



Bob Chisholm

“The Greatest Commandment”

Mark 12

Small Group Plan

Mark 12:28-34

²⁸ One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, “Of all the commandments, which is the most important?” ²⁹ “The most important one,” answered Jesus, “is this: ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.’ ³⁰ Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ ³¹ The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.” ³² “Well said, teacher,” the man replied. “You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him. ³³ To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices.” ³⁴ When Jesus saw that he had answered wisely, he said to him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” And from then on no one dared ask him any more questions.

After a frustrating encounter with dishonest critics, Jesus has a refreshing meeting with one who is “not far from the kingdom of God” (Vs. 34). It is a bright spot at the end of a long line of dark confrontations (see 12:27-33, 13-17, 18-27). This scribe asks a question that touches the very heart of Jesus’ purpose. He is not trying to trap Jesus (cf. 12:13), but seems to be honestly listening to the discussions and is impressed with Jesus’ answers.

His question is an old one and had often been a matter of debate among rabbis who were either trying to find the essence of the law or who were endeavoring to prioritize the 613 commandments.

Through the centuries, several statements in the Old Testament were offered as the essence of the law:

<p>Psalm 15 Blameless walk, true heart Does neighbor no wrong Despises evil, keeps word Honest deeds and tongue Does not slur fellowman Honors those who fear God Keeps his oath, generous Does not exploit innocent</p> <p>Isaiah 66:2 A humble heart A contrite spirit Respects the word</p>	<p>Isaiah 33:15 Walks righteously Speaks the truth Refuses extorted gain Refuses bribes Refuses to hear murder plots Will not consider evil</p> <p>Habakkuk 2:4 Living by faith</p> <p>Micah 6:8 To act justly To love mercy To walk humbly</p>
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Jesus answers with two quotations (Deuteronomy 6:4ff; Leviticus 19:18) and interprets every relationship, God to people and person to person, with the single word “**Love.**”

OPEN IT / INTRODUCE IT ...

- Why do we often use the word “love” used to describe every kind of thought and emotion: “I love pizza ... I love this movie ... I love you”?
- How does this cheapen the whole concept of “love?”

LOOK AT IT / STUDY IT ...

“THE MOST IMPORTANT ONE”

Mark 12:29

The first Hebrew word in Deuteronomy 6:4 is **Shema**, which means, “hear.” The word **Shema** came to be used as the title for the entire statement of faith, which pious Jews recite three times daily:

*Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.
Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul
and with all your strength.
— Deuteronomy 6:4-5 —*

- There were 613 commandments in the law. How difficult would it be to try to prioritize them?
- What does it mean to love God with my heart? With my soul? With my mind?
- Using social language, personal language, financial language and time management language, describe what happens when I love someone as I love myself.

“THE SECOND IS THIS”

Mark 12:31

His answer regarding the “most important command” was expected. He gave the most commonly held answer. But his second command came as a surprise. No one had even asked about the number two spot. It was as if he was saying, “*You have asked one question, but I cannot give you one answer. I cannot talk about God without talking about people. They go together.*” And his second answer came from a rather obscure part of the law and was surrounded by lesser known commands:

*Love your neighbor as yourself.
I am the Lord. Keep my decrees.
Do not mate different kinds of animals.
Do not plant your field with two kinds of seed.
Do not wear clothing woven of two kinds of material.
— Leviticus 19:18-19 —*

- Since Jesus is only asked for the greatest commandment, why does he volunteer a second?
- How does the second flow from the first?
- What is the difference between the right way to “love ... yourself” and the wrong way to “love ... yourself”?
- Read the following short poem aloud to the group:

*To live above with the God we love,
that would be grace and glory.
But to live below with the ones we know,
well ... that’s another story.*

- How would you describe the difficulty we often have with “living below with the ones we know” or, as Jesus puts it, “The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’”

“MORE IMPORTANT THAN SACRIFICE”

Mark 12:33

An old warning against hypocrisy echoes through this conversation (1 Samuel 15:22; Psalm 40:6; 51:16; Hosea 6:6). Jesus himself is replacing the temple as the place where God is encountered.

- 11:1-11 — Jesus enters the city going immediately to the temple.
 - 11:12-26 — Jesus causes the temple disturbance.
 - 11:27; 12:35, 41 — Jesus clashes with the temple leadership.
 - 13:1-2 — Jesus predicts the temple’s destruction (cf. 14:58 John 2:19)
 - 15:38 — At Jesus’ death, the curtain of the temple is ripped in two.
- Why is Jesus himself the clearest picture of God (cf. Hebrews 1:1-3)?

“NOT FAR FROM THE KINGDOM”

Mark 12:34

This man is near, but has not yet arrived. He agrees with Jesus. But here it stops. He is a hearer, but not a doer.

- How can a person move from hearing to doing?
- How can thoughts and attitudes keep a person “stuck” as only a hearer?

USE IT / APPLY IT ...

- How does all of God’s will “hang on these two commandments” (Matthew 22:40)?
- What is your greatest obstacle to loving God fully — with all your heart, soul, mind and strength?
- What do you find in people that makes it difficult for your love to overcome?
- Close with prayer asking God for a clearer picture of his love that will overflow into the lives of those around us.