

Sunday, June 5, 2022 | Ten

Matthew 22:36-40 | "The Duality of Love"

Today, we'll be kicking off a new 11-week series called "Ten," in which we'll be exploring the first set of commandments given to the Jews in Exodus and how they can still help guide the Christian today. Using parallel passages, we'll discover that the principles God tried to instill in Israel in the Old Testament find fulfillment through Jesus in the New Testament. And how, while the believer is no longer bound to the Law for salvation (i.e., justification), we can still use it to become more like Christ (i.e., sanctification).

Now, I can see that some of you are confused. You're probably thinking, "There are only 10 commandments. So why did he say that this would be an '11-week series'?" Well, you have to understand that, as Christians, we read the O.T. *through* the lens of the N.T. And only when we come to know Jesus Christ can we come to understand the Scriptures as they were meant to be understood. So, before we tackle even the *first* commandment, we should see what the Lord has to say about *all* the commandments. Thus, rather than turning to Exodus 20 today, we'll be in Matthew 22.

READ: Matthew 22:36-40 (ESV)

³⁴ But when the Pharisees heard that he [Jesus] had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. ³⁵ And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. ³⁶ "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" ³⁷ And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. ³⁸ This is the great and first commandment. ³⁹ And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. ⁴⁰ On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets."

Interestingly, Matthew, Mark, and Luke mention that Jesus summed up the O.T. in this way (cf. Mar. 12:28-34; Lu. 10:25-37). However, when you compare each of the three accounts, it appears that each synoptic gospels either gave a different perspective of the same event, or each writer recorded similar but separate occasions. For instance, in the Marcan version, Jesus does engage with a scribe, like in our passage, but this one's response to Jesus was positive. So much so that it prompted the Lord to admit that this particular scribe was close to becoming a believer. Or, take for example Luke's version, where after Jesus gives the two great commandments, a scribe counters by asking, "who is my neighbor?" This seems to suggest that Jesus had so oft-repeated these two commandments that the scribe knew what Jesus was going

to say and thought he had found a loophole whereby he might get out of loving people he thought didn't deserve it. But, to the scribe's surprise, Jesus counters his question with the Parable of the Good Samaritan. When Jesus said "love your neighbors," he meant to love anyone in need regardless of who they are.

The lawyer's question likely reflected a theological debate at that time.¹ To ask which was the "great commandment" was a lot like asking, "Of the 10 amendments to the Bill of Rights, which one is the most important?" Is it free speech? Right to "bear arms"? Security from unreasonable search and seizure? How about the right to a speedy and public trial? They are all important, but we can all agree that the most significant amendment in the Bill of Rights is undoubtedly the 3rd. (HINT: That was a joke.)

Jesus distills the entirety of the O.T. down into two sentences:

i. Love your God with everything.

You may recall that we studied the Shema in September of 2021. And it is from the Shema, in Deut. 6, that Jesus is quoting. To love God with all your heart, soul, and mind is to adore God with your whole being. It means marshaling a unified *inner monologue* (i.e., mind), *personal existence* (i.e., soul), and a unified *physical resource* (i.e., might) in wholehearted adoration for the one true God. Loving God means that there is no part of you that doesn't love God. Each thought, cell, and penny are given over to God. You ought to love your God with your everything.

Jesus says that the Shema is the "great and first commandment," which is to say that it is of more importance than all the rest; it's also of first priority before all the rest. He will use this same language again when condemning the Pharisees.

READ: Matthew 23:23-24 (ESV)

²³ "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the Law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others. ²⁴ You blind guides, straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel!"

Is financial giving and generosity a New Testament principle? Yes. But is it of supreme importance? No. Things such as justice, mercy, and faithfulness should weigh on our hearts far more than how much we are giving. Does this mean that we should stop giving? No. God

¹ Turner, David L., *Matthew*, The Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids, MI; Baker Academic, 2008), p. 535.

blessees those who are consistently and willingly generous. But we shouldn't fool ourselves into thinking that just because you give to the church doesn't mean you can forget your spiritual duties to God and others. When Jesus speaks of the "weightier matters of law," he isn't saying that those things which weigh less can be ignored. It's an either/or situation but a both/and situation.

The love of neighbor is second only to our love for God. Today we'll hear various mantras such as "all you need is love" or "love is love," in which love itself becomes the goal. ***This is not what Jesus is saying, and that is not what the Bible teaches.*** When love becomes an end of itself, it can be used as motivation for us to do whatever we want. So long as we ***feel*** attracted to someone or something, we can justify our actions because of "love."

But ***true*** love is not to be reduced to mere feelings. Love is an action from which our emotions should flow, not the other way around. Before God ever told the Israelites to love him with their "hearts, soul, and might," and before he gave them even the first of those titular "ten commandments," he showed them his love for them through loving acts (i.e., the Exodus). God never expects something of us that he himself has not already done (cf. Jn. 14:15). The kind of love that he requires of us—i.e., the first four commandments (cf. Ex. 20:1-11)—is the kind of love the Lord has already shown us.

ii. Love your neighbor as yourself.

Just as Jesus quoted from the O.T. when describing the first and great commandment, he also mentioned it when explaining the second commandment. Out of all the other commandments he could've turned to, Jesus raises Lev. 19:18 to new heights. In fact, all of Lev. 19 stresses the importance of loving not only fellow Jews but strangers as well (cf. Lev. 19:33-34).²

READ: Leviticus 19:9-18 (ESV)

⁹ "When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field right up to its edge, neither shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest. ¹⁰ And you shall not strip your vineyard bare, neither shall you gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard. You shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner: I am the Lord your God.

¹¹ "You shall not steal; you shall not deal falsely; you shall not lie to one another. ¹² You shall not swear by my name falsely, and so profane the name of your God: I am the Lord.

² Turner (2008), p. 535.

¹³ "You shall not oppress your neighbor or rob him. The wages of a hired worker shall not remain with you all night until the morning. ¹⁴ You shall not curse the deaf or put a stumbling block before the blind, but you shall fear your God: I am the Lord.

¹⁵ "You shall do no injustice in court. You shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great, but in righteousness shall you judge your neighbor. ¹⁶ You shall not go around as a slanderer among your people, and you shall not stand up against the life of your neighbor: I am the Lord.

¹⁷ "You shall not hate your brother in your heart, but you shall reason frankly with your neighbor, lest you incur sin because of him. ¹⁸ You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord.

God worked out scenario after scenario where the Israelites were to love each other. And Jesus could've said all those things. Instead, rather than work out every possibility, he summed it all up by saying, "love your neighbor as yourself." Love of others is the prime characteristic that ought to characterize all true believers. It is so foundational and crucial that, should we find love lacking in the hearts of believers, it is proof that such a so-called "Christians" is a liar.

READ: 1 John 4:19-21 (ESV)

¹⁹ We love because he first loved us. ²⁰ If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. ²¹ And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.

Just as Jesus used "neighbor" in the broadest way possible, John's use of "brother" is also vast. Yes. He is obviously speaking about the Christian community (cf. Jn. 13:35). If love should be found anywhere, it should be found within the faith community. But given the fact that we are all descended from Adam and Eve, we are, all of us, related. Thus, think not that you are exempt from loving those who are not your Christian brothers and sisters. If Jesus told us to "love our enemies" (Mat. 5:44), you can rest assured that no one should be considered unlovable. You can even see the emphasis that God places on loving others in how he divided the ten commandments. The first four rules inform us how to love God, while the last six inform us how to love God.

This is not to say that commandments 5-10 are not expressions of our love for God. They are. In fact, only when we love those around us will we also love the God above us. A love for our neighbors is also a love for our God.

So, what's the takeaway?

A love for God and others brings certainty in a world of uncertainty.

Even though the Scriptures are explicit regarding God's truth on various topics, it is not exhaustive in how to apply its teachings. This is why the scribe asked Jesus this question. He thought he could stir up controversy since whatever commandment he thought Jesus would pick would inevitably have some detractors. Some rabbis might've said, "well, actually..." and then posited some hypothetical scenario where that particular commandment wouldn't be as applicable as some other commandment. It's a clever test, actually. Whatever Jesus would've said should've ended up making someone unhappy. However, that's not what happened. Jesus' response was specific enough to be rooted in particular commands but broad enough that it would encompass every possible situation. Jesus quite literally said that "on these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets," meaning that there is no greater exegetical method than a love for God and others. Do you want to know the Bible well? Learn to love your God with your everything, and endeavor to love your neighbor as yourself.

Interestingly, in Jesus explaining the dual nature of love, he detaches it from being anything but those two things. This is why the world is never more out of sync with biblical ethics than when it admonishes us to love ourselves. This is not to say we shouldn't have a healthy self-image. We are, after all, loved by God (cf. Jn 3:16). Those who think they're worthless need only look to the Cross to determine just how much worth God places on human life. But the principle I'm trying to oppose is that we should love ourselves to the exclusivity of all else, which is what the saying "love yourself" implies. Jesus' pathway to meaning and purpose in this life is self-sacrifice. That's the exact opposite of self-love. Nowhere in the pages of Scripture are we told to place ourselves at the center of our affections. Love God? Yes. Love others? Absolutely. But love ourselves? Never.

The world is complex. We will be put into scenarios that may not be covered explicitly in the Bible. Just as the scribe sought to test Jesus about the nature of the Law, the world will challenge us about the validity of our love. And, admittedly, the world does not make it easy to love them. They can be unkind, bitter, and argumentative. But when our minds are guided by a love for God and a love for others, we can make choices when there doesn't seem to be a clear answer.

Video Description

Ten | Week 1 | “The Duality of Love”

TEXT: Matthew 22:36-40

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In our passage today, Jesus shows that, among the many commandments in the Bible, there is one that stands above them all: love God. But Jesus shows us that this command naturally moves one to also love others. And while the latter must take priority, it would be a mistake to think that the two commands can be separated as if it were possible to do one without doing the other. No. Loving God will always move us to love others. If it doesn't, our love for God is defective.

Pastor's manuscript can be found here: