

“The Greatest Commandment”
Mark 12:28-34
(Preached at Trinity, February 5, 2014)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. In the last section we witnessed Jesus' condemnation of the position of the Sadducees on the resurrection and marriage. The Pharisees must have had mixed emotions. On one hand they must have been pleased at the defeat of the Sadducees. After all they had been bitter theological rivals. They disagreed on the authority of Scripture, the doctrine of the resurrection as well as the existence of angels. But it must have been frustrating to see Jesus once again outsmart His enemies as He drove home the truth.
2. Now one of them asks Jesus a question, "What commandment is the foremost of all?" This account is found only in **Mark** and **Matthew** although **Luke** writes on the subject of the great commandment. Although Mark's account is much fuller Matthew provides an additional piece of information. He tells us this scribe was actually sent after the Pharisees had met together to consider their course of action.
Matthew 22:34-35 NAS - "But when the Pharisees heard that He had put the Sadducees to silence, they gathered themselves together. ³⁵ And one of them, a lawyer, asked Him *a question, testing Him*"
3. Although it was not a trick question and an important question to ask Matthew records it was still lacking sincerity. The scribe was "testing Him."
 - A. Jesus doesn't rebuke him. In fact He commends him.
Mark 12:34 NAS - "And when Jesus saw that he had answered intelligently, He said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God."
 - B. Could it be that the Pharisees did not truly know the heart of this one that they had sent to question Jesus, but Jesus knew his heart? Was this man's mind changing concerning the teachings of Jesus?
 - C. Remember, it was Nicodemus who was also a Pharisee that came to Jesus secretly at first but later came openly at the burial of Christ. It was Nicodemus that brought the spices to anoint the body of Jesus
John 19:39 NAU - "Nicodemus, who had first come to Him by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds *weight*."
 - D. This points to the truth that Jesus never sends away one who comes seeking Him in sincerity and truth.
4. This Pharisee asks the question
Mark 12:28 NAU - "What commandment is the foremost of all?"
 - A. Jesus quotes the Jewish Shema from **Deut. 6**
Mark 12:29 NAS - "Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is one Lord;"
 - B. Jesus' answer summed up the Law with a single word - - LOVE
With love we find our highest duty. From the beginning a true relationship with God has been a matter of the heart. True obedience can only come from the heart.

- C. Paul made it clear that the law can only be kept by love. He didn't say that love *replaced* the Law but *fulfilled* the Law. Anything else is only an empty legalism.
Romans 13:8 NAS - "Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled *the* law."
Galatians 5:14 NAS - "For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the *statement*, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."
- D. Although the word ἀγάπη is not specifically Christian, truly demonstrating it is only possible for one who has been transformed by the regenerating grace of God
- a. It is caused by and is dependent upon God whom we seek to imitate
 - b. This love is NOT just an emotional feeling though it stirs our heart to great feeling. True love is a volitional, willful action – a purposeful, unselfish service to others. It is demonstrated in doing. God demonstrated His love for us by action.
1 John 4:9-10 NAS - "By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. ¹⁰ In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins."
John 3:16 NAS - "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life."
5. Jesus makes it clear that this ἀγάπη love has two objects – We must love God supremely and we must love our fellow man. I want to divide this passage into these two divisions. This week we'll look at our duty to love God. Next time we'll look at our duty to love our fellow man.
- I. We must love God supremely
- Mark 12:29-30 NAS** - "The foremost is, 'Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is one Lord; 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.'"
Matthew 22:38 NAS - "This is the great and foremost commandment."
- A. God demands love from all men
 1. This is at the heart of the first commandment – "Thou shalt have no other God's before Me."
 - a. And what does this mean? It means we must love Him with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength
 - b. Our love for God should eclipse all else. This is commanded of all men.
 2. God desires our love and demands our love, yet is not increased by it – it adds nothing to His glory. He demands our love because He deserves our love. He is altogether lovely.
 - B. This is our highest test as we examine whether we are Christians
2 Corinthians 13:5 NAS - "Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith"
 1. Our examination must begin by using objective truth – by comparing our lives to the Biblical standard. Christian conversion demands God's regenerating grace. One mark of this grace is love. God fills us with His Spirit which is manifested by the fruit of love.

2. Do we sincerely love God?
 - a. The problem with counterfeit Christians is that they do not love Christ. They attend the services of the church but they find it impossible to embrace the things of God. Their heart is just not in it.
 - b. Our love for Christ must be our ultimate motivation for obedience. We call this evangelical obedience. It is Gospel obedience—obedience that flows from our redeemed heart of love.
3. What is the evidence of our love for God?
 - a. When the Rich Young Ruler came running to Christ seeking eternal life Jesus told him to keep the Law.
Matthew 19:17 NAS - "if you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments."
 - b. When a scribe asked Jesus the same question Jesus also answered by holding forth the Law. But then He set forth this standard.
Luke 10:25-28 NAS - "a certain lawyer stood up and put Him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" ²⁶ And He said to him, "What is written in the Law? How does it read to you?" ²⁷ And he answered and said, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself." ²⁸ And He said to him, "You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live."
 - c. God's Law cannot be divorced from loving Him.
To the Rich Young Ruler Jesus defined what it means to love Him.
Mark 10:21 NAS - "And looking at him, Jesus felt a love for him, and said to him, "One thing you lack: go and sell all you possess, and give to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me."
4. The one who loves God will follow hard after Him
Psalms 42:1-2 NAS - "As the deer pants for the water brooks, So my soul pants for Thee, O God. ² My soul thirsts for God, for the living God"
5. The one who loves God cannot find contentment in any other
 - a. Questions from Donald Whitney's book – *How Can I Be Sure I'm a Christian*
**Would you really prefer: God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, grace, glory, holiness and Heaven: or all the money, pleasure, fame, houses, lands, possessions, and anything else you could name in this world?
**Would you be content to live without hearing sermons, praying, reading the Bible, or worshipping God in public?
 - b. His point is, the one who loves Christ cannot live without Him.

6. The one who loves Christ hates anything that might cause a breach in his relationship with Christ – i.e. sin
Psalm 119:128 – "Therefore I esteem all *thy* precepts *concerning* all *things to be* right; *and* I hate every false way."
John 14:15 NAS - "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments."
 a. The lost person will mourn the absence of earthly things (His health, wealth, prestige and honor)
 b. The Christian mourns the absence of Christ. In Song of Solomon we read of the heartache of being absent from one's true love.
Song of Solomon 5:6-8 NAS - "I opened to my beloved, But my beloved had turned away *and* had gone! My heart went out *to him* as he spoke. I searched for him, but I did not find him; I called him, but he did not answer me. ⁷ "The watchmen who make the rounds in the city found me, They struck me *and* wounded me; The guardsmen of the walls took away my shawl from me. ⁸ "I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, If you find my beloved, As to what you will tell him: For I am lovesick."
7. The one who loves Christ cannot bear anything that grieves Him
 a. He is offended when he sees others take His name in vain
 b. He is offended when he sees things that offend Him (can someone love Christ while viewing pornography)
 c. True love is demonstrated in obedience
1 John 5:2-3 NAS - "By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and observe His commandments. ³ For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome."
8. The one who loves Christ will seek to make Him lovely to others
 9. The one who loves Christ will suffer hardship for His sake. It is folly to claim to love Christ but refuse to be inconvenienced for Him

II. Let me give some other points of Application

- A. Like saving faith, true love presupposes knowledge
Philippians 1:9-10 NAS - "And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment, ¹⁰ so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ"
1. The fountain of this knowledge is Christ
 We cannot love properly unless we know Christ
 Our knowledge of the fullness of Christ's love for us demonstrated at Calvary causes us to respond to Him in love and in love towards our fellow men
Luke 7:47 NAS - "For this reason I say to you, her sins, which are many, have been forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little."

2. You cannot love Christ unless you know Him and you cannot know Him apart from His Word. Loving Christ is not simply a sentimental feeling. True love demands discernment.
 - a. It is an intelligent, purposeful love that demands spiritual understanding
 - b. Our love must be doctrinally pure (both our love for God and for our fellow men). We cannot claim to love Christ if the object of our love does not exist biblically.
- B. We must love God for His sake alone
1. Our love for God is directed at the glory of His being and of His works.
Psalm 66:2-3 NAS - "Sing the glory of His name; Make His praise glorious. ³ Say to God, "How awesome are Thy works! "
 2. Such love will transcend our earthly condition. Will we love Him in adversity and abundance?
Job 1:21 – "And said, Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD."
Job 13:15 NAS - "Though He slay me, I will hope in Him."
 3. Such love will elevate God above everything else
 - a. More than earthly relationships
The favor of lost parents, the accord of lost mates, the misplaced affection of children.
Luke 14:26 – "If any *man* come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple."
 - b. More than earthly possessions
Matthew 6:24 – "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon."
- C. We must love God with all of our being
"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."
1. Heart - καρδία – "the fountain and seat of the thoughts, passions, desires, appetites, affections, purposes, endeavours
 - a. God must have our whole heart
 - b. Divided affection for God will always end in no affection
 2. Soul - ψυχή - our inner being. That which enables us as rational creatures to have a relationship with God.
 - a. This is that part of us that makes love possible
 - b. This is the part of us awakened by the new birth without which love would be impossible
 3. Mind - διάνοια – "the mind as a faculty of understanding"
Our love is an act of the will and strengthened by an objective knowledge of His excellence. We reason the excellencies of God and set our love upon Him.
 4. Strength - ἰσχύς – "Power, ability, force, strength, might"

5. What is ultimately meant here is that we are to love God with all the faculties we possess—everything we are.

Conclusion

1. Love for God will always result in obedience to the His Law. But obedience without love is dead religion.
1 Corinthians 13:3 – "And though I bestow all my goods to feed *the poor*, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing."
2. Our love for God will always result in God's great blessing upon us.
Romans 8:28 – "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to *his* purpose."
1 Corinthians 2:9 – "But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him."
3. Yet, we can only love Him because He has enabled us.
1 John 4:19 – "We love him, because he first loved us."
4. Pray that you might love Him more and more
Philippians 1:9 – "And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and *in* all judgment;"