

Valley Bible Church
Sermon Notes for October 22, 2017

The Greatest Commandments
Mark 12:28-34

I. The scribe's appeal (12:28)

And one of the scribes came up and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, asked him, "Which commandment is the most important of all?"

- "And one of the scribes"
 - This man was a scribe or an expert in the Law
 - Already saw the scribes mentioned back in Mark 11:27
- "And one of the scribes came up"
 - Perhaps this scribe was approaching and missed the early interaction between Jesus and the chief priests, scribes and elders?
- "Heard them disputing with one another"
 - His hearing Jesus debate/argue with the Jewish leaders caught his attention
 - Heard Jesus debating about taxes and the resurrection
- "Seeing that he answered them well, asked him..."
 - This is not the same interaction as earlier debates and arguments
 - This scribe is legitimately intrigued by Jesus
 - However, he still enters this discussion with a desire to test Jesus
 - Matthew 22:34-35 "But when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. 35 And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him."
- "Which commandment is the most important of all?"
 - The scribe was not desiring an answer with one single command in order to thus throw out all the other commandments
 - The question addressed the fundamental premise or principle of classification of the Law of Moses
 - The question focused upon summarizing the heart of the law
 - Perhaps, it is better to read "What sort of commandment is first of all?"
 - "The rabbis would later count 613 commandments in the Torah—248 of them positive in form and 365 negative in form. They also debated about the distinction between 'heavy' and 'light' commandments (see Matt 5:19). The 'first' or most important commandment was a common topic in

Jewish circles and it is reasonable to assume that a teacher like Jesus would be asked for his response.”¹

II. The Savior's answer (12:29-31)

Jesus answered, “The most important is, ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. 30 And you shall 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: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”

- Jesus basically answered in three distinct parts
- First, He quoted from Deuteronomy 6:4 to present fundamental truth regarding God
- “Jesus answered, ‘The most important is, ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.’”
 - Deuteronomy 6:4 “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one...”
 - “The Shema... was recited by every pious Jew in his worship, both morning and evening, as a religious creed or confession of faith.”²
 - “Shema is the Hebrew imperative ‘to hear.’ ... The first item discussed in the Mishnah concerns the times to recite the Shema each day (m. Ber. 1:1).”³
 - This was unique about Israel over and against the nations
 - Also, the significance of the declaration of the oneness of God informs the kind of love that He deserves.
- Second, He quoted from Deuteronomy 6:5 to present man’s obligation to God
 - Deuteronomy 6:4-5 “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. 5 You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.”
 - Mark 12:30 “And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.”
 - In Hebrew thinking, heart included the mind
 - With Greek influence, the mind became emphasized individually

¹ John R. Donahue and Daniel J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, ed. Daniel J. Harrington, vol. 2, Sacra Pagina Series (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2002), 354.

² D. Edmond Hiebert, *The Gospel of Mark: An Expository Commentary* (Greenville, SC: Bob Jones University Press, 1994), 351.

³ David E. Garland, *Mark, The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), footnote on 476.

- Some would like to use a verse like this to discuss the psychological divisions of a man
- However, several variations of this formula exist in Scripture, even in our own passage!
- It is better to understand the divisions as an emphatic statement of the wholeness or completeness of one's love for God
- "Love to God must possess the whole heart, the seat of personality, the whole soul, the self-conscious life, the whole mind, the rational faculties, and the whole strength, the entire active powers of man. This command, in its various scriptural occurrences, shows interesting variations in form. These variations make it clear that there is no intention to give a psychological analysis of human personality; the accumulation of terms underlines the comprehensiveness of the duty of love. If God is worthy of man's love, He must be loved with all of man's being."⁴
- Focusing on the psychological divisions of a man, misses Jesus' point
- Man's whole being must be committed to loving God
- Man cannot compartmentalize his love for God
- Third, Jesus followed up with a closely related and second greatest commandment
- "The second is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."
 - Leviticus 19:18 "... but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD."
 - Love for God must be displayed in love for people
 - 1 John 4:21 "And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother."
 - What kind of love must be demonstrated toward one's neighbor?
 - An instinctive love that we already possess for ourselves
 - A love that promotes the good of someone else
 - We already naturally do that which is good for ourselves
 - Who are we to show such love toward?
 - Neighbor, which does not simply mean fellow-Israelite
 - Neighbor takes on wide meaning of everyone (Luke 10:29-37)
 - Matthew 22:40 "On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets."
 - Love God expresses the heart of the first half of the Decalogue

⁴ D. Edmond Hiebert, *The Gospel of Mark: An Expository Commentary* (Greenville, SC: Bob Jones University Press, 1994), 352.

- Love neighbor expresses the heart of the second half of the Decalogue
- Romans 13:10 “Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.”
- Galatians 5:14 “For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’”
- James 2:8 “If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself,’ you are doing well.”

III. The surprise agreement (12:32-34)

32 And the scribe said to him, “You are right, Teacher. You have truly said that he is one, and there is no other besides him. 33 And to love him with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the strength, and to love one’s neighbor as oneself, is much more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.” 34 And when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.”

- “And the scribe said to him, ‘You are right, Teacher. You have truly said...’”
 - The scribe was impressed with Jesus’ former answers and he was impressed, yet again by Jesus’ answer to his own personal question
- “That he is one, and there is no other besides him. 33 And to love him with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the strength, and love one’s neighbor as oneself”
 - The scribe basically repeats and affirms Jesus’ answer
 - “His list of the components of the person omits the “soul” and uses synesis (“understanding”) rather than dianoia (“mind”). The variations are minor and show again that what is at stake is total love for God.”⁵
- “Is much more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.”
 - “The word translated “burnt offerings” refers to those offerings totally consumed on the altar. The word translated “sacrifices” refers to offerings in general, only a small portion of which was burned, and the remainder was given to the priest or returned to the worshiper to eat as a sacred meal. The two terms summarize and represent the entire sacrificial system.”⁶

⁵ John R. Donahue and Daniel J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, ed. Daniel J. Harrington, vol. 2, Sacra Pagina Series (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2002), 355.

⁶ James A. Brooks, *Mark*, vol. 23, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1991), 199.

- 1 Samuel 15:22 “And Samuel said, ‘Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams.’”
- Hosea 6:6 “For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.”
- “Jesus’ answer and its hearty affirmation by a Jerusalem scribe demonstrate that he stands with the best of his generation in understanding the central concerns of Torah.”⁷
- “And when Jesus saw that he answered wisely,”
 - Jesus acknowledged this scribe’s insight in seeing love as more important than the vain and empty religious external system of sacrifices
 - This is another indication that this was not a typical controversial debate scene
 - Scribe liked Jesus’ answer to the Jewish leaders
 - Scribe also liked Jesus’ answer to his own question for Jesus
 - Jesus liked the scribe’s response to Himself
- “he said to him, ‘You are not far from the kingdom of God.’”
 - He was close based upon his reception of Jesus and his teaching
 - Was he simply missing the follow through of repentance?
 - “This answer effectively silences the teacher. To be ‘in the kingdom’ one must do more than simply approve of Jesus’ teaching; one must submit entirely to his authority and person.”⁸

IV. The silent attackers (12:34)

And after that no one dared to ask him any more questions.

- This particular exchange forced people to pull back and stop challenging Him
- The sum total of the challenges on this day brought people to their senses, that is that they should stop challenging Him

⁷ Rikk E. Watts, “Mark,” in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, UK: Baker Academic; Apollos, 2007), 219.

⁸ David E. Garland, *Mark, The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), 477.