

JESUS TEACHES THE PHARISEES TO LOVE GOD

Matthew 22:34-46

Key Verse: 22:37

“Jesus replied, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.””

In this passage Jesus teaches the Pharisees what God wants most from us. Simply speaking, it is to love God with all our heart, soul, and mind; and to love our neighbors as ourselves. Then Jesus teaches us the true identity of the Christ. He is not just the Son of David, but he is the Son of God and God incarnate. Let's decide to love God today.

First, the greatest commandment is to love God (34-38).

Look at verse 34. “Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together.” Jesus had silenced the Sadducees by proclaiming the living God, the God of the living. The Pharisees should have agreed, saying, “Amen!” But they felt challenged. They thought they needed to defend their reputations as the teachers of Israel. So they got together to test Jesus. Look at verses 35-36. “One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question, ‘Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?’” This man must have studied night and day to become an expert in the law. His question was challenging. It was to summarize the entire law of God into the main point. It is much harder to state a main point succinctly than to ramble on indefinitely. The experts loved to debate such questions endlessly to display their knowledge. But Jesus was different. Let's see how Jesus answered.

Look at verses 37-38. “Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” This is the first and greatest commandment.” Jesus humbly quoted Deuteronomy 6:5. Jesus summarized the entire law into this one commandment: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” However this simple commandment is overwhelming. It can seem burdensome. We struggle in “survival mode” most of the time, just making it through each day. We may be the busiest generation in history. When do we have time to love God? But if we are honest, we will admit that it is not a time problem, but a heart problem. We suffer from a kind of heart disease called “love of the world.” 1 John 2:15 says, “Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.” Or we may be bitter toward God. The Israelites struggled with bitterness. Whenever their lives became difficult, they would harden their hearts and blame God. We understand. How easy it is for a young person from a broken home to feel abandoned by God and become bitter. How easy for grieving parents to do the same. Yet, God commands us to love him. Regardless of our condition, we must love God.

What is love? That is a good question. People have many ideas about what love is, mostly having to do with human feelings. Yet the word “love” in verse 37 comes from the Greek word “agape.” “Agape” is directed by the will, not the feelings. The NIV study Bible defines this as “the commitment of devotion that is directed by the will and can be commanded as a duty.” So we must decide to love God. “Agape” is consistent with God's nature. The word first appears in Matthew 5, where Jesus describes God's love, saying, “He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous” (Mt 5:45b). God blesses people daily who are hardhearted and indifferent. God loves people unconditionally and universally. Why? Because God is love (1 Jn 4:16). It is God's nature to love. We are made in God's image. We are made to love as God loves. God commands us to love him because he designed us to love him. But we must decide.

Then, who is God? The words “the Lord” in verse 37 come from the Hebrew name for God known as “YHWH.” This is God who planted the garden of Eden, paradise, and put man there to live happily as the steward of his world. This is the God who provides the air we breathe, the food we eat, joy in our hearts, and our family and friends. This is the God who revealed himself to Moses as the Savior who came to redeem his people. This is the God who sent his one and only Son Jesus to the cross as a ransom sacrifice for our sins. He is God our Savior. When we know this God and what he has done, we know what love is (1 Jn 3:16). When God gave Jesus to us, he gave everything.

As the gospels tell us, Jesus is the wonderful Son of God. Jesus loved God with all his being, and always did what pleased God (Jn 8:29). Jesus loved all kinds of people with divine compassion and exercised his power to heal and save. Jesus was strong enough to defeat Satan, yet gentle enough to bind up the brokenhearted. Jesus was the most diligent to take up his cross, yet was patient with his disciples, who were slow to follow. This Jesus was God's delight and joy (Mt 3:17). Yet God gave precious Jesus in exchange for each one of us. John 3:16 says, “For God so

loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

When we accept God’s love in Jesus, we can love God. 1 John 4:19 says, “We love because he first loved us.” A certain woman lived immorally and then became a shameful outcast. She came to Jesus, her tears of repentance dripping on his feet. Then she wiped his feet with her hair and poured perfume on them. She loved Jesus extravagantly. Why? Jesus forgave her sins. Jesus said, “...her many sins have been forgiven—for she loved much” (Lk 7:47). Jesus’ love melts any heart, even a Roman centurion’s. This love of Jesus compels us to love God.

The last part of verse 37 says, “...with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” This represents the totality of our being. There is also a progression here. Love begins in the heart. God wants us to love him from our hearts. Then we serve him with willingness, initiative and enthusiasm. The Pharisees went through the motions, but did not give their hearts. They loved men’s praise more than God. On the other hand, David was a man after God’s own heart. He was genuine with God. As we read the Psalms, we can see that he always came to God as he was. He did not pretend to be strong when he was weak, or full of faith when he was troubled. He loved God from his heart. Once he danced before the ark of God, though it looked undignified to some. To love God from our hearts brings true joy and excitement.

Next is the soul. In the Old Testament, there are many references that connect “heart and soul” (Jos 23:14; 1 Sa 14:7; 1 Ki 2:4; 1Ch 22:19 et al.). Some Bible scholars say that the heart is the doorway to the soul. If our hearts are the surface waves of our lives, our souls are the deep undercurrent. It is where our life direction is set. It is where our important decisions are made. It is where our determination resides. To love God with our souls is to have a clear identity as God’s child, and to commit our lives to fulfill his mission. We can love God with our souls even when our heart condition fluctuates. For example, Mary accepted God’s calling to be the mother of the Messiah and decided to carry out this mission with her life. It was a costly decision that involved sacrifice and pain. But she said, “My soul glorifies the Lord” (Lk 1:46).

Next is the mind. Many people think that a man’s rational mind is the basis for his decisions and actions. That is not entirely true. The mind is a tool, like a computer. It is used according to the spirit in a man. The same mind can be used to love God or to create evil. To love God with our minds is to think for the glory of God. A mind that loves God produces beautiful things, like Handel’s “Messiah.”

When we love God with all our heart, soul, and mind, he is pleased and he blesses us to be happy. We can grow in the love of God and become all that we can be. To love God is the first and greatest commandment. It is worth noting that this has nothing to do with rules, such as “do this,” or “don’t do that.” Rather, it is an attitude toward God that comes from a decision. Isn’t it amazing that God wants us to love him? Let’s decide to love God with all our hearts, souls and minds.

Second, love your neighbor as yourself (39-40).

Jesus continued in verses 39-40 as follows: “And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” This is a quotation from Leviticus 19:18. It summarizes the second part of the Ten Commandments. Love for God is always accompanied by love for others. 1 John 4:20 says, “If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen.” We must love others; it is God’s command. Then, how can we love others? Jesus said, “Love your neighbor as yourself.” Again the Greek word is “agape.” God wants us to love others with the love of God. It begins by accepting people as they are, as God accepted us. Sometimes we become conditional, demanding others to meet our standard. We must accept others as they are. Then we must love others in a way that builds up their humanity and spirituality. Obviously, if someone does not know Christ, his greatest need is for the gospel. We must share the gospel in love. This love should extend to all kinds of people throughout the world. We must love hungry Africans and depressed Americans. We must love Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists.

This past week a troubled man killed several young Amish girls in a Pennsylvania classroom. The Amish community responded with love. They served grieving relatives with living hope saying, “The girls are in heaven with Jesus.” They reached out to the family of the wrongdoer with forgiving hearts. The grandfather of a slain girl

said repeatedly, “Do not think evil of the man who did this. Forgive him as Christ forgave you.” In this way they preached the gospel to America in love.

Most of all, we must love our Christian brothers. Jesus set the example. Jesus humbly served his disciples. At the Last Supper, Jesus washed their smelly feet one by one with his own hands. Then Jesus said, “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another” (Jn 13:34). We must regard Christian brothers so dearly, and serve and bear with one another in love.

Third, the Christ is the Son of God (41-46).

Jesus loved the Pharisees and wanted to save them. They needed most a right concept of the Christ. They needed to see Jesus as the Christ. Jesus asked them, “What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?” They replied, “The son of David.” It was their textbook answer based on Scripture (2 Sam 7:12-16, Isa 9:6-7). They expected the Christ to restore David’s earthly kingdom. It was a partial concept.

Jesus gently corrected them with the word of God. Look at verses 43-45. “He said to them, ‘How is it then that David, speaking by the Spirit, calls him “Lord”? For he says, “The Lord said to my Lord: ‘Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet.’” If then David calls him “Lord,” how can he be his son?’” Jesus quoted Psalm 110 to explain the true identity of the Christ. In that Psalm, David calls the Christ, who is his descendant, his “Lord.” It would be somewhat like Mike Thompson calling his son Christopher his master. It does not make sense humanly. But it is possible if the Christ is God in the flesh. And this is exactly who Jesus is. Jesus is God.

Psalm 110 is widely quoted throughout the New Testament (Mk 12:36-37; Lk 20:42-44; Ac 2:34-35; Heb 1:13). It reveals a conversation in heaven. God the Father tells the Christ to sit at his right hand, the position of power and authority over all creation. As he does so, the Father promises to put all his enemies under his feet. Primarily, these enemies are the devil, and the power of sin and death. Jesus destroyed them all and reigns victorious at the right hand of God. What is happening in history now? God is putting everything under Jesus’ feet. God is subduing the nations through those who obey the world mission command. This happens as the gospel is preached person by person, community by community, nation by nation. Finally, Jesus Christ will reign as King of kings and Lord of lords. Before him every knee will bow; every tongue will confess that he is the Christ to the glory of God the Father. This truth is underscored in all of the parables and teachings that Jesus shared with the Pharisees.

Jesus had unlocked a part of the Scriptures that the Pharisees never understood. Jesus wanted them to accept the Christ and be saved. They saw the Son of God before their eyes. It was time to stop asking questions and to make a decision to accept him for their own salvation. This is what Jesus really wanted from them.

Today Jesus taught us the greatest commandment. It is to love God with all our hearts, souls, and minds. We can do so when we accept the love of Jesus. Let’s decide to love God and love our neighbors.