

Theme: Jesus taught that the heart of God's Law is to love God with my whole heart, soul, mind, and strength, and to love my neighbor as myself.

I. Intro - Celebrity Jeopardy Easy Questions!

- A. A recurring SNL skit to make fun of Celebrity Jeopardy
- B. Easy categories: sounds that kitties make; twinkle, twinkle little _; states that end in Hampshire; what color is green - and they still could not get them!
- C. Usually, Jeopardy is much harder!
- D. Jesus is given a classical hard question: What is the heart of God's Law? How will He answer?

II. A Series of Challenging Questions

- A. This is the 4th question in the Temple conflict

Story	Matthew	Mark	Luke
Jesus' authority/Parable of the Wicked Tenants	21:23-27; 33-46	11:27-33; 12:1-12	20:1-19
Paying Taxes To Caesar	22:15-22	12:13-17	20:20-26
Marriage at the resurrection	22:23-33	12:18-27	20:27-40
The greatest commandment	22:34-40	12:28-34	(10:25-37)
Whose Son is the Christ	22:41-46	12:35-40	20:41-44

1. The Sanhedrin is in conflict with Jesus.
2. The groups of the Sanhedrin are testing Him with questions
3. These have not been Celebrity Jeopardy questions!
4. They have been trying to trap Jesus with rapi- fire questions

B. A new group, a new question

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?" Mark 12:28

1. The whole group, then the Pharisees, then the Sadducees, and now the teachers of the law.
2. The teachers of the law came from all the groups within Israel and were the bible scholars of the day.
3. This teacher was impressed with Jesus' answer to the Sadducees (perhaps he was a Pharisee?)
4. But how will the rural Rabbi answer this tough question?

C. The question - what is the most important command?

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?**" Mark 12:28

1. Rabbis counted 613 commands (365 prohibitions; 248 positive commands)
2. Many different answers had been given to this before
3. Psalm 15; Micah 6:6-8; passages in Isaiah
4. Most did not even pick a command from the Torah!
5. "What you would not want done to you, do not do to your neighbor. That is the entire Torah, everything else is interpretation." - Hillel (died 10AD)
6. Can Jesus get at the whole Law with one command?

III. Jesus' Brilliant Answer

A. Jesus begins with the Shema - Love God fully

"The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. ³⁰Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' Mark 12:29-30

1. Only Mark records the first part - the Shema
2. Faithful Jews repeated this morning and night
3. This is no nebulous 'god' - it is the One and Only True God that is in view.
4. Jesus says the most important command is to love God fully with every part of my being.
 - a. Heart, soul, mind, and strength - Jesus adds "mind" to the list from Deuteronomy 6:4-5
 - b. This is not looking at three or four parts to humanity but rather referencing every aspect of who I am.
 - c. I am to love God with ALL my heart, ALL my soul, ALL my mind, and ALL my strength - with the fullness of every aspect of who I am.
5. What is central is not doing a few discrete actions, or avoiding a few discrete behaviors but rather loving God actively with my entire being.
6. From this root of radical love for God will flow obeying every other command, for if I love God I will want to please Him.

B. Jesus adds a second command - love your neighbor!

The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these." Mark 12:31

1. The scribe asked for one but got two as an answer!
2. Jesus is again being nuanced - the correct answer requires both commands!
3. True love for God will automatically usher in love for other humans who are created in God's image!
4. There is no record of anyone linking these this way before Jesus, but it is brilliant!
 - a. The Ten Commandments are really just an expansion of these two
 1. Table 1 - commands 1-4: how to love God
 2. Table 2 - commands 5-10: how to love your neighbor
 - b. The rest of the Law is then a commentary on how each of the Ten commands will work out in daily practice!
5. This became a standard part of the church's teaching

If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. 1 John 4:20

 - a. Love for God will issue in love for other humans
 - b. Most of 1 John 4 is about this idea

There are two ways, one of life and one of death, and there is a great difference between these two ways. ² Now this is the way of life: First, you shall love God, who made you. Second, you shall love your neighbor as yourself; but whatever you do not wish to happen to you, do not do to another. Didache 1:1-2

C. A surprising concluding exchange

“Well said, teacher,” the man replied. “You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him.

³³To 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. Mark 12:32-34

1. The scribe approves of Jesus’ answer!
2. This is the only positive mention of a scribe in Mark!
3. The scribe even brings out the implications of what Jesus taught, showing his understanding
 - a. No other God but Him - Deuteronomy 4:35
 - b. More important than sacrifices - said in the Temple!
 - c. The Old Testament had taught this but most had missed it!
For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings.
Hosea 6:6
To do what is right and just is more acceptable to the LORD than sacrifice. Proverbs 21:3
 - d. Jesus’ death will end the sacrificial system within a week, but the command to love God fully and love my neighbor as myself will endure!
4. Jesus then judges the scribe’s answer! The tables have turned!
5. The Master teacher has silenced everyone!
6. All of this is the answer to the authority of Jesus - He teaches with the authority and wisdom of heaven!

IV. Applying the Word

A. Do I see the heart of God’s law is love?

1. Many in Israel loved the world, power, riches, or sinful pleasure rather than God - and then hoped keeping ritual sacrifice would cause God to overlook their wicked lives!
2. We can do the same thing today - keep religious rituals or follow external rules while having a heart that is far from God.
3. But this was never the intent of God’s Law, for what God desires is a heart full of love, not external religious rituals or robotic rul- keeping.
4. The goal is to have a heart full of love for God, which will inevitably lead to actions of love for other people.
5. The religious leaders opposing Jesus reduced the law to endless external rules and rituals - this is how religion usually acts!
6. Jesus says the heart of God’s law is actually love - love for God and our fellow humans!
7. The specific regulations are a description of what love for God and neighbor looks like in action!
8. The individual commands in God’s Law are a perfect diagnostic tool to reveal the state of my heart! But the ultimate goal is a heart full of love, not external keeping of rules!
9. The love of God is the primary command because one who is properly and fully loving God will love their neighbor with true love, but those who do not love God will not be able to love their neighbor in accord with the truth.

B. Living by the Law of Love

1. My focus in my life (and those I walk with) should be the development of a heart full of love for God, which will lead to obeying God's commands - including loving others!
2. This is the basis of Augustine's famous statement
"Love God and do whatever you please: for the soul trained in love to God will do nothing to offend the One who is Beloved." St. Augustine (Sermon on 1 John 4:4-12)
 - a. This sounds radical - and it offends legalists!
 - b. But it is biblical to its core! The root issue is always love!
 - c. A heart that is aflame with love for God will continually grow in obedience to God and His law, but a person who only externally obeys the law will grow cold towards God.
 - d. This was why the Pharisees, Sadducees, and teachers of the law, who externally lived very obedient lives - rejected and crucified the Son of God!
3. Is my heart aflame with love for God at present?
 - a. My love for God will wax and wane, ebb and flow
 - b. My main concern needs to be fanning the flame of my love for God, not simply policing my external behavior.
 - c. When I find myself wandering into disobedience, it is a call to check the state of my love for God and to fan my love to a white-hot flame!
 - d. When we come to the Table, let the Spirit reveal any cold corners of my heart where my love for God has cooled.

4. Is my concern as a spouse, parent, leader, or friend to shepherd the heart or police behavior?
 - a. There is a great temptation to police behavior rather than shepherding and encouraging the heart to be full of love for God.
 - b. As a younger parent, I spent far too much time worrying about and policing behavior rather than praying for and shepherding my children's hearts. (Thankfully God corrected me on this before it was too late!)
 - c. In every relationship, the goal must always be the encourage a heart of love towards God - and trust that this will produce the fruit of a life of obedience and righteousness.

C. The Table of Love

1. This Table reminds us of the love of God!
2. The Spirit works at this Table to renew our love for God - and for one another!
3. Come and let the Spirit work!

The Heart of God's Law

Mark 12:28-34
August 18, 2024
Communion

1 Thessalonians 3:12-13

Teaching keywords: God's Law; law and gospel; love; Catechism

May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you. ¹³ May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones. 1 Thessalonians 3:12-13

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