

Pentwater Bible Church

Gospel of Mark

Message 47

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The Woman Clothed with the Sun Fleeth from the Persecution of the Dragon By Benjamin West Cir 1796

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Pentwater Bible Church

The Book of Mark
Message Forty-Seven

THE GREATEST COMMANDMENT

Mark 15, 2015

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Christ Driving The Moneychanger from the Temple

JESUS DEALS WITH THE PHARISEES & THE SCRIBES

Mark 12:28:34

²⁸ And one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, and perceiving that he had answered them well, asked him, Which is the first commandment of all? ²⁹ And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord: ³⁰ and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment. ³¹ And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these. ³² And the scribe said unto him, Well, Master, thou hast said the truth: for there is one God; and there is none other but he: ³³ and to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love his neighbour as himself, is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices. ³⁴ And when Jesus saw that he answered discreetly, he said unto him, Thou art not far from the kingdom of God. And no man after that [dared] ask him any question (KJV).

NOW COME THE SCRIBES

Mark 12:28

²⁸ And one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, and perceiving that he had answered them well, asked him, Which is the first commandment of all (KJV)?

Several groups have confronted Jesus by day in the Court of the Gentiles just outside the Temple during the beginning of the last week before Passover that would end with His crucifixion. By day He argued with them as they tried to trick Him with religious legal manipulations. Each night he retreated to Bethany presumably to the home of His friends Martha, Mary, and Lazarus. Each group was antagonistic toward Him for several reasons. He being God accused them of not knowing God or the Scriptures, defrauding the very population of Israel that relied upon them for drawing them to God and their lack of faith in God. The Herodians were complicit with the Romans. The Pharisees were ultra right wing legalistic and held to their own rabbinic tradition more than the Scriptures. The Sadducees were the ultra left wing liberals that denied the authority of the Bible and any afterlife. The Scribes were closely associated with the Pharisees. In earlier times they were the professional writers and as such were the copyist of the Bible from one worn out set of documents to new ones. In the New Testament times they became influential interpreters of the Torah (1st five books or Torah) and worked with other groups but primarily the Pharisees due to their insistence on the ultra detail of the Scriptures, which the New Testament condemns (II Corinthians 3:6). The Scribes were frequently viewed both positively and negatively in the Gospels. Some seem to have taken their work seriously and actually accepted the authority of God as He presents Himself in the Old Testament. Because of their exceptional knowledge of the Mosaic Law through the 613 commandments in the Torah they were also known as lawyers of the Law.

In this particular instance this Scribe appears to sincerely desire an answer from Jesus without an antagonistic confrontational attitude. He realized that Jesus had answered the previous questions exceptionally well and asked Him, “*Which is the first commandment of all*”? Since the Pharisees and rabbinic tradition had accumulated thousands of laws which had various degrees of importance to the religious community. These were frequently debated to determine consensus over minute details and importance, which led to even more laws being enacted. Just as Jesus ended His conversation with the Sadducees over the Resurrection this particular Scribe seemed to actually want to settle which of all the laws was the most important.

THE GREATEST COMMANDMENT

Mark 12:29-30

²⁹ And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord: ³⁰ and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment (KJV).

Instead of selecting any of the vast rabbinic laws, Jesus quotes what the Jews call the *Shema*. It is found in Deuteronomy 6:4-9, 11:13-21 and Numbers 15:37-41. It gets its

name from the Hebrew word for “listen” which is *shema*. This word begins the sentences in the Hebrew text. These texts actually summarize the whole Law, similar to the first commandment in Exodus 20. This Hebrew Shema is recited twice daily, once in the morning and once in the evening by observant Jews and is even posted on their doorposts and put into the phylacteries that the orthodox wear.



Hebrew Mezuzah, Shema inside



Phylactery with Shema inside

The Lord Jesus always quoted from the Bible, The Word of God and not any of the rabbinic documents. Here He chose to emphasize the unity of the God Head who is to be loved supremely above anything else and with all of the power and capabilities, which we have. This quote by God and from God struck at the very center of the Pharisees self-righteous laws. A person’s total being must be applied to loving our God. When one loves God with this degree of focus and strength one can completely fulfil the commandments related to our direct or *vertical* responsibilities to God.

THE SECOND MOST IMPORTANT COMMANDMENT

Mark 12:31

³¹ And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these (KJV).

Jesus then moves to a *horizontal* commandment which is between neighbors or other believers and that is to extend love to others as you already do to yourself. Love your neighbor as, in the same way as, yourself (Leviticus 19:18). The love a person has naturally for him or her self is not to focus solely on himself—a constant tendency—but should be directed equally toward others. No commandment is greater than these two because wholehearted love to God and one’s neighbor is the sum of the Mosaic Law and the Prophets To fulfill these commands is to fulfill all others. This is one of the most important concepts in Christianity.

Christ in His teaching here is referring them back to the Mosaic Law in Leviticus 19:18 where the neighbor is narrowly defined as another Jew.

Leviticus 19:18

" Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD (KJV).

The New Testament was written by and first given to the Jews. In fact Christ made the declaration early in His ministry that He had come only for the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matt 10:6; 15:24). Paul tells us that the Gospel is to go to the Jew first and then to the Gentile (Romans 1:16). It is important to consider the Jewish roots of Christianity in order to properly understand the Biblical text. Stephen in his dissertation to the High Priest in Acts presents the term neighbor as a fellow Hebrew.

Acts 7:24-25

And seeing one [of them] suffer wrong, he defended [him], and avenged him that was oppressed, and smote the Egyptian: For he supposed his brethren (neighbor) would have understood how that God by his hand would deliver them: but they understood not (KJV).

Here Stephen speaking of Moses' issue attempting to defend another Jew against an Egyptian calls the Jew a neighbor. Fellow Christians are referred to as neighbors in the New Testament (Romans 15:2; Ephesians 4:25; James 4:11-12). This is consistent with the context of which Jesus referenced Leviticus 19 talking about fellow believers. He means other believers are neighbors. Christ in the parallel passage in Matthew (Matthew 23:38-39) told the lawyers that we must love God first and then love our neighbors the same way we love ourselves. We must consider the context also of Christ's commandment to love one another as related in John's gospel.

John 13:34-35

A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all [men] know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another (KJV).

As Christians we are commanded to have a love for one another. This is consistent with Christ's usage of loving our neighbors in Matthew 22:39 and in Mark 12:31. Here He narrowly defines the love we are to have for others is to be first directly to others in the Body of Christ. Others being those outside the Christian community will see our special relationship to God. The apostle John captures this subject in his first epistle. He demonstrates that a true believer loves the brethren (other believers) otherwise stated as our neighbors.

1John 3:14

We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not [his] brother abideth in death Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him. Hereby perceive we the love [of God], because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down [our] lives for the brethren (KJV).

This follows directly from the Matthew passage in that Christ said the first commandment is to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. The second as mentioned is to love your neighbor the same way you love yourself. This is not a commandment to engage in loving oneself. He knows that with the sin nature still in us we already love ourselves. The sin nature obviates the need for this commandment.

These passages do not refer to us loving, in a humanistic sense, the whole world's population. The love that Christians have for each other is to mark us as Christ's disciples. If the commandment to love others were to the general population then there would be nothing significant about the passage in John 13. We are commanded to love other believers. That is real believers, not pretenders or those that hate us. They that hate us are depicted as being non-believers in the 1 John passage. Notice that we are not commanded to hate back. In fact Christ tells the listeners of His sermon on the mount to love those that hate and curse you. (Matthew 5:43-44) What does that mean? It is important to realize the nature of Christ's statement so as not to confuse it with the passages commanding us to love other believers.

The Sermon on the Mount is Christ's interpretation of the *standard* of righteousness, which the Law demanded, put in contrast with the Pharisaic interpretation of the *kind* of righteousness, which the Law demanded. The Pharisees interpretation was treating the Levitical passage as license to hate everyone that was not a Jew and particularly not a Pharisee. The Mosaic Law never intended this commandment to be *carte blanche* to hate any enemy. Rather, the Mosaic Law was given in the sense that one must love God and love those whom God loves and conversely hate those who God hates. As an example God hated the Canaanites because of their extreme wickedness and He commanded the Jews to exterminate them. Therefore the O.T. commandment was never meant to hate individuals through personal animosity or enmity. The proper interpretation is to hate what God hates and love what God loves. We must first love God and hate what God hates. God hates sin and we must hate sin. As far as loving our neighbor we must first love other believers. We are not commanded to hate those that harm us or do not believe. Then we are to extend our love to the unbelieving community in that we would like to see them become children of God as we have become. All people are made in the image of God and a have worth. We should treat them with respect and concern. The love Christians have for each other is unique and a special living testimony to our connection to the Lord Jesus and the salvation that He has given to us. Our first love must be for God then to other believers. Finally we should not hate the rest of the world and extend the love of God to them given the opportunity. The term neighbor is narrowly defined though as other believers.

THE SEQUENCING OF OUR LOVE IS:

1. Firstly, realizing that other Believers (Christians) are our neighbors.
2. Our primary love is to be directed to God.
3. Secondly our love is directed to other believers.
4. Lastly our love is directed to those outside the church that need our assistance.
5. We are to love those people first that God loves.
6. We are to hate sin.

7. We are to offer God's love to sinners in hope that God will choose to save them. This stage is only after we have offered love and assistance to other believers. We are not commanded to first offer God's love to those outside the church.

THE SCRIBE AFFIRMS JESUS' TRUTH

Mark 12:32-33

³² And the scribe said unto him, Well, Master, thou hast said the truth: for there is one God; and there is none other but he: ³³ and to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love his neighbour as himself, is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices (KJV).

This man seemed to understand immediately and agree with Jesus. He was one of the very few religious leaders that saw Jesus' teaching as true and accurate. He called Him an excellent teacher (Master), which is a title they only reserved for the most learned of the teachers of the Law who had attended the most prestigious institutions such as the apostle Paul who studied under Gamaliel. He did not seem to be mocking Jesus as the others had done. He commended Jesus for speaking the truth affirming the unity of the God Head through the Shema and then he quoted from Deuteronomy 4:35 "*Unto thee it was showed, that thou mightest know that Jehovah he is God; there is none else besides him.*" Other passages which affirm this are Exodus 8:10 and. Isaiah 45:21. These verses (32-33) are unique to the Gospel of Mark. Apparently they instructed his primarily Roman Gentile audience who struggled with the relationship between spiritual reality and ceremonial ritual. God through Isaiah says what He thinks of the emphasis of ceremony over spiritual relationship with God

Isaiah 1:11

"What are your multiplied sacrifices to Me?" Says the LORD. "I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams And the fat of fed cattle; And I take no pleasure in the blood of bulls, lambs or goats (ASV 1901).

CLOSE TO GOD'S KINGDOM

³⁴ And when Jesus saw that he answered discreetly, he said unto him, Thou art not far from the kingdom of God. And no man after that [dared] ask him any question (KJV).

Jesus commended this man for understanding the spiritual nature of the Law, which was unique among the religious leaders in Israel. He had the knowledge of the nature of the Law and not just the letter of the Law. The next step would be the most difficult for him. Jesus realized this because He said that he was "*not far from the kingdom of God.*" In order to enter he would have to profess faith in Jesus. Now the confrontation would subside but the plotting to take Jesus' life continued all week.

NEXT MESSAGE: WHO IS THE SON OF DAVID?

Please call or e-mail with any questions or comments

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