeping the second table of the law.

The Pharisees had developed partiality, judging people according to their wealth, and making friends with only who they would claim were the "best" of people. Their focus upon people was based upon outward appearances, not upon love.

While the Pharisees didn't murder, they slandered one another, thinking themselves better than others. They sat in the synagogue looking around to see who was there, how they were dressed, and how they were acting. Jesus' point is that they were more concerned about the outward appearance and actions of others rather than loving all. And, they certainly they weren't focused upon God.

Hatred in the heart, seeking revenge, or bearing a grudge against another are certainly not ways to love our neighbor.

Pharisees wanted to see the Law, they wanted the Law held before their eyes. It was their hope, for their confidence was upon the fact that they had kept the Law. Throughout His earthly ministry Jesus had pointed out to them that they hadn't kept it, at least not as God required them to keep it. "Be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy." So the Pharisees were trying to trap Jesus, as if He didn't understand the Law.

Did Jesus understand the Law? Perfectly! He understood it to a 't'. He knew the weaknesses of human flesh, that nobody, including the Pharisees could keep the law. Jesus' entire life was not about getting people to keep the Law, but about His keeping the Law for them.

You and I don't keep the Law perfectly. That is, in fact, one of the main purposes of the law, it functions as a mirror to show us our sin. Yes, the law does tell us how we're supposed to live, but knowing what we should be doing does not always make it happen, does it?

How many other things do we love more than God - fishing, hunting, music, the car, the boat, the home, our spouse, our kids, our kids' sports, the Packers, and more? Too often, these things, or even some others, come before God in my life. When we are honest with ourselves, we love too many things more than we love God, and it happens way more often than it should.

As for loving our neighbor as ourselves, which of you would willingly give of yourself or your belongings for your friends or family members? What I mean is, would you give up something you love so that another could have something they need? Would you sell your boat or favorite gun so that you could give the proceeds of the sale to another, say, so your brother and his family might eat? Take it further, would you be willing to do that so a stranger could eat? Do you

forgive others as you want to be forgiven? Do you really love everybody as you love yourself?

The Pharisees did not really love God with all their heart, mind, and soul, just as we do not. The Pharisees did not really love their neighbor as themselves, just as we do not.

So, as they are putting their heads together to trip up Jesus, Jesus brings up the real purpose for the Law. The purpose of the Law is to show us our sin so that we look not to ourselves, but to God's Christ. Jesus was trying to get the Pharisees to trust not in themselves and their keeping of the Law, but He wanted them to trust the One which God sent into the world - the Son of David, God's Christ, the one greater even than David.

The Pharisees wanted an earthly king. They asked a question of the Law because they saw the Law as the end of all religious discussion, they thought they could be saved by the Law. Jesus shows that David's Son is more than an earthly king. David failed the Law; He could not keep it as required. Jesus' question is trying to bring them to faith, to see religion not as only about the law, but more importantly about God's Christ.

God's Christ came as a man, the Son of David according to the flesh, to redeem David from His failures in keeping the Law.

The greatest commandment is God's Christ. Christ loved God with all His heart, even being obedient till that heart stopped beating. He loved God with all His soul, giving His very spirit into the Father's hand from the cross. He loved God with all His mind; teaching, preaching, proclaiming the truths of God, even though it brought Him the hatred of the people and ultimately took Him to the cross.

God's Christ, Jesus, did the will of His Father in all things, showing His love for God in His perfect obedience.

Christ also loved His neighbor as Himself. His love for every single person who would ever live, moved Him to suffer the Father's wrath against all people for their sinful lack of love – their lack of love for God and for their fellow man. His great love for you is most evident when you consider His suffering and death, it is why Paul determined to know nothing except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.

His love, sacrificed upon the cross, is given to you when you remember - when you hear His love spoken to you in the comforting words of sins forgiven. His love, sacrificed upon the cross, nourishes your faith in Him and love toward your neighbor when you eat of His body which was pierced and drink of His blood which was shed out of His great love for you.

What is the greatest commandment? Jesus summarizes the whole law with one word - Love! Christ is the perfect fulfillment of that Commandment, He is the embodiment of love. Christ comes right now to give you His love. Receive Christ's love for God. Receive Christ's love for your neighbor. Receive perfect love in the forgiveness of your sins.

The question the Pharisees asked about the law brings into focus your need for forgiveness and

salvation. Christ's answer points to Himself, for He is perfect love who fulfilled that Law for you.

What do you think about the Christ? While the Pharisees could not reply to Jesus' question, there is a wonderful answer. The Christ is my answer to what is the greatest commandment. Christ is my forgiveness and salvation, He is my love of God and my neighbor.

Dearly beloved of God, Christ is your greatest commandment, He is your salvation, He is your forgiveness. Christ is He who keeps God's Law for you, in you, and through you. Christ is God's love for you, and in you, and through you.

My prayer for you dear friends is simple, live in love! Live in Christ! Amen.