

Love: The Greatest Commandment

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[0 : 00] All right, so this morning we are going to be looking at the, you can see the message is called Love, the Greatest Commandment. Jesus has asked a question from another one of the Jewish leaders.

This one's going to be a little bit different. The attitude, the motivation as we'll look at is a little bit different from, or is quite a bit different I should say, from the previous questions he's been peppered with this last week of his as he's in Jerusalem preparing for his crucifixion and death. We're going to look at the motivation and the attitude of this scribe, look at the question itself, and then also look at how Jesus responded and look into a lot of details of that response.

This is, as we'll find out, an important question and one that we all should be paying attention to. So we're going to read through as we usually do. Mark chapter 12, verse 28. We'll start with verse 28. Then one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, perceiving that he had answered them well, asked him, which is the first commandment of all?

[1 : 09] Jesus answered him, the first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.

This is the first commandment. And the second, like it, is this. You shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these. So the scribe said to him, Well said, teacher, you have spoken the truth, for there is one God, and there is no other but he. And to love him with all the heart and with all the understanding, with all the soul, with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as oneself is more than all the whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.

Now when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, You are not far from the kingdom of God. But after that, no one dared to question him.

So the first thing we'll look at here is this scribe. And you'll notice that this guy seems a little bit different from what we have seen here in the past. We've seen some of the Jewish leaders ask about Jesus' authority.

[2 : 22] And they're really looking to undermine him. They're looking to make him look bad. Whether it's with the Roman authorities, one of the questions they asked was, Shall we pay these taxes that Rome is levying on us?

They're looking to get him in trouble. They're looking to get him in trouble with either the Romans or the people. They're trying to make him look bad. This guy, it seems, is coming to Jesus with an air of genuineness.

Even some humility. He's got real curiosity. It seems from his response back to Jesus' response that he actually really knows the answer himself.

But he wants to look and see what Jesus has to say. It says in this verse that he perceived that Jesus, that he had answered the previous folks well.

And so he wanted to ask a question of his own. Now the question, it seems, is somewhat of a test. He responds back to Jesus' answer.

[3 : 33] And he said, Hey, your answer was great. And then he quotes off some of the scriptures that would bolster the answer that Jesus gave.

And so, but he's asking this question for a good reason, it seems. A good motivation. He just wants to know, is this guy Jesus, is he really legit? He's not just trying to undermine him.

He wants to know, is this guy the real deal? And that's an important thing, I think, for all of us to understand. All of us have questions. Whether you're not a believer at all yet, and you just want to know more about this whole concept of God, or this Jesus described in the Bible.

Everyone has questions, and God is more than happy. Just like here, Jesus is very happy. To answer this man's question. And God is more than happy to answer anyone's question, who come to him in humility, for the right reasons.

The other thing I'd like to point out is, it seems like this scribe in particular, he was listening in to the previous conversations. Right, there were these other conversations going on, these other questions, and this scribe was just paying attention.

[4 : 51] He perceived that he had answered these other scribes and Pharisees, Sadducees and Herodians and chief priests, that he had answered them well.

He was somewhat looking in. He wasn't part of the crowd that was trying to entrap Jesus, but he was just listening in. You know, you'll see, sometimes there are public debates regarding certain ideas.

Sometimes debates on religious matters or Christian issues. You'll have a public debate between a theist and an atheist. You know, does God exist?

And you might think, well, at the end of the debate, is anybody's mind changed? Usually, the two people who are debating, nobody changes their mind at the end and says, I can't believe it.

I was wrong this whole time. You never see that, right? But typically, when you have a debate like that, the engagement is not just for the two people involved in the debate, right?

[5 : 54] You have an audience. There are people who are listening. And so, we should remember the same thing whenever we have an opportunity to, in whatever way, in a public setting, to engage others on the gospel.

I've seen and even done a little bit of public engagement, for example, on college campuses or in other public settings, and engaged with people about important ideas about God and other things. And a lot of times, you might engage with somebody who's just very hard-hearted. And they're not going to change their mind, at least not today. Now, of course, seeds can be planted that will put a pebble in their shoe and put a thought in their mind that might bear fruit a week from now, two weeks, two years, ten years from now.

And so, we can look for that fruit. But then, there are also those who are listening in. People are paying attention, just like this man. And just another thing to note is that there are, in this particular case, not just the crowds around Jesus who are listening in, but somebody actually wrote down this conversation, and now, 2,000 years later, even you and I are listening in to the conversation, right?

And that's so much of what the Bible is, us listening in to these conversations that were had in public and benefiting from it. Just one other note, sometimes on social media, not everybody's on social media, and that's totally fine, but some people are, and they like to engage in ideas, sometimes just share a Bible verse, or some other important idea that has to do with the Christian faith.

[7 : 41] Sometimes it might be controversial, and somebody might disagree with you. You might have an engagement, right? And it might go, you know, fine, or it might become very tense.

And those kinds of things are fine. And sometimes you think, oh, is it really worthwhile? Because usually, you're not going to change somebody's mind. But again, even in that social media setting, right, there are other people who are listening, right?

They're reading. They're seeing what's going on. And I've had several occasions where I've had these kinds of engagements online, and I've had people privately message me and say, hey, I saw what you said, and that was very encouraging to me, or something to that degree.

So let's look at the question. The question is, what is the greatest commandment? Now there are hundreds of commandments in the Old Testament. And this man is saying, hey, is there a priority here?

Is there one commandment that's more important of a higher priority than the others? There's an assumption here, an assumption in the question. And that assumption is, is that some commandments are greater or lesser than others.

[8 : 55] And you know, Jesus actually taught this himself in the beginning of his ministry, and I'll quote from Matthew chapter five. Jesus says this, Matthew 5, 19, whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, he's saying there's some commandments that are lesser, and teaches men so shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven.

But whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. Now there, Jesus is emphasizing the whole law is important. You shouldn't break the big ones, you shouldn't

break the little ones.

But there are greater and lesser commandments. Also, just during this same week, we read not anywhere in Mark, but in the book of Matthew, Matthew chapter 23, verse 23, Jesus is again addressing, railing against the scribes and the Pharisees, and he says this, woe to you scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites, for you pay tithe of your mint and anise and cumin and have neglected the weightier matters of the law, justice and mercy and faith.

These you ought to have done without leaving the others undone. Again, Jesus is saying it's important as Jews to obey the whole law, but you've neglected some and the ones that you neglected are the ones that are the greater parts of the law, the ones that are the weightier matters. There are some things that are more important than others, especially when it comes to the law of Moses. And actually, the Old Testament teaches this and we actually see this drawn out by this scribe, which we'll look at in just a moment.

[10:42] But Hosea 6, 6 verse 6 says this, this is from the prophet Hosea, for I desire mercy and not sacrifice and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.

And this isn't the only place where that is said in the Old Testament, especially by the prophets. In fact, I think we've read in the last few weeks the same thing. that you have the sacrificial system, which so many were dedicated to doing.

They're going to follow these laws that are more ceremonial in nature. But then they neglect the things that are more important. And again, here Hosea says he uses, I think, language that is really figurative.

For I desire mercy and not sacrifice. Does God, did God not require sacrifice in the Old Testament? He did require sacrifice, didn't he? It was required to be, as part of your Jewish faith, to offer the sacrifices.

But he's making this hyperbole. He's saying, mercy is so much more important, it's like sacrifice means nothing. It's like, I don't even require it at all because mercy and justice are of such high priority.

[12:00] The other thing to point out here is that as we read the Old Testament, especially, and the law and the commandments given to the Jews, and most of us know, right, there is a difference between what God, the commandments God gave to the Jews and how, the kinds of moral laws that we should abide by today.

And so, you can actually make a distinction, and many do, between, really, I think, three types of laws, but we'll just talk about two, making a distinction between two today. And one is, people call the moral law.

These are laws that have to do with fundamental morality. These are the kinds of things that the Bible says were put in all of our hearts through our conscience that we know right from wrong. Then the other laws you have in the Old Testament, many call the ceremonial laws. These are things that don't have to do with necessarily fundamental right or wrong, but are things that God commanded the Jewish people to make them different from everybody else.

The kinds of foods they would eat, the kinds of clothes they would wear, how they harvest their food. Sometimes people can get a little bit confused on what is fundamental morality and what is just ceremony.

[13:19] That's a huge topic which we won't necessarily get into. But so many don't make this distinction. And in fact, one thing that comes to mind when it comes to understanding God's law is that some people, they decide because there are certain ceremonies that were required of the Jews that seem silly for us today that we would follow, then they use that as an opportunity to undermine all of God's law, even the moral law.

So I think of a time, I remember watching a video, this was years ago when we had a different president, President Barack Obama. Or maybe it was during his campaign, I can't remember. But somebody asked him about this whole biblical command because he claims to be a Christian. And they asked him about the topic of, you guessed it, what is it, what's one of the most controversial things today?

Homosexuality. I heard abortion and homosexuality, those are the two big ones, right? And so, he went to the Bible because people say, well, you're a Christian, the Bible speaks to homosexuality, especially in the Old Testament.

It says that for a man to lie with a man is an abomination. That's a very intense word in the Bible. And so, he said, yes, the Bible does say that.

[14:51] But the Bible also says in that same passage that you're not supposed to eat shellfish. And he just kind of left it there. But what's the assumption? Well, that's a stupid thing to command people, right?

Don't eat shellfish. What's up with that? So, his whole presentation, his whole, what he was communicating was, well, here's this silly command that, of course, no Christian abides by. And so, what? We can basically just ignore all the moral commands in all of the Old Testament. You know, not to mention that there are actually commands against homosexuality in the New Testament as well.

But that's a, that's a difference, that's a whole other, a whole other bunny trail. So, this scribe understood that there's a distinction.

You have greater laws and lesser laws. Ceremonial laws and others that are more fundamental that we need to consider. Going back to Mark in verse 29, Jesus answered him.

[15:59] And here was his answer about the greatest commandment. The first of all the commandments is this, and he quotes Deuteronomy directly. Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.

And you shall love the Lord your God with all of your heart, with all of your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. This is the first commandment.

You know, really, this speaks to relationships. He's going to give a second one, love God and then love your neighbor. And both of these have to do with love and loving people.

And this has to do with relationships. And you know, relationships is the fundamental aspect of all of life. It's what God created us for. And it's the greatest thing in the world.

Our relationships are what bring us the most joy in life. Is that true? That seems true to all of us, doesn't it?

[17:00] The things that bring us the most joy are not the toys that we buy, the cool electronics, that cool sports car that we've been saving up for so long. But it's the relationships that we have with one another.

Of course, on the other side of that, right, the things that bring us the most pain and turmoil and grief in life most of the time is our relationships as well.

There's nothing that can hurt a person more than a sharp word. The pain and suffering that we can inflict on one another can be intense and more painful than even breaking your leg, being in a car accident, having a difficult surgery.

The pain that is inflicted through harsh words, meanness, can sometimes be overwhelming. Let's look specifically at this passage that Jesus quoted.

This comes from Deuteronomy, Deuteronomy chapter 6. So if you have a Bible, go ahead and turn there, Deuteronomy chapter 6. We'll look at this passage more closely and just give it a little context.

[18:18] Deuteronomy chapter 6 and verse 1 and I'll read it. Now, this is the commandment and these are the statutes and the judgments which the Lord your God has commanded to teach you that you may observe them in the land which you are crossing over to possess.

This is an introduction. He's about to deliver to them a bunch of commandments through this whole book of Deuteronomy that you may fear the Lord your God to keep all of his statutes and his commandments which I command you and your sons and your grandsons all the days of your life that your days may be prolonged.

Therefore, hear, O Israel, and be careful to observe it that it may be well with you and that you may multiply greatly as the Lord God of your fathers has promised you a land flowing with milk and honey.

And here's the part where Jesus quoted. Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. So really, this first part of the passage was Jesus just set, not Jesus, Moses, or God through Moses, setting up this list of commandments that I'm about to give you and why I'm giving it to you and it's for your benefit so that you can prosper and be well in the land if you follow these commandments. And then this verse 4. is the very beginning of this list of commandments. Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.

[19:52] You have one God. And then he says this regarding this one God. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.

And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. And so, there's a hint here, right, in priority. When it comes to all these commandments, this is the one that it all starts with. It starts with loving God. You know, you notice in here in this introduction that he also speaks of fearing God. You shall fear the Lord your God. And that's an important command too.

But the question is, how come that one's not the greatest commandment, right? In some ways, really, you should fear the Lord before you can really love him, right? Some people say they love the Lord, but the fear of God, the respect, the honor of him, the humility towards God is not there. And it's somewhat of a baseless love. But you know, you can also have a fear of God but not love him. And is that sufficient? It's not, is it?

[21 : 05] You can be afraid of someone, even have a high degree of respect and honor for someone. But if you don't have love for them, it doesn't get you very far.

You know, it makes me think of the military, right? You have a military and you have order in the military and it's important to have fear, respect, honor in the military in order to have the kind of order that you need to win battles.

and so you have sergeants and lieutenants and commanders and generals and they have to lead and they need that respect and that honor. And there needs to be honor even among the soldiers themselves.

But is there always, sometimes there can be love, right, between soldiers. But you can certainly have an army without having that love.

You know, there are songs that say that we are the army of God, right? I'm in the Lord's army, right?

[22 : 09] You know that song? I may never march in the infantry, right, in the cavalry. So we are in the Lord's army in one degree, in one sense, right? But what is the illustration that is primarily used in the Bible about our relationship with each other and with God?

It's not an army. It's a family. No, we are a family. You know, families have order, don't they? Wives submit to your husbands, children obey your parents, and that order is important to accomplish things that families need to accomplish.

What is also necessary in a family? The glue that ties everything together. It's our love for one another. Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church.

And that love is the glue that holds everything together. Fear is important. Respect, honor, those things are important. But the foundation, the foundation has to be love.

So here's another question. What is love anyway? Everyone likes the idea of love, right, it seems. I don't know anybody that says, ah, love, who needs it?

[23 : 30] Everybody likes the idea of love. But it seems that very few understand what real love is. You know, there's been countless songs that come from Nashville all about love.

They're the most popular kinds of songs out there. Lots of movies from Hallmark about love. love. And some of those movies and some of those songs really get to the heart of love.

A few. Most of them, not so much. You know, the world's definition of love focuses on what kinds of things? Romance is a big one, right?

Really, emotionalism. The other thing that I've seen, especially in our day, and maybe this has been, it's been this way to some degree throughout the ages.

But this whole concept of just affirming everyone as they are. A kind of anything goes love.

[24 : 30] You know, if you try to tell me what to do or how I should or shouldn't live my life, well, that's not love. Especially in the season of the year that we're in.

We have, this month of June is, what do they call it? Pride month? Pride. Where you're proud of your sexual immorality, proud of your perversion.

And a big refrain, I don't know if you've heard this, but is this quote, love is love. Anybody seen that? Love is love.

What does that mean? It means nothing, right? Love is love. It means nothing. It doesn't give any kind of content to the definition of love.

It's meaningless. And really, all it is, is a way to say, love is whatever I want it to be. And I want love to be sexual morality.

[25 : 33] That's what I want love to be. That's not the biblical definition of love. That's not the real kind of love. Real love is demonstrated by Jesus.

Here's what the Bible says. John 15, 13. Jesus says this, greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends.

Is that what people are celebrating in the parades in the big cities around here? Laying down their lives for their friends? What they're celebrating is using each other for their own pleasure and whatever.

That's what they're celebrating. True love is laying down your life for others. What's the great love chapter of the Bible? Somebody shout it out. 1 Corinthians 13.

Love is what? Patient. What does that have to do? Does that have to do with yourself? Love is patient. No, it's waiting on others. Love is kind, even when sometimes other people aren't kind to you.

[26 : 44] Love is all of those things. It's laying down your life for others. And it could be in big ways, like Jesus demonstrated with his own life, or it could be in small ways.

Opening the door for somebody. Leaving the lights on. at night. Leaving that, those two cookies that are left over for your brother or sister, instead of eating the last one yourself.

Those are all ways of just laying down your life for others. Putting others before yourself. The other thing we'll point out here is that it talks about, Jesus mentions four different aspects of love.

love God with all of your heart, mind, soul, and strength. What do these four things mean? Well, there are lots, if you read commentaries and theologians, they'll have a little bit of a different take, each one of them.

I think the big picture is it's not too important. What's the big idea? Love God with everything that you have, with all of your being. Your heart.

[27 : 56] Most of the time we think about our affections. That's where you feel things with your heart, with your affections, with your mind. Love God with your understanding. Know who God is.

Know Him, how He really is. A lot of people, they just decide they're going to make up whatever they want God to be or maybe get their understanding from, you know, Christian clip art or something like that.

Instead of reading the Bible for themselves and really trying to understand who God is and what He's like. We should love God with our understanding, with our mind. Love God with your soul.

The word soul just means your life, your whole life. Soul, spirit, body. And then He mentions the word with your strength.

And the strength of a person is their vigor, their vitality. your labor, your industry, your toil, and everything that you do. Find a way to love the Lord.

[29 : 08] The second thing I'll point, or the next thing I'll point out here is priorities, right? We're about to read here the second commandment, to love your neighbor, but He starts with this one as the first one, the most important.

And our relationship with God is the most important and the number one reason why that is is because God, He's the number one most important person there is in all of existence.

And so our relationship with Him is of utmost importance and really our relationship with Him is the foundation for having a good relationship with other people. You know, the Bible actually indicates that it's more difficult to love God than it is to love people.

I guess maybe it depends on the person, right? Some people are really, really hard to love. But it says this in 1 John 4, 20, if someone says I love God and he hates his brother, he's a liar.

For he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And this commandment we have from Him that he who loves God must also love his brother.

[30 : 26] Love God, love brother. In fact, one of the ways that we love God is through loving our neighbor, loving our brother. But it's actually easier, at least, you know, for those who are easy to love, it's easier for us to love those around us who we can touch and handle and hug and say hi to than it is to love God who we can't see.

But it's still so important for us to prioritize our love of God. And really, this is the command that the world misses. Right? We talked about how the world has a lot to say about love and a lot of times it's focused on the wrong things, the wrong aspects of love.

But one of the things we almost always see, unless you're listening to Christian radio, is that the love is always towards people. And in the secular world, the atheistic world, there is no love of God. And so, the question sometimes atheists bring up, he says, well, you know, a lot of people think because I'm an atheist I can't be a good person. Right? But an atheist can love his neighbor, he can

be a good Samaritan, right, to his neighbor.

He can do nice things, he can even lay his life down in certain ways for other people. And that's true.

[32 : 00] But one of the things an atheist, a secularist can't do or refuses to do is to do the most important, the most good thing and that is to love the God who created them.

You know, you can't ignore God and be a good person. It's not possible. God is the foundation of truth and goodness. And we all, every single one of us, we owe our lives, our very existence to him, the one who created us.

We owe him all of our love and all of our affection. And when we don't, when we don't give him our affection, what happens is the rest of our love, the rest of our lives break down.

The rest of our lives will be broken when our connection, when our relationship with God is broken. Let's move on to the second. The second commandment.

Verse 31, and the second, like it is this, you shall love your neighbor as yourself. There's no other commandment greater than these. So you shall love your neighbor as yourself.

[33 : 20] You know, this scribe, he says, what's the greatest commandment? And so, does Jesus like not get the whole superlatives thing? Right? He actually gives two.

There's two great commandments. Why is that? You know, I think Jesus just thought it's so important, I have to give two, not just one. And really, they're the same thing, right?

The one commandment is to love God and your neighbor. But then he prioritizes. Loving God is most important. Loving your neighbor is second. But it's very, very important.

And why is it important to God for us to love our neighbor? He could just selfishly want all the love for himself. He wants us to love our neighbor primarily because he loves them.

He loves every single person that he created. And he wants us to love them just as he loves them. You know, there was a, there was an instance in Jesus' ministry when he brought up this whole concept of loving your neighbor.

[34 : 39] And one of the, I think it was a Pharisee, asked him the question, who is my neighbor? And he told that that's the famous parable of the Good Samaritan.

You know, it's easy, I think it's easier to love those who are at a distance. Right? To love the, that little child who's across the world who's on your refrigerator magnet, you know, you send \$30 a month or \$50 a month to them.

And that's a loving thing to do, isn't it? But that's pretty easy. It's harder to love those who are close to us, who can be annoying or rude or selfish or sometimes can be quite an inconvenience to our lives.

Yet loving people when it's difficult is the best kind of love, isn't it? In fact, Jesus speaks to this, doesn't he? You know, you can love those who love you back.

That's easy. Anybody can do that. the kind of love that really, really counts is when you love those who are difficult, annoying, rude, maybe just inconvenient in certain ways.

[36 : 09] And I think, you know, when people or circumstances make love difficult, which happens a lot in our lives, I think it's an opportunity, and I'm not saying this is an easy thing to do, but it's an opportunity to say, thank you, God, for this opportunity to practice love, to use that muscle, that love muscle when it's hard.

You know, if you have, it's like weights, right? If you have little weights that weigh just a few pounds, sometimes, you know, you're going through what we call rehab, and you start with just the basics. Sometimes you get some soda cans, right, and you lift those weights like this. It's not very much. It helps a little bit, you know, you're exercising those muscles, but if you really want to get big muscles, what do you do?

You get the really heavy, difficult weights, right? If you really want to get the big muscles, you get the heavy, difficult ones that, oh, you have to strain under. It's the same way with exercising our love muscles, practicing love.

When we have an opportunity to do it through great difficulty, we grow more than we would otherwise. You know, with these, with these two commandments that are really one, one big one, there's one umbrella commandment to love God and our neighbor, and two kind of subcommandments under that umbrella.

[37 : 35] This is the foundation for all of God's commands, at least the moral ones. Jesus says this in Matthew 22, 40. This is actually the parallel account, so we didn't read this in Mark, but the

parallel account to this passage or this account recorded by Matthew, Jesus says this when he gives his answer.

He says, Matthew 22, 40, on these two commands or commandments hang all the law and the prophets. So all the law and all the prophets are founded or hung on, as he says, these two commands to love.

You know, Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, teaches the same thing. In Romans 13, verse 8, he says this.

Romans 13, verse 8. O no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not murder, you shall not steal, you shall not bear false witness, you shall not covet, and if there is any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying.

Namely, you shall love your neighbor as yourself. Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore, love is the fulfillment of the law.

[39 : 06] So Paul himself teaches this principle that love is the foundation. It actually, when you love, you fulfill all the moral law of God.

If you love your neighbor, right, you're not going to steal from him. If you love your neighbor, you're not going to seduce his wife.

If you love her, you won't seduce that woman. You won't even flirt with her. I do want to say this.

Sometimes, when you have something like this, love fulfills the law, love fulfills the law, is this true if you invert that? Does the law fulfill love?

If you keep the law, does that mean that you are loving those to whom you're keeping the law? I'm seeing a lot of shaking of heads.

[40 : 18] Can you not steal from your neighbor and still despise your neighbor? Yeah. Yeah. Could you not seduce your neighbor's wife and still want to in your heart?

Absolutely. Absolutely. sometimes people, they do what is right not because they love righteousness but because they're afraid.

They're afraid of the consequences. What might happen to them? A lot of people obey the law, right, our civil laws because they're afraid I might get put in jail.

and that's why they do the right thing, not for its own sake, not because of love, not because they love their neighbor but because they're afraid.

And this is important. We live in an age of grace where we are no longer under the law and this indicates one of the fault lines in the law.

[41 : 28] The Bible says the law is good and holy and righteous and just and it is. But the law fails when it's mixed with our hearts because what we need is not just a change of behavior, right?

What we needed all along was a change from the inside out, not just to conform our behavior on the outside but to change us on the inside.

And the law has the power to conform our behavior through what? Through fear of punishment. But the law can't teach us how to love.

It can't do it. It can only show us that we're sinners, that we make bad choices and make us afraid to make those choices.

And any kind of moral behavior that is not from love is not really true virtue. virtue. If we're doing something just because we're afraid of the consequences, there's nothing to be proud of there.

[42 : 38] There's no real virtue. We'll continue on Mark 12, 32. So the scribe, here's how the scribe answered him. Seems like he liked Jesus' answer.

The scribe said to him, well said, teacher, you have spoken the truth, for there is one God and there is no other but he. And to love him with all the heart and with all the understanding, with all the soul and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as oneself is more than all the whole of burnt offerings and sacrifices.

This guy was impressed. I think he was really trying to see, is this guy, is this Jesus, is he legit, is he real? And I think he came away thinking, he really is, he knows what he's talking about, he's got the right viewpoint.

Notice that this scribe, his answer is just chock full of scripture. If you're not familiar with a lot of the Old Testament, you might not see it all, and obviously he's quoting some of the things that Jesus already quoted, like Deuteronomy 6 from the scriptures here.

Keep in mind here that the scribes, like this man, were like the academics, they're the theologians, they're the ones that went to seminary back in that time. And you can see his training kind of come out here.

[43 : 57] Just a couple of verses that really haven't come out so far, but Psalm 86 verse 8 says this, among the gods there is none like you, O Lord, nor are there any works like your works.

And there's several Old Testament passages that say that same kind of thing, and that's one of the things he communicated in his response. Another one, we already talked about, Hosea 6, 6, I desire mercy and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.

And there's probably at least a dozen other passages in the Old Testament, especially among the prophets, that say a similar thing. And this man got at that same point.

And just a little point here about theologians in general. You know, studying theology and the Bible is such an important thing, and there are people who do that professionally, like this scribe.

But we all know that you can have lots of knowledge and almost no wisdom. Lots of knowledge about facts, of things that are in the Bible, but never get to the heart of it.

[45 : 04] And this guy got to the heart of the Bible. And we should emulate him. As we read through the Bible, there's so many things that we can get caught up in.

Minutia, like these guys, the Pharisees and all these guys, they got caught up in the minutia of tithing on the mint and the cumin in your window seal and making sure you follow all these things and, well, we can't heal on the Sabbath all this minutia and they lost the big picture.

You know, we can get caught up in studying things like, you know, one of the popular things I see today is who are the Nephilim and trying to understand where they came from and, you know, are they around today and everything in the Bible is important, isn't it?

Is there anything in the Bible that we shouldn't consider or look at? Not at all. We should consider everything in the Bible. But are there certain things that are more important than others? Yeah, without a doubt.

I think it's so much better than being a theologian who knows lots of facts but doesn't get the heart of the Bible to just be a modest Bible student, reading our Bibles, studying them, and really focusing on what is the heart of the Scripture, seeking understanding, understanding, to understand what God would have us to know.

[46 : 36] Jesus ends with this, now when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, you are not far from the kingdom of God. You're not far from the kingdom of God.

He said, he answered wisely, and Jesus is really positive toward them. This guy showed real humility, a real genuine seeking for the truth.

And he said this, you're not far from the kingdom of God. Now, what exactly does that mean? We've talked a lot going through Mark. Jesus is the Messiah. The Messiah was supposed to come and bring a physical kingdom on the earth.

We know that they thought that Jesus was coming to do that right now, but really this was just a first coming. And there was a little bit of a secret involved in which he would die for the sins of the world. Somewhat of an open secret. It was right there, but a little bit hidden. But then there's going to be a second coming in which Jesus will come and he will bring his kingdom from heaven down to earth in which he will rule the whole world in righteousness.

[47 : 41] And really bring a righteousness into the world that no other kingdoms up to this point have brought to the world. He's saying that this Jew, this scribe, is close to the kingdom.

kingdom. You know, one of the things, what was, what's one of the big things that was required that Jesus spoke about a lot before you could enter into the kingdom?

There was this seven years of difficulty, of trial, of testing, of tribulation, and then the kingdom would come.

And the purpose of that testing, and this is, again, just for the Jewish people, this isn't for us, this is for the Jewish people, that through that seven years they would be tested.

Their hearts would be tested. And there would be many temptations to fall away. If you're one of these Jewish leaders who focus on the profits you can get from the temple, they focus on the accolades they can get from the having the best seats or wearing the long robes, if that's your focus, or on just keeping focused on the minutia of the law of Moses, are those kinds of things going to keep you from falling away during that tribulation period?

[49 : 12] When there is this division, the wheat and the chaff will be separated. And I think what Jesus is saying here is that you are the kind of person who understands the important things that God wants from us, to love him and to love our neighbor.

And that's the kind of heart that is going to break through, make it through to the kingdom of God when all this difficulty comes upon us.

The last thing that it says here is, it says, but after that no one dared to question him. This was the last question that Jesus received from the leaders.

There were no other big questions like this afterwards. And why was that? Why didn't anybody ask him any more questions? Well, I think Jesus, his answers made him look too good.

His responses blew them away. His responses made them look bad. And that's not what they were going for. I'm going to end with this.

[50 : 26] You know, you don't have to raise your hand, but have any of you ever felt like your love for the Lord kind of waning, growing cold? There's a song I really like by, what's his name?

Andre Crouch. Anybody know Andre Crouch? This is from the 70s. So if you're a young person, you probably might not recognize his name. But he was a Christian music artist.

And there's this song that he has that says, take me back. Take me back. Does anybody know that song, take me back? And this whole song is about, take me back to that time early on in my faith where I first received you.

And I was so in love with you. I want to go back there. And in our Christian lives, we can have seasons where our love seems to wane, grow cold.

Whether it's because of the difficulties in life or whatever it may be, our love wanes. But this is the number one duty that we have as Christians.

[51 : 37] Our number one duty before anything else is to love him. I'm going to tell you, there is a secret to growing in love in our love for God and our neighbor.

And it's not this. It's not pure grit and determination. I'm just going to love the Lord no matter what comes. I'm just going to make it happen.

Many people try that. Or you can just beat yourself up. Every time you do something that you know you shouldn't, you just beat yourself. Keep yourself up with all the condemnation that comes with not loving God, with sinning against him or sinning against our neighbor.

That might work, right? We could cower in that condemnation. But did you know that this is the whole purpose of the cross, to take that away?

That's what Jesus did. He took away the condemnation. And why is that? Because the condemnation for our sins separates us from him.

[52 : 57] Because you know what the number one secret to loving God is? It's God. It's him. He's the secret.

He's the answer to every need that we have, including our need to love him. His love for us will change us, and it says that in the Bible.

1 John 4.10 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.

Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love our neighbor. 2 Corinthians 5.14 says this, For the love of Christ compels us.

God's love for us compels us. Because we judge thus, that if one died for all, then all died, and he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves.

[54 : 11] And isn't that what love is? Not living for yourself, but living for others. But for him who died for them and rose again. This is a secret that's not really revealed in the Old Testament.

You know, God shows love in the Old Testament, but the fullness of it didn't come until the cross. And through that cross, everything that might be a barrier to us having a relationship with God has been removed.

Every sin has been forgiven. Every obstacle to a relationship with him has been removed. And the Bible teaches that we are one with him. We have been united with him.

Not in the future, right now in the present. We are in Christ, the Bible says, and he is in us. So many people do not understand this.

And so all this left is what? Just to pursue him. There's not any obstacles in the way. There's no mountains to traverse.

[55 : 23] There's no oceans to swim through. He's not far off in the heavens out of reach. The Bible says he lives in our hearts through the Holy Spirit.

And so all that's left is for us to go to him and to pursue him each and every day. Not bringing anything with us, just humbly. And whether you feel anything or not, just tell God, today I want you. Today I want to love you more. I don't know how. Today it's difficult. I don't feel anything. But God, I need you. I want to draw close to you. I want to love you more.

Teach me how to love. And then you know what? God will bring me increase. He'll do the work. He's very good to us, isn't he?

Let's end with a word of prayer. Father, we love you. Even when we don't feel it, we love you because you first loved us and you demonstrated the kind of love that is just really out of this world.

[56 : 43] It truly was out of this world. We pray that whether we feel it or not, wherever we're at in our lives, as far as growing in love, that you are the one who will work in us.

And we need you each and every day, not just on Sundays, on Mondays and Tuesdays and Wednesdays and Thursdays and Fridays and Saturdays. We want to draw close to you and know you more that we might grow to be like you.

from glory to glory to glory to be conformed to be like Jesus. We thank you that you offer this to us with no obstacles in the way.

Amen.