

## CONFRONTATION WITH THE PHARISEES

### *The Great and Foremost Commandment*

Matthew 22:34-40

Throughout the history of man...it has been a universal belief that **love** is the greatest thing in life. Consequently, innumerable volumes of *poems*, *songs*, *books*, *plays*, and *films* have been produced about **love**.

God's Word concurs that **love** is the greatest virtue (**I Corinthians 13:13**). But the **love** which the Word of God elevates as supreme is much *deeper* and much more *substantive* than that which the world understands and admires.

In response to the *third* in a series of *three questions* posed by the *Jewish religious leadership* seeking to *discredit* and *entrap* Jesus (**Matthew 22:15-17, 23-28**)...Jesus declared that *agape* **love** is the preeminent divine requirement of man...both in regard to Himself and in regard to other men.

#### I. THE ASSEMBLY: (vs. 34)

**But when the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered themselves together (vs. 34)...**

The *first test* of Jesus was by the **Pharisees** through their *disciples* and the **Herodians**...and it was *political* regarding the payment of the *poll-tax* (**Matthew 22:17**). The *second test* was *theological* and was by the **Sadducees** pertaining to the *resurrection*. Now the **Pharisees** are about to test Jesus for the *third time*...and this time it will also be *theological*.

**Silenced**...Gk. *phimoo*, literally means *to muzzle...to forcefully restrict the opening of the mouth*. The term is used in **I Corinthians 9:9** regarding the *muzzling of an ox*...also in **Mark 1:25** when Jesus *silenced a demon*...and in **Mark 4:39** when Jesus *rebuked the wind and calmed a storm*. The **Sadducees** were *verbally incapacitated* by Jesus...rendering them *totally speechless*.

**They gathered themselves together**...They covertly **gathered together** in another part of the Temple to plan their next strategy...but in doing so, they *unintentionally* and *unknowingly fulfilled prophecy* by plotting together against the Lord. Quoting **Psalms 2:2** ...**Peter** and **John** proclaimed in **Acts 4**...

*"The kings of the earth took their stand, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord and against His Christ. For*

*truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur."*

~Acts 4:26-28

#### II. THEIR APPEAL: (vs. 35-36)

**One of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him (vs. 35)...**This **lawyer** was also a *scribe* (**Mark 12:28**) which would indicate his unusual *expertise* in the **Mosaic Law** and perhaps also an *expertise* in resolving *religious* and *social disputes*. He was probably the *most educated* and the *most astute expert* on *scriptural* and *rabbinical law* in their group...so if anyone would have been a match for Jesus, they thought this man would be.

**"Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" (vs. 36)...**

The *rabbis* and *scribes* spent countless hours proudly debating the *merits* of the law and the *ranking* of the laws...and this was actually a question being debated among the religious leaders at the time with various commandments being championed as the greatest. And judging by the lawyer's single, and extremely simple question, they assumed that His naming of just *one great commandment in the Law* would cause a division among those gathered...and would be sufficient cause to condemn Him.

#### III. JESUS' ANSWER: (vs. 37-40)

Jesus' quick reply summarized the entire *Decalogue*...but not only with the **Mosaic Law**...but with an *ancient Jewish custom* based on that law.

**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." (vs. 37)...**

Jesus quotes **Deuteronomy 6:5**...part of the *Shema*...**Hebrew** for *hear*. It was so named because it began with, **"Hear, O Israel!"**...and was used by all **Jews** in their *daily prayers*...meaning a faithful Jew would have recited the *Shema* typically *twice* a day.

*"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might."*

~Deuteronomy 6:5

Love...Heb., *ahab*, used here in **Deuteronomy 6:5**, refers primarily to *an act of mind and will...the determined care for the welfare of something or someone*. It might well include *strong emotion*, but its distinguishing characteristics are *the dedication and commitment of choice*. It's the love that *recognizes and chooses to follow that which is righteous and true...regardless of what one's feelings in a matter might be*. It's the **Hebrew** equivalent of the **Greek agape** in the New Testament...the *verb* that expresses *intelligent, purposeful, and committed love*...love that is expressed out of *an act of the will*.

*Godly love*...whether it's *His love for man* or *man's love for Him*...it's always measured by what it *gives*...not by what it might *gain*.

**This is the great and foremost commandment (vs. 38)**...Jesus is declaring that the *commandment of Moses* that they recited every day when they quoted the **Shema**...and that many of them literally would *bind on their arms and foreheads* every day...was **the great and foremost commandment**.

**The second is like it, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' (vs. 39)**...

Jesus was the first to *combine* these two text...**Deuteronomy 6:5** and **Leviticus 19:18**...into a summary of the **Law**. The first verse summarized the *first tablet* of the Law...and the second summarizes the *second tablet*.

*"You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the Lord."*

~Leviticus 19:18

**Genuine love** for one's **neighbor** must be expressed the same as the kind of **genuine love** that one has for God. It's by *choice*...it's *purposeful...intentional*...and *active*...not merely *sentimental* and *emotional*. Jesus said that it's measured by your **love for yourself**.

When a person is *hungry*...he *feeds* himself. When he's *thirsty*...he gets himself a *drink*. When he's *sick*...he sees a *doctor* or *takes medicine* to feel better. All because he is consumed with caring for himself. He doesn't simply *think* or *talk* about *food* or *water* or *medicine*...but *does* whatever is necessary to provide those things for himself.

*"Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law."*

~Romans 13:10

**On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets (vs. 40)**...

All the Old Testament *develops* and *amplifies* these *two points*...

- *Love for God.*
- *Love for others who are made in God's image.*

**Mark** reported that the teacher of the Law said that Jesus had *correctly answered the question* and that *love for God* and *one's neighbor* is more important than *burnt offerings* and *sacrifices*.

*"The scribe said to Him, 'Right, Teacher; You have truly stated that He is One, and there is no one else besides Him; 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 himself, is much more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices'."*

~Mark 12:32-33

**Mark** also added in the next verse...

*"When Jesus saw that he had answered intelligently, He said to him, 'You are not far from the kingdom of God.' After that, no one would venture to ask Him any more questions."*

~Mark 12:34

The reason was obvious...Jesus was answering them as no one had ever done before. And with this **lawyer**, the light of truth was beginning to shine into his heart...that's why Jesus said that he wasn't *far from the kingdom of God*.

## WHAT WE CAN LEARN FROM THIS PASSAGE:

- When we *ask questions about God*...we must be open to receiving His answer...not ours.
- Being *not far from the kingdom of God* isn't close enough. One can be close and still miss heaven. One must enter the *kingdom of God* to have eternal life.
- One can only fulfill the **great commandment** through **agape** love. *Love of God* and *love of our fellow man*. All other expressions of **love** are limited expressions of *man's love*.