

Message #46**Mark 12:28-34**

One of the most memorable things I ever heard done in a sermon occurred in a message preached by Dr. S. Lewis Johnson. It seems to me that he did this in his exposition of Romans. What he did was take the famous Ten Commandments and worked through many of them showing that we were guilty. When he got done he invited anyone in the audience who thought they had kept all of the Ten Commandments to stand. Not one person stood. You could have heard a pin drop. He proved that all of us have broken the law and have fallen short of the glory of God, which is why we need to believe on Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ is in Jerusalem and He is in the Temple. He has been challenged by a series of religious leaders, who have gone up to Jesus Christ in an attempt to trap Him. Their goal is to get something on Him so they can kill Him. In each case, they have been silenced. **They haven't trapped Him, He has silenced them.** So far, He has been questioned by the Chief Priests, Scribes and Elders (11:27-33) and that didn't work. He has been challenged by the Pharisees and Herodians (12:13) and that didn't work. He has been confronted by the Sadducees (12:18) and that didn't work.

So the next to take a shot at Him was a Scribe (12:28). If anyone could outsmart Christ and trap Christ, it would be a Scribe. He was not only a guy who supposedly knew the Bible; but this was a guy who was known for being able to interpret the Bible. This was supposedly an elite Biblical scholar.

The Scribes were the guys who interpreted the O.T. law. They had systematically studied the O.T. Law and broken it down into 613 commandments. They boiled the law down into 248 positive commandments (Thou Shalt Do This) and 365 negative commandments (Thou Shalt Not Do This).

They pretended like they had a wonderful relationship with God because they were so scholarly. They carefully studied the O.T. and they interpreted the O.T. and they came up with their own man-made codes and rules. They invented religious traditions for the people to follow.

They appeared to be "real men of the cloth." They gave the aura that they were real authorities sanctioned by God. They pretended that they were close to God. They eventually wrote their own book, filled with their religious codes, which they esteemed as much as the Bible. They called their book the Mishnah (A.D. 200).

Now none of these religious leaders approaching Christ are believers in Christ. They are religious leaders who were not saved. They had Jesus Christ personally present with them and they were close, but being close to salvation is not the same as being saved. That point is very clear from this passage:

EVEN THOUGH THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS WERE NOT FAR FROM BEING SAVED, THEY WERE NOT SAVED BECAUSE THEY REFUSED TO ACKNOWLEDGE THEIR OWN SIN AND THEY REFUSED TO BELIEVE IN JESUS CHRIST AS THE GOD/SAVIOR/MESSIAH/KING.

According to **verse 28**, one of the Scribes came to the part of the Temple where Jesus had been questioned. He heard all of the other leaders arguing with Jesus Christ. This particular Scribe realized that Jesus was not only answering them, he was frankly outsmarting them.

The Greek participle “arguing” is one that implies an intense discussion or debate (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p .429). The present tense indicates that this Scribe had been listening to the continual intense discussions Christ had with these leaders. Those religious leaders were really going after Jesus Christ, but Christ was refuting and answering every one of them and that impressed this scholar.

So in **verse 28**, he decides to take a shot at Christ, too. In front of all of the leaders, he approaches Christ and asks, “What commandment is the foremost of all?” “What commandment would you say is the first and most important commandment?”

Now before we move on further, let me point out a couple of things. **First**, all commandments are equally important in that they will all condemn us. James says if you are guilty of breaking one of the commandments, you are guilty of breaking all of them and have not measured up to the righteousness of God (James 2:10). **Second**, Jesus uses different commandments in different contexts to prove all are guilty. For example, in Mark 10:17-10, Jesus used a different list of commandments to prove the rich ruler was guilty.

Now this Scribe is challenging Jesus about the commandments, trying to trap Him, so Jesus decides to answer him and when this discussion is over, no one will dare to ask Him any more questions (**v. 34**).

Now most say Christ gives a twofold answer to this question. In fact, Christ, Himself, says **verses 29-30** are one answer and **verse 31** is answer number two. However, from a purely grammatical, technical standpoint there appears here to be three answers because you will notice that **verse 30** begins with a conjunction “and.” This is a coordinating conjunction which links thought units. From a pure exegetical standpoint, I would like to present three answers Christ gives to the question:

ANSWER #1 – The LORD our God is one LORD. **12:29**

Had these religious leaders of Israel understood this part of the statement, they would not be questioning the identity of Jesus Christ.

Now notice how Jesus begins “Hear, O Israel.” Israel needs to clearly hear and understand what Jesus is saying. What Jesus actually says here is precisely what Israel did not understand, and still does not understand.

The quotation Jesus uses here concerning God comes from the O.T.. It comes from a very famous text, Deuteronomy 6:4-5. Jews are known for reciting this very text. It is known as the Shema. It is the “fundamental creed” of the Jewish faith. In fact, this very text is recited at the opening of a synagogue service to this very day. **This is a statement that affirms the fact that the God of Israel is the only true one God.** When Jesus begins with this statement, these religious guys would have loved it.

The literal reading of the first part of this in the Hebrew text is: “Hear Israel Jehovah the Elohim of us *is* one Jehovah.”

Now the word “Elohim” is translated God and it is in the plural form. Clearly this proper noun lends itself to Trinitarian doctrine. **There is one God, yet there is a plurality to this one God.**

Had Israel realized this, she would have realized who Jesus Christ actually was. He was a member of the Godhead, as He Himself said, “I and My Father are one” (John 10:30).

So part of the most important commandment in all of the Bible in the mind of God is to realize the singularity of there being only one God, yet also realize there is a plurality among the Godhead members.

There is only One true God and there are three distinct Persons who comprise that One God, the Father, the Son and the Spirit.

Jesus said if a person is not willing to acknowledge that Jesus Christ is God, he will die in his sins and will go to hell (John 8:24). So Christ begins right here with this point. This is why this is stated up front. The most important thing is having a relationship with God and it starts by believing the truth about God.

The Apostle Paul really developed the importance of realizing that Jesus Christ was a part of the one true God and that sinners needed to believe on Him.

In I Corinthians 8:6 he wrote: “yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things and we exist for Him and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him.”

In Ephesians 4:5-6 he wrote: “one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.”

In I Timothy 2:5 he wrote: “For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.”

Had Israel come to terms with the truth of Deuteronomy 6:4, they would have realized that God was right there in front of them in Person.

ANSWER #2 – You are to love The LORD your God. **12:30**

Again notice carefully the repetition of the proper nouns “Jehovah” and “Elohim.” So loving God means acknowledging and loving the members of the Trinity that comprise the one true God. They were to love God the Father and they were to love Jesus Christ, God the Son.

The verb “love” is in the family of the “agape” love, which is the highest love there is that chooses the best and highest kind of love in any given situation.

Now Jesus qualifies how the Triune God is to be loved. Now before we analyze the qualifications, there are some grammatical points we want to observe:

First, the preposition “with” is actually in Greek a preposition “out of.” This particular preposition (ek) has to do with direction that moves “out from within.” Second, the word “all” is one that refers to the whole of something. This refers to the complete entirety of something. This word stresses that no part is lacking (*Ibid.*, p. 316).

Qualification #1 - God is to be loved out of all of your heart. **12:30a**

The grammar specifically says that the most important commandment to the mind of God is that out from within your heart there is no part lacking in your love for God. You love God from within your own entire heart and you love God with every bit of your heart.

Qualification #2 - God is to be loved out of all of your soul. **12:30b**

Now every human is tripartite, which means you have three parts:

- 1) Your body which is your world-consciousness;
- 2) Your spirit which is your self-consciousness; and
- 3) Your soul which is your God-consciousness.

Jesus says that another part of the most important commandment is that out from within your God-conscious soul there is no part lacking in your love for God. You love God from within your own soul and with every bit of your soul.

Qualification #3 - God is to be loved out of all of your mind. **12:30c**

Now Jesus adds something here that does not show up in Deuteronomy. What He adds is that you are to love God out of a mind that does not lack in any way in its love for God.

You are to love God with a mind that carefully thinks through everything and has understanding in everything that relates to God (*Ibid.*, p. 110).

This does show that God wants our faith to be a faith of the mind and not just emotions. Biblical faith is a thinking faith, not an emotional and irrational faith.

Qualification #4 - God is to be loved out of all of your strength. **12:30d**

Jesus says you are also to love God out of all of your strength which includes body, soul and spirit (*Ibid.*, p. 220). So with every part of you, you are to love God perfectly in every way. Nothing ever lacking. Then Jesus adds one more thing.

ANSWER #3 – You are to love your neighbor just as yourself. **12:31**

Actually the word neighbor is interesting. It is a word that refers to someone who lives near or close by you (*Ibid.*, p. 366).

Jesus said you are to love those who live close by you just like you love yourself.

In **verse 31**, He says these three answers really sum up the commandments. There is nothing greater than this.

Now **verse 32** says that when the Scribe heard this answer of Jesus, he said that is a right answer and that is a good answer. Notice how he identifies Jesus: “Teacher.”

What the Scribe says to Jesus is you nailed it. God is one God and you are to love Him with all your heart, understanding and strength (**verse 33**). The Scribe uses a different Greek word for “understanding” than Jesus used for “mind.” This word the Scribe uses seems to have in view more of a level of intelligence (*Ibid.*, p. 428).

So the Scribe says you are to love God at a perfect level with everything you have and everything you are and also love your neighbor as himself, in fact, the Scribe says that is worth more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices.

When Jesus heard this in **verse 34**, He said, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” In other words, you are close to being saved, but you aren’t saved. Here is the problem. You don’t see yourself truthfully in the sight of God.

See, there is a slight problem. In fact, you have six problems:

First, you think I am a teacher and what you need to realize is that I am part of the One God Trinity. This actually will become the very point that Jesus will make in **verses 35-37**.

Second, when the guy heard that every bit of his heart was to love God at the total, complete level, he should have said wait a minute, I have a little heart problem. I haven't done that. In fact, there has been some dark stuff that came out of my heart.

Third, when you say we are to love God out of all of my soul. Well there have been times I haven't done that either. In fact, there have been times when my God-consciousness told me to do one thing and I did just the opposite.

Fourth, when you say we are to love God with all of our mind. Well I have missed the mark on that one. My mind hasn't always done that. It has wandered off the path a time or two.

Fifth, you say we are to love God with all of our strength, including body, soul and spirit. Well there have been a few times I didn't really do that.

Sixth, as far as me loving people who live close to me like myself, I have never done that. I don't remember one time when I could actually say I hit the mark of that commandment. Oh I didn't do anything really against my neighbor, but I sure didn't love them like I love me.

What this Scribe should have said, how can I possibly measure up to those commandments? How can I ever be good enough to enter the Kingdom?

Jesus' answer is "you are standing very close to the One who can get you into the Kingdom."

At the end of **verse 34**, we read that no one dared to ask Him any more questions.

One can go to church and be close to being saved but not be saved. One must admit he is a sinner and one must ask Christ to be your Savior.

Have you done that? Are you close to doing that?