

The Great Commandment

Mark 12:28-34

July 19, 2026

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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?” ²⁹ 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.” 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 after that no one dared to ask him any more questions.

What is your duty towards God?

Solomon says that the whole duty of man is to “fear God and obey his commandments?”
Ecclesiastes 12:13

In Deuteronomy, Moses commanded ancient Israel in 10:12 “*And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul*”

In this passage Jesus answers a scribe.

Who were the scribes?

The scribes were official scholars of the Torah or the five books of the Law of Moses.

This scribe had probably been observing the discussion between the Pharisees, Herodians and Jesus (v.13-17). The scribe probably also saw the discussion Jesus had with the Sadducees regarding their question about resurrection (v.18-27). Seeing the discussion among them, he then comes to Jesus and asks the singular question on what is greatest commandment of all.

So far, we have seen in the Gospel of mark that the chief priests and the elders of the Temple wanted to *question* Jesus’ authority. The Pharisees wanted to *trap* him. The Sadducees wanted to *test* him.

It is not wrong to question or ask a teacher about the Scriptures.

But why did these religious leaders question Jesus?

Did they like him? Did they love him? They adore him? Did they want to follow him? No. They hated Jesus. They wanted to destroy Jesus.

Unlike the Pharisees, the Sadducees and the chief priests this scribe does not appear to have malice or hatred for Jesus. His question appears to be somewhat sincere. This man was a scholar and had confidence in the matters of the Law. That is why he comes by himself.

Let's look at the scribe's question:

Verse 28.

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?"

The motive of the scribe's question is not stated. Matthew's Gospel tells us that the scribe wanted to *test* Jesus. He probably heard Jesus' response to the Pharisees on the question about taxes in verse 17 "Give back to Caesar's what is Caesar's and to God what is God's". Being an expert in the Law, he probably wanted to see Jesus' reply on what the greatest commandment is.

What was Jesus' response?

²⁹ 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 affirms the "first" commandment from the Shema. The Shema denotes three passages (Deuteronomy 6:4-9, 11:13-2, Numbers 15:37-41) and was to be recited every morning and evening by the Jews.

Jesus quotes from Deuteronomy 6:5 "you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength" but adds "with all your mind" in his response to the scribe. The Masoretic text for the Shema mentions three modifiers - The *first* noun is '*levaav*' in Hebrew or '*kardia*' in Greek for 'heart'. Heart is translated inner man, mind, will, heart.

The *second* noun is '*nephesh*' for 'soul'. Soul is translated living being, life, self.

The *third* noun is '*maod*' for 'muchness', 'force' and 'abundance'.

Jesus' adds 'love with all your mind'. The noun *mind* has parallels with *kardia* – mind or will.

Jesus conveys the command to love God with one's whole and resources, with everything that one has. Jesus' addition of *mind* may suggest a deliberate extension of the familiar text to emphasize the intellectual faculty as a key element in God's service.

In addition to the first commandment, Jesus also quotes the second commandment as '*You shall love your neighbor as yourself*'. This is a quote from Leviticus 19:18. Both the commandments have the verbal form of '*agape*'.

Jesus' wholesome words about the duty of man to 'love God and his neighbor' weigh greater than all other commandments.

Jesus adds the additional comment saying 'there is no other commandment greater than these'.

Jesus' response with a double-commandment summary of the Law places him squarely in the center of Jewish piety.

How far the meaning of 'neighbor' extends is not discussed at this point. From the context of Leviticus 19, the meaning of 'neighbor' certainly included a fellow member of the covenant community. In the Lukan narrative, Jesus extends the meaning of 'neighbor' beyond the covenant community.

Jesus taught that the greatest commandment is to *love* God with your highest affection, with your utmost strength, with the best of resources and with your entire intellectual capacity. And the second commandment is to love your neighbor as yourself.

The scribe has a compliment and comment when he hears Jesus' response:

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

- The scribe, being an expert in the Torah, must have been intimately familiar with the books of the Law. So, he immediately recognizes the entirety of the ten commandments encapsulated in two commandments – love God and love your neighbor. Impressed by the response of our Lord, he says 'Well said, Teacher'. The scribe affirms the monotheistic formula of the Judeo-Christian faith that the Lord is One. He also complements and quotes from Deuteronomy 4:35 that 'there is no other besides Him'. This affirmation is in many ways a 'detour' from previous interactions

with Pharisees and scribes to trap Jesus. This scribe not only affirms the response of Jesus but praises Him.

- The scribe now re-quotes the greatest commandment, but with only three modifiers – ‘to love him from all your *heart* and from all your *understanding* and from all your *strength*’. He omits the phrase ‘love with all your mind’. He also repeats the second commandment to ‘love your neighbor as yourself’. The scribe then contrasts these two great commandments with the phrase ‘is greater than all the whole burnt offerings and sacrifices’. The scribe questions Jesus on what the greatest commandment is. Hearing the response of Jesus with a double commandment, the scribe not only affirms Jesus’ answer to love God and love your neighbor, but ‘moves’ towards Jesus. And then he affirms that these two commandments are much greater than the temple practice of the whole burnt offerings and sacrifices. The expression ‘all the whole burnt offerings and sacrifices’ is found over a *hundred* times in the Septuagint (Greek translation of the Old Testament). The scribe’s public confession acts an endorsement of Jesus’ *authority* and *competence* in Scripture. It also affirms greater importance of obedience over ritual from the prophetic tradition.

Jesus has a stunning last word:

³⁴ And when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” And after that no one dared to ask him any more questions.

Jesus commends the scribe for ‘thoughtfully’ commenting on his response.

Jesus commands the scribe for not just for repeating the two greatest commandments but also to his ‘wise’ understanding that ‘all the whole burnt offerings and sacrifices’ are of less importance.

Jesus’ approval is his response to the comments of the scribe ‘you are not far from the kingdom of God’. This is a very stunning statement, especially in light of the discussions and disputes among religious figures.

Jesus approves that this scribe is moving in the right direction, tracking with Jesus and his thoughts on what it is to be *in* the kingdom of God. However, the scribe is not yet in the kingdom of God but he is not far either. Jesus began his ministry with these opening words ‘The kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel’. (Mark 1:14-15) Jesus makes clear that the scribe is near the kingdom of God but is not inside.

Why does Jesus say this scribe is close but not in the kingdom of God?

This scribe was a scholar. This scribe was a teacher of the law.

Yet Jesus says this scribe is not *in* the kingdom of God yet.

What do the disciples have that this scribe does not?

The disciples were unlearned people.

The disciples were fishermen, tax collectors, and zealots, regular folks.

Answer: Mark 4:11 *“to you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside everything is in parables”*.

The scribe may be an insider as far the Temple system is concerned but according to Jesus, he is still an outsider.

Because, the secret of the kingdom of God is repentance and faith in Jesus Christ.

To be in the Kingdom of God is to be saved from the wrath of God by faith in Christ!

The scribe needs to ‘repent and believe in faith’ that the Jesus Christ is the Messiah as foretold in the Law and the Prophets to enter the kingdom of God.

Jesus has authority to make pronouncements regarding one’s nearness to or remoteness from the kingdom.

If you desire to see the kingdom of God, you need to put your faith in Jesus Christ alone. The kingdom of God is an everlasting kingdom. When you repent of your sins and put your faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, you will see joy and peace reigning in your heart.

The kingdom of God is not a political kingdom nor an earthly kingdom nor a feelings kingdom but is a spiritual kingdom of Christ reigning your life as Supreme.

The Kingdom of God is a kingdom of Love.

The gospel writer Mark ends with the comment that no one, no longer dared to ask any more questions. Jesus has the last word when it comes to wisdom of Scripture.

In conclusion, you cannot love God if your first love is self or the world. You cannot love God if you are apathetic to Jesus. You surely cannot love God if you deny or hate Jesus. The religious leaders hated Jesus while claiming God to be their Father. Jesus told them, ‘Jesus said to them, *“If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and I am here”*’. John 8:42

Let us love God because Christ loved us first and gave himself up for us.

“We love because he first loved us.” 1 John 4:19

----- Discipleship Questions-----

MESSAGE SUMMARY: The Great Commandment. Mark 12:28-34

HEAD: These questions help you examine the truth of God's Word.

1. What is the greatest commandment? Why is there no greater commandment than the command to love God and neighbor?
2. HEART: These questions help you wrestle with what you believe.
 - Do you believe you are to love God with *all* your heart, soul, mind and strength? Why? Share what God has done for you in Jesus Christ that this commandment is not a burden but a joy.
 - What is God convicting you of and to believe in light of this message?

HANDS/HABITS: These questions help you bring the truth into your everyday life and develop behaviors that change your habits.

3. HANDS For personal reflection: Read Deuteronomy 6:5, 10:12, Philippians 1:9. What will you do to love Christ and others more?