

“The Greatest Commandment”

Leviticus 19:18; Deuteronomy 6:4-7; Mark 12:28-34

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Introduction:

Here is a clip from an article I wrote titled “Honor God!”

(www.wordforlifesays.com):

“One day my son accompanied me to the grocery store to do some shopping. He was wearing his military uniform at that time and when people saw him they kept stopping him to shake his hand, to talk to him, or to tell him to keep up the good work. They were proud of him. They honored him for his service.

You know, as a mom, how I felt. Are dads the only ones who can stick out their chest and feel like, “That’s my boy?” I’m just kidding. But, I really thought it was something special for people to recognize him and his service to our country in that way. As much as I love the many fields in which one can be honored (military, teachers, firefighters, police officers, etc.), no one deserves our respect and adoration more than God. It is customary to stand to our feet when a judge enters a courtroom and there is a hush in the crowd when they bang that gavel. What about God?

Too many go through their day without ever considering the fact that hey, He is God, and He should be before all others. With that realization in hand, I want my life to reflect that great truth. I want every word, every action and every thought to magnify the greatness of who He is and all of His glory. When I go about my day I want people to see Him in me. Do I make mistakes? Oh, yeah! But, I have a goal. I aspire to do better and to be better every day. God has been so good and wonderful to me, and I feel that as His child the least I can do is showing Him the honor due Him."

I used this clip as an illustrative way to open up today's lesson because when we are discussing **"The Greatest Commandment,"** in essence, we are discussing honoring God with our lives; putting Him first as priority over everything else. Let's get into the lesson and learn more.

Leviticus 19:18 "Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I am the LORD."

We are learning to fulfill **The Greatest Commandment:** which is loving God. Jesus teaches later in our lesson that the second like it, **"Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself,"** which is noted in the above verse.

"Love" is a working of the inner man. **"Love"** is a fruit produced on the inside to affect lives on the outside. **"Love"** comes from the heart (you know, that little inner part of man we discussed in last week's lesson☺). **"Love"** is the committing of oneself for the betterment of others. **"Love"** wants to close the gap of hindrances that prevent us from being in the relationships we were designed for.

That's how love operates. **"Love"** is selfless, patient and kind (see 1 Corinthians 13:4-7). **"Love"** is the greatest thing that any human can show to another (1 Corinthians 13:13). That's why the opposite of love is spoken against with earnest in this verse.

"Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people."

I think most of today's woes and troubles extend from a lack of love; rather, people are very self-seeking in matters of avenging oneself and holding grudges. These are separators of human relationships. These are the very things that tear

down the walls of communication and common sense when they are allowed to block the flow of love. How often do we turn on the news to hear of a tragedy spurred on by avenges and grudges? Too often!

Avenges and grudges go hand in hand; I believe that's why they are together here in this verse (personal opinion). When one holds a **"grudge"** they are giving an opportunity to allow that matter held to fester as an infecting sore. The longer it is held the more it begins to puss and seep its nasty effects on the rest of the body. When it cannot be contained any longer, that **"grudge"** wants to be satisfied by way of **"avenge."** It wants the other to hurt and to suffer as one supposes him or herself to; it wants to lash out! This is the total opposite of love.

Proverbs 20:22 says, "Do not say, 'I will recompense evil'; Wait for the LORD, and He will save you." Knowing the inconsistency of human nature and his inability to execute these matters in a peaceful way when emotions are involved, God said in Deuteronomy 32:35, "Vengeance is Mine," (NKJV). God knows how to deal with these matters rightly; man's responsibility is just to **"love."**

Deuteronomy 6:4-7 "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD: And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up."

But for love to prevail between human and human, there has to first be established a love relationship with God. These above verses are known to be a part of the Shema; a recitation of prayer spoken two times a day. Its instructions are very poignant and meant to solidify one's relationship and that of his house with God. Though we as Christians do not recite the Shema, it holds in it great principles on rearing a godly house and drawing one closer to God.

1. **"The LORD our God is one Lord."** The foundation of the God and man relationship is based off of this leading and governing principle: there is only one God. God does not and will not compete with any other for there

is none other beside Him. This is why the very first commandment of the Ten given states, “Thou shalt have no other gods before me,” (Exodus 20:3). Isaiah 43:10 solidifies it by saying, “. . . Before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me.” There has never been and never will be another God. He is it. The real deal.

2. **“And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.”** Because we love Him, everything within our inner being should be wholly and completely devoted to God: the emotions, mind, will and strength. This is a reminder of last week’s lesson stressing God prefers heart service over lip service:

“This is a matter of lip service versus heart service. God wants your inner man devoted to Him rather than surface professions of faith. Why do you think God so approved of David despite his many, many faults? He did so because David’s heart was for God. Act 13:22 says, “I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after mine own heart. . .” David worshiped God and was devoted to God from the heart. His inner man was tied to God.” (www.WORDFORLIFESAYS.com)

God wants all of you and this verse stresses that nicely.

3. **“Thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.”** Take every opportunity possible to pass the Word onto your children. If one generation fails to pass on the values and lessons of the faith to another they are effectively cutting off the flow of God’s blessings to the generations that come after them, and them, and them, and so on. Proverbs 22:6 says, “Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.” Not only will he not depart from it but you have equipped him/her with what they need to pass it on to others. Leaving a legacy of wealth and treasure may allow a child to grow up and be financially secured; but what

of the Spirit? Leaving a legacy of the Word will provide for a spiritually rich future.

These commandment lessons from the Old Testament lay the foundation for Jesus' teaching in the New Testament.

Mark 12:28 “And one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, and perceiving that he had answered them well, asked him, Which is the first commandment of all?”

In the verses prior to this, beginning at the start of this chapter, Jesus was dealing with a lot of opposition. He opens this chapter with the parable of the vineyard. That parable ends with the vineyard owner's son being killed at the merciless hands of the husbandmen (read verses 1-11 for clarity). Not at all liking what the parable implied verse 12 tells us, “And they sought to lay hold on him, but feared the people: *for they knew that he had spoken the parable against them:* and they left him, and went their way” (emphasis mine). They knew Jesus was accusing them.

As a result, they sent certain men at different points: Pharisees, Herodians, Sadducees and scribes, “to catch him in his words,” (Mark 12:13). These questionings were not honest inquiries rather ways to try to catch Jesus in a trap; “that they might take hold of his words, that so they might deliver him unto the power and authority of the governor,” (Luke 20:20; read 9-19 for more).

Then, out of the crowd comes a “scribe” with another question “**having heard them reasoning together, and perceiving that he had answered them well.**” Jesus was often taken notice of for the way He speaks, teaches and responds to people. In John 7:46 an officer replied, “Never man spake like this man,” (see also Matthew 7:29 and Luke 4:32).

His question was this, “**Which is the first commandment of all?**” What is the most important thing we should be focusing on? Most Bible students and teachers alike agree that there were 613 laws for the Jewish people to follow. With such an extensive list this “scribe” wants to know Jesus' impute to which should take precedence over all.

Mark 12:29-31 “And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The LORD our God is one Lord: And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment. And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these.”

“The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The LORD our God is one Lord .” The number one priority in anybody’s life is God, Jesus responded. It has always been God, it should be God now, and it should always be God in the future. Everything is about God! God should be first over all, always and forever. There’s no other way to put it. Even if one skipped the 613 laws the Jewish people followed and just stuck with the Ten Commandments, the priority is set right there as number one on the list, “Thou shalt have no other gods before me,” (Exodus 20:3). Remember Jesus’ response at the time of His temptation? He said, “Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve,” (Matthew 4:10).

“And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.” Referring back to the Old Testament, the verses we’ve already covered from Leviticus and Deuteronomy, Jesus reiterated the ground work for how the human life is to operate: Love for God first and love for people second. (If you remember from last week’s discussion on the Ten Commandments we noted that the first four commandments were directed at one’s relationship with God while the remaining six were related to how humans are to treat one another). Here, we see Jesus not swerving from these two important truths; rather He is stating, **“There is none other commandment greater than these.”** As a matter of fact, in Matthew 22:40 Jesus states, “On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.” Everything is fulfilled in the following of these two commandments.

Mark 12:32-33 “And the scribe said unto him, Well, Master, thou hast said the truth: for there is one God; and there is none other but he: And to love him with all the heart, and with the understanding, and with all the soul, and with

all the strength, and to love his neighbour as himself, is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.”

Jesus spoke the **“truth”** and the **“scribe”** agreed with Him and was pleased with how Jesus responded. He knew that everything Jesus spoke was right. There was no contradiction here in His words. When Jesus said, **“There is none other commandment greater than these,”** the scribe took it all in and also said that they are **“more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.”**

“Offerings and sacrifices” were never meant to take over one’s responsibility to have a right relationship with God and man. This has always been a priority to God; **“For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings,”** (Hosea 6:6). There is no mistaken here: these outward appeasements can never replace genuine, inner devotion and love toward God and man.

Mark 12:34 “And when Jesus saw that he answered discreetly, he said unto him, Thou art not far from the kingdom of God. And no man after that durst ask him any question.”

Jesus saw that this man understood what He was getting at. He seemed to possess wisdom in understanding what God was looking for as opposed to the rest of the questioning tempters; therefore, He said, **“Thou art not far from the kingdom of God.”** If he keeps on this path and searching honestly for insight to the way God sees things and what God is looking for, he could draw closer God.

Seeing the way Jesus answered gave pause to the rest of the crowd and **“no man after that durst ask him any question.”** Cased closed!

Conclusion:

Are we showing love to God as His Word states? What about people? Everything boils down to these two questions, doesn’t it? It really is this simple to line our lives up with **“The Greatest Commandment.”** This is how we honor God and show Him that we really love Him.