

**July 10, 2011**

**The Most Important Commandment**

**Matthew 22:34-40**

But when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees with his reply, they met together to question him again. <sup>35</sup> One of them, an expert in religious law, tried to trap him with this question: <sup>36</sup> "Teacher, which is the most important commandment in the law of Moses?"

<sup>37</sup> Jesus replied, "You must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind." <sup>38</sup> This is the first and greatest commandment. <sup>39</sup> A second is equally important: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' <sup>40</sup> The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments."

What do you think is the most important commandment? Don't lie, don't steal, don't covet, maybe-because you have gone through a divorce on account of it-don't commit adultery. The Pharisees had categorized over 600 (613) laws and spent much time debating which were more or less important. A man who was an expert in religious law, a student and a teacher of the law of Moses, tried to trap Jesus with a needless question: "Teacher, which is the most important commandment in the law of Moses?" A needless question, because aren't they all important? He wasn't testing Jesus' knowledge but His judgment. Why would this be a trap? Perhaps some thought laws about the Sabbath were the most important, while others thought the law of circumcision to be most important, still others may have felt that the laws pertaining to sacrifices were the most important of the laws of Moses. And so, he thought, he had Jesus trapped because no matter how Jesus answered He was sure to upset someone by not choosing what they thought was the most important commandment.

I'm glad this expert in religious law asked the question, for now we have Christ's answer. The most important and greatest commandment was not the judicial laws, nor the ritual and ceremonial laws, nor even the ethical and moral precepts, but love of God and neighbor for these are the foundation of and included all the other laws. All the other laws are based on these. All the law is fulfilled in one word, love.

Romans 13:10

Love does no wrong to others, so love fulfills the requirements of God's law.

All obedience to God begins with love for Him and nothing in religion is done right that is not done in love. Love is the rest and the satisfaction of the soul.

"You must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment."

Love for God is the first and greatest commandment. God is infinitely and eternally good, and so He is to be loved. Love is the first and greatest thing God commands of us, and the first and greatest thing we should devote to Him. To love God sums up the first part of the Ten Commandments (commandments 1 through 4).

1. Having no other gods.
2. Not making idols.
3. Not taking God's name in vain.
4. Remembering the Sabbath day.

Now, did you notice that the Bible says to love the Lord "*your*" God; the first of the 10 commandments is, "You must not have any other god but me." (Exodus 20:3). That implies that we must have no other God besides the God of the Bible, and we are to love Him above all other things. Whatever or whoever you make your god, you will love, and make most important in your life before anything else. When you think of it that way, who or what is "*your*" god?

You must have as yours the God of the bible-the Creator, Sustainer, Owner, Ruler, Savior- you must have Him as *yours* if you are going to love Him. To love Him is expressed with obedience to Him, and dependence on Him. How does the God of the Bible become ours? The only thing that can separate us from a good and holy God is our sin. Everyone sins ... Romans 3:23

For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard.

We can't do anything to be forgiven of sin, we can't make up for it, we can't be good enough, or religious enough, but what we could not do for ourselves...

Romans 3:24 THE MESSAGE

God did it for us. Out of sheer generosity he put us in right standing with himself. A pure gift. He got us out of the mess we're in and restored us to where he always wanted us to be. And he did it by means of Jesus Christ.

Jesus makes God ours by reconciling us to Him through the forgiveness of our sins; by being a substitute and paying the price for our sins making a new covenant through His shed blood, His suffering and death on the Cross. How can we love God? It has to do with relationship.

Once we have a relationship with God, once you make God "*yours*" and understand how much He loves us, we can and want to love Him with all our heart, all our soul, and all our mind; or, to say it another way, with all our affections/emotions, will, and understanding. The purpose Jesus had for saying that we must love God with all, and uses "*all*" before each, all our heart, all our soul, and all our mind, was to show that our total being must be involved in loving God. And these can't be separated, that is, you

can't love God with your mind but not your will, or with your will but not your affections, or what if your emotions don't feel like loving God, then the mind and will must act in spite of how you are feeling. And He is showing that it must be a strong love, and your greatest love. Love Him in every way and with all that is in you as opposed to having a divided heart; love Him more than anything else. It must be a sincere love. Not just in word, as those who say they love God but their hearts are not with Him. This is the first and great commandment; for obedience to this commandment is the spring to obedience of all the rest; which is then only acceptable, when it flows from love.

And that brings us to the second great commandment, which is equally important: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'

This sums up the second part of the Ten Commandments (commandments 5 through 10).

5. Honoring your parents.
6. Not killing others.
7. Not committing adultery.
8. Not stealing.
9. Not bearing false witness.
10. Not coveting the things of your neighbor.

If you love God you will love others because it is what God wants you to do. But it is not easy:

To live above with saints we love,  
O, that will be glory.  
To live below with those we know,  
Now, that's a different story.

The Greek word for love used by Jesus is *agapao*; a totally unselfish love, which humans are capable of only with help of the Holy Spirit. First God must be yours through faith in Jesus Christ, to love others as you should.

To love your neighbor *as yourself* implies that you already love yourself. And when you think of love as an action that makes sense. Even those who don't think they love themselves show that they do by their actions: They protect themselves, they take care of themselves and their needs; they get angry when someone disrespects them. And we should have concern for the welfare of our body and soul; we should and must love ourselves...I mean there is a self-love that is corrupt and needs to be put off because it is the root of our greatest sins. But there is a self love that is natural and needs to be persevered and sanctified by putting on Christ and becoming more like Christ, the opposite of selfish.

To love our neighbor as ourselves is to treat others the way we want to be treated; Wrong no one, have good will to all, wish good to all, do good to all as you have the opportunity, honor all for all were created in the image of God.

We must love our neighbor, and who is our neighbor? - all people, especially the next person you come across who is in need of help and love. We must love our neighbor as truly and sincerely as we love ourselves. Sometimes we even have to deny ourselves to do good and to serve others, and show concern for the welfare of another's body and soul (physical and spiritual needs).

So these are the two great commandments and why are these commandments the two greatest commandments? Jesus tells us, because ...

"The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments."

This is the sum and substance of all teachings relating to practical religion which were written in on our hearts by God, written down by Moses, and backed and enforced by the preaching and writing of the prophets. Everything else hangs on the law of love; take away this, and all falls a part, and comes to nothing. Rituals and ceremony must give way to these. Love is the most excellent way. Love is the spirit of the commands of God, which animates them and must be the root of all we do. Love is the fruit of faith, and so our faith is expressed through love. We love God in Christ, and we love our neighbor for the sake of God. All hangs on these two commandments, for *the fulfilling of the law is love*.

1 Timothy 1:5

The purpose of my instruction is that all believers would be filled with love that comes from a pure heart, a clear conscience, and genuine faith.

Admit you need His love  
Accept His love  
Act in His love