

You Shall Love the LORD Your God; Mark 12:28-34
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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 Jesus answered the most important is here Oh Israel the Lord our God the Lord is one 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 The second is this you shall love your neighbor as yourself There is no other commandment greater than these 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. And to love him with all the heart and all the understanding and with all the strength and to love one's neighbor as oneself is much more than all the burnt offerings and sacrifices. And when Jesus saw that he answered him wisely, he said to him, you are not far from the kingdom of God.

After that, no one dared question him. to ask him any further questions. Let's pray. Gracious Father, we pray, Lord, that you would equip and enable us not only to see the preeminence of this command, to see the Father above, the Son, the Spirit as those which are worthy. of the maximum degree of love and devotion and to see that loving one's neighbor is the expression of loving the father.

We pray, Lord, that not only do we see that, but we pray that we are compelled, convicted by the seriousness of this command and by the necessary implication upon our souls and our lives that all of our lives must be given to loving you to the maximum degree. We pray, Lord, you do that for your glory in Jesus name.

We pray. Amen. As we come to this passage, I mentioned just a moment ago the uniqueness of the passage. No other passage portrays a scribe in anything like a positive light. But not only that, this passage I think is uniquely convicting. I'm not sure that there is another passage in our New Testaments that is this convicting, at least not for me.

I struggled a great deal this week to prepare this message just because the fact that this is a tremendously convicting message for me personally. I pray that as we all listen to this message, we will all share in the conviction of the reality of what this passage has to say to us. And so now with that being said, let's begin here in verse 28 and let's dive in from verse 28.

And one of the scribes came up and heard them disputing with one another. So here we have now the third group of people or category of people, so to speak, that are coming to Jesus with questions. First was the Pharisees, now is the Sadducees, and now the scribe. We remind ourselves of what the scribes were.

The scribes, in Matthew's passage, they're referred to as a lawyer. And that's what a scribe was. A scribe was a professional person who was trained in the interpretation of the law. They were not only trained, they were skilled in the interpretation of the law, and that was their occupation. In Matthew's Gospel, the parallel passage in chapter 22, it describes the situation in which the

Pharisees see how Jesus has put to shame or literally the word that Matthew uses there is muzzled the Sadducees.

So think back to the previous week as Jesus answers the Sadducees. Remember, the Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection, and they come to Jesus with this question about the resurrection. And Jesus answers. So. Resolutely and so soundly that the Pharisees who believe in the resurrection and who are the enemies of the Sadducees, they hear this and they're glad to hear it.

And our passages says that the scribes heard him disputing with one another and seeing that he answered them well, whereas Matthew says, seeing that he muzzled them. So it's true. Amen. Amen. In Matthew's passage, it describes this scribe as a lawyer of the Pharisees. There's no contradiction there between Matthew's gospel and Mark's gospel.

The scribe, a scribe was an occupation and a scribe could be also affiliated with other groups of people. Most often the scribes were affiliated with the Pharisees, but they could just be affiliated with other groups as well. So no contradiction here. Here's a Pharisee. He's affiliated with the group of the Pharisees, but by occupation.

He is a scribe. He's a scribe of the Pharisees and this group of Pharisees hear how Jesus has shamed, so to speak, the Sadducees with his answer and hearing that they answer him well, they send or this scribe, this particular scribe goes on his own to now ask another question of Jesus. This is the only situation in which.

A individual comes to ask Jesus a question instead of a group. So the single scribe comes to him and in Matthew's gospel he comes and asks this question Matthew's specific to tell us that he asks the question to test Jesus. In the flow of the dialogue, it's going to be going, going to become obvious to us that this is not a hostile dialogue.

This is a friendly, amiable dialogue, and particularly in Jesus's conclusion after hearing the scribes answer, this is not something that we would see as the typical. Jesus. Nevertheless, Matthew says that they ask this in order to test Jesus. So we put those two together and we see perhaps the Pharisees continuing to want to test Jesus, continuing to try to get something on Jesus that they may accuse him of.

Nevertheless, there's one of the Pharisees who tends to be Who tends to view Jesus favorably. Perhaps this is one of the Pharisees that later on in Acts, the book of Acts, we're going to read that many of the Pharisees believed upon Christ after he had risen, perhaps he's one of those, but in any case, the Pharisees still see an opportunity.

And although this person, this individual scribe is not hostile to Jesus, nevertheless, he goes to ask a question. Perhaps they're listening in to hear what they might overhear. In order to hold this against Jesus. So he comes and he and he comes here at them disputing with one another and seeing that he meaning Jesus answered them, meaning the Sadducees answered them.

Well, he then asks him this question. And then the question comes, which is the most important commandment of all? Now, in asking this question, this was not something unusual. This would have been a very typical question of the day. We read that it was a very commonplace thing for people to ask popular rabbis or sages or teachers to ask them a question phrase, just like this of all the commands, which is the greatest, which is the most important?

He says, which is the most important? Commandment of all our English standard translates that most important. If you're in the King James, it'll say something like the first commandment. It's just the, the word proto from which we get our word or our, prefix like, proto type first type. So he says, what's the first commandment, not meaning the, the first one in order.

The first commandment would've been. You may eat of any tree of the garden except the one, the tree of the knowledge you are going to need of. So he doesn't mean the first commandment in order. He means the most important, as our English standard translates. What's the greatest, the highest, the most important question?

And as we said, that's a typical type of question that would be asked of rabbis. Or teachers just categorize all the things that we're supposed to do. Can you categorize them for us and sort of give us an idea? What's the most important one for us to follow, which is the most important commandment of all?

So a couple of interesting things about the Greek there that aren't necessary in order to understand the passage, but perhaps they'll help you. Shed a little additional light on it for us and help us to really perceive the flavor of the question first of all Which commandment is the most important of all that word all there in the English?

It reads to us as though all is modifying or describing Commandment as if to say of all the commandments which commandment is the most important? Is the one that's most important of all, but scholars tell us that that word all is not modifying or describing the word commandment. Instead, it's a generic word that is describing.

Well, I'll put it this way. The question really is not so much asking of all the commandments, which one is the most important. What it's asking is of all the requirements upon all of humanity. What's the greatest requirement upon humanity? So it's not necessarily asking what should the Jew obey most of all what should the Israelite obey most of all of all those?

Commandments that we have which of those should we be obeying most of all instead what it's asking is Of all of mankind, what's the most important thing for us to be doing? So of all these commandments, which commandment is the most important of all? So that's the one thing that, that helps us to kind of see the flavor.

Another thing here is that the question as it's asked again, as it comes through in the English, it sounds as though that the scribe is asking, tell me which commandment should be held above all the others, but instead it would be more literally or more. Precisely translated, what sort of command is the best, is the greatest of all, what kind, what category of command is the greatest?

You see, the Jewish mind thought of the commands of God is in two categories of all these commandments in the Old Testament. Some 613 were told commandments in the Old Testament of all those commandments. The Jew thought of those commandments in two categories. You've heard me say before that I think it's best to think of those in three categories.

One is the commandments of the moral law. You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery. Another is the category of civil law, how Israel as a nation was to govern themselves. And then the

third category is the ceremonial law. But Israel being a theocracy, they didn't separate Civil law from moral law, so to speak.

So all that to say is that the Jew separated the commandments into two categories, the ceremonial law and the ethical law. So the ethical law do not murder. Don't steal from your neighbor. Don't covet the ceremonial law governs the Sabbath, the sacrifices, the dietary laws, the, all the ceremonial practices that took place.

And so the question really was a question that was asking Jesus of these two categories of law, which category is most important for mankind? Which category is it most important that humans obey? Is it the category of ceremonial law or is it the category of ethical law? We wouldn't have to think about that.

We would answer. Certainly, everyone can understand the most important category is the category of ethical law. However, we are not ancient Jews. And this is why it's important for us to do the, the sometimes hard work of understanding the scriptures through the lens of the culture that they were given to.

In Jesus's culture, the far and away predominant view was That the more important category was the ceremonial law, that that was the most binding and most important category of laws. to not only to the Jew, but to all people. And so to ask the average Jew on the street in Jesus day, is the ceremonial law or the ethical law more important?

They would have answered, well, clearly the ceremonial law. This is manifested most clearly in the Pharisees. This helps to explain for us why it was that so often we come across these incidents in which the Pharisees So think with me of just the instances in which they lose their mind over Jesus healing a man's hand on the Sabbath, or they go berserk over Jesus's Pharisees plucking a few heads of grain on the Sabbath.

This explains something to us about why it was that they seem to take those ceremonial laws. So seriously to the degree that they could literally just almost seemingly do away with the ethical laws. Let the man's hand remain withered. Just don't violate the Sabbath. You see? So the Pharisee, along with most of Jews, would have immediately answered the ceremonial law as the category that's most important.

But notice Jesus is not going to answer it in that way. In fact, he's not even going to answer which category. He's going to go to a specific commandment. Now, As we think forward to the scribe's response, his response is going to indicate to us that perhaps he too was of the opinion as of as Jesus' opinion, that it's not the ceremonial law.

In fact, that's what he's going to basically say. It's not the ceremonial law that's most important. It's the ethical side of the law. So this would, if this is true, this would put the scribe in sort of a minority category of people who viewed the ethical law of God as something that supersedes the ceremonial type law.

So, he answers this question, which commandment is the most important of all? Verse 29, Jesus answered. And you get the sense here, don't you? That there's no hesitation, Jesus didn't have to stop and think. Oh, let me sort of ponder on that a little bit. Let me Of all 613 laws, which one? Let me think. Okay, let me go with this one.

Instead. It's like a reflex reaction, isn't it? Like you hit the kneecap and the foot goes forward. It's just this reflex immediately. Jesus has his answer already prepared. Clearly. The most important command is here. Oh Israel, the Lord, our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord, your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, with all your strength.

And the second is this. You shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these. Boom. There's the answer. Clear and straightforward. So in answering the question, Jesus is going to quote from what you probably heard of as the Shema. The Shema is a passage of scripture found in Deuteronomy chapter 6.

That word Shema is just the Hebrew word for hear. H E A R. Well, that was the typical method of referring to biblical passages for the ancient Jew. They would refer to the passage by the first word of the passage. In fact, just as on a side note, that's why many of your Old Testament books are named what they're named because the name of the book is the first word in the Hebrew text like Genesis, but that's just, that's a side note.

So the first word of the passage is here, here, Oh Israel. And so he's referring to this. This, this passage known as the Shema. Now the Shema was made up of this passage and then put together with this passage, two other passages, a lengthier passage later in Deuteronomy and a lengthy passage in Numbers.

Those three passages would be recited twice daily by the Jew every morning, every evening. So think for just a moment of just how many thousands and thousands and thousands of times the Jew has heard these passages. Recited and recited these passages themselves. This would have been something akin to the Lord's prayer for us or the Apostles creed for us or something so foundational, so fundamental that it would be something that they recite daily, even twice daily.

So he answers in this. This quotation from Deuteronomy. Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one, and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. So as he quotes this, he is going to indicate for us, as he quotes from the Shema, The beginning of the Shema says this here, Oh, Israel, the Lord, our God, the Lord is one.

The Shema is this command that Jesus is going to tell us is the most binding command on humankind. But the command begins with this statement of the uniqueness and the unity of God. Here, Oh, Israel, the Lord, our God, the Lord is one. So here and there, sort of the unity, the Lord, our God is one. But you also hear.

The uniqueness or maybe you don't hear the uniqueness someone who does hear that is the scribe because look at his answer He's his answer. He reiterates or he restates what Jesus said. He says in verse 32. You are right teachers you have truly said that he is one and There is no other besides him. Now.

The scribe is not adding information to the Shema He's not adding something to what Jesus says He is restating what Jesus said. He is stating what the Jew understood the Shema to be saying, which is a statement that begins with the uniqueness, with the unity, with the personality of God the Father. The Lord our God is one.

That's going to be helpful as we think about the command that is to follow. The command that is to follow, we all know, you shall love the Lord your God, With all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. You cannot love an idea with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. You cannot love a universal force with all your heart, mind, and strength.

You cannot love a universal principle. You cannot love a universal ethic with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. You can love a person with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. And so it's important to see that before the command even comes, we're told the love that we are to have is not a love toward a set of rules or a principle or an ethic.

It's a love to a person. The Lord, our God, the Lord is one, not a person as a human person, but a person, the person of God, the Lord, our God, The Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, with all your strength. So here we come against this section in which this, the Shamas recounted and it's, it's hard to miss the fact that the Shama in Deuteronomy read, we read that earlier.

The passage in Deuteronomy, which Jesus is quoting, is a passage that contains a three facet description of the character or of the person from which this love to God is to come. Heart, heart, soul, and, and, might as it's translated in the English standard of the Deuteronomy passage or strength, same thing, heart, soul, strength, or heart, soul, and might.

But then as Jesus quotes from this, there is this other word that comes in there called mind. This other word minds now goes to four. Now, here's a passage that for many, many, many years, I misunderstood the passage to be saying to us this, that Jesus adds to the Shema, the mind, that the ancient Israelite was commanded to love the Lord their God with all their heart, All their soul and all their strength.

But then Jesus comes along and says, Oh, well, let's add mind to that too. You need to love the Lord with your mind, with your intellect, with your mental capacity, with your imagination, with your philosophy, with your strength of thought, which is true. However, upon studying the passage more closely, it becomes evident that Jesus added nothing.

Because what we find is when we look to that Hebrew word that's translated heart, we find that that word is, that's probably one of the most frustrating and difficult concepts of the Old Testament for me to get my arms around. Because that word translated heart in your Old Testament means such a wide variety of things.

In the Old Testament, your heart has the meaning of desire. Psalm 37 verse four. Psalm 37 verse four, delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart. So the heart is the organ is the part of us that desires. It's also the part of us that has emotion, that feels. In the Old Testament, it's also the part of you that thinks and reason, Proverbs 23.

As a man, as a man thinks, so as a man thinks in his heart, so he is. Okay, so we find many, many examples in which the concept of the heart in the Old Testament includes the intellect and includes the thoughts. It includes the mental capacity. So Jesus is not adding another dimension onto how we should love God.

Instead, he's stating the very same thing. In the Hebrew, the three words, heart, soul, strength, cover the full gamut. However, we're reading from a passage that is now translated to Greek. The

Greek word for heart did not contain the same idea. So when Mark writes his gospel in Greek, he rightly adds the word mind because the Greek word for heart, the word we get cardio from, is not a concept that covers the thoughts and the intellect and the mentality.

So Jesus is adding nothing. He's stating what the Old Testament has always said all along. Which is to say that there are these four aspects of the love of God. Literally, the passage reads there, not that you are to love God with these things. Literally, you see, all four times, four times it's said that not only, or it's not as though you're using your, Heart or your soul to love God, those are the source of the love from the heart, from the soul, from the mind, from the strength.

You are to love the Lord your God with all these things. Now, I have previously, I think, and many of us have understood the passage to be a passage that seems to be saying to us that there are four aspects of our humanity that we are to focus towards God in love, the aspect of heart, soul, mind, and strength.

But the more I've meditated upon this passage, I don't think that that's at all what the passage is saying. I don't think Jesus at all is saying to us that there's four components of you as a person, that you need to focus in love towards God. Instead, the force of the passage seems to be saying, all of you, I'm going to give this description of everything that it means to be you.

Everything that makes up you is to be the source of love. I think that's more of what Jesus is saying. Jesus is not dividing up these four psychological aspects or characteristics of people. Instead, he's saying everything that, that it means to be you with all that you are, that is to be the source of love towards the Father.

And so it's described in these four terms, heart, soul, mind, and strength. Now, when we look to the Old Testament and we say, okay, What does it mean? What, what does it mean when it's saying that we're to love the Lord our God with all of our hearts? Or the New Testament for that matter. That's really just, that's such a difficult concept to get your mind around.

Many times, I have sat down to prepare a message and tried to turn to the Old Testament and say, Let me, I want to really get at what the Old Testament means by heart. And I can't do it. Because as soon as I feel like that I've, I've compared passages in which the word shows up and I've looked over here and as soon as I feel like I'm starting to maybe get my mind around it, I come across something else that just blows it out of the water.

So really, I'm left with the understanding that in the Old Testament, the heart is the totality of the person. It's your emotions, it's your mental capacity, it's your imagination, it's your desires, it's your hopes, it's your will. It's all there. It's your feelings. It's everything about you. It's the soul.

Well, that's that word soul in the Old Testament. What does the Old Testament mean by that? To love the Lord your God with all your soul. There's another difficult word, because that's a concept that's also wide reaching in the Old Testament. It's the word nephesh. And I think the closest. Comparison. The closest analogy is life.

That's how the word often is used. Think about Genesis. The Lord God formed them from the dust of the earth and breathed into them the breath of life and man became a living soul. That's the word. And so I think most closely that speaking of the life force within you, the life within you, very nebulous concepts, right?

Intangible concepts. We're talking about just. All of what people are, all of what the soul is, all of what the life is, all of what our thoughts and emotions and desires, all of that. And oftentimes you'll find in the Old Testament, you'll, you'll know this to be true. When I, when I tell you this, you'll often find those two words put together, heart and soul.

Many, many passages you'll find heart and soul put together so much so that that combination of words has even made it into our modern vernacular. Don't you often say with all my heart and soul and what you mean is that's the maximum I can describe me. That's all all my heart and soul and the Old Testament.

We use those two terms in that way. So Jesus isn't taking some sort of scalpel and saying, let's, let's isolate how you love God with your feelings. Let's isolate how you love God with your desire, with your will. Let's isolate how you love God with your mind. Instead, he's saying all of this. Now, the word translated in Deuteronomy, might, or in Mark's gospel here, strength.

I think what that's saying to us is that this love directed to the Father is a love that is, well, strenuous. Maximum effort. Maximum ardor to the point that after you are loving God this way, you are tired, you're exhausted because you've loved him so hard. You've loved him with everything that you can love him with.

I think this is the biblical picture of what Paul will say, for example, in second Timothy, he'll say as a drink offering, I'm being poured out. Upon the altar or Romans 12 and verse one to present your bodies as living sacrifices It's speaking of the fact that as we love God our love for him is to be that strenuous striving intense effort Love it's not to be a lazy just sort of flow along and Let go and let God and we're just here to love God and just float along instead.

It's the strenuous effort It's the striving to enter through the narrow gate and then mind as we see that in the greek That's a different word a separate word But it's still just describing the whole same concept that our love for God is to be sourced From our thoughts of Him, our high thoughts of Him, our correct thoughts of Him, our thoughts of Him that are informed from Scripture, our imaginations that are formed from Scripture, that are shaped by Scripture, our efforts at deduction, our efforts at reason, our efforts at logic, our efforts at philosophy, our efforts at problem solving, all those things are loving God with the mind.

We all know, don't we, of Christians who Perhaps loving God with the emotions is where they seem to focus or others in which loving God with the strength or the might is where they seem to focus that they do many things for the kingdom and then others that seem to focus on loving God with the thoughts and with the intellect.

Jesus is saying none of those are right. What's right is the whole person, the entirety of the person to love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. And so this description that's being given here is this description of loving God with the total, total person. Helpful for me as I think through this, because quite honestly, let me just share something with you.

As I struggled to prepare this message this week, I really struggled with it. This passage has so much in it that we could literally break it down and take just a few words at a time and spend four weeks. So do we do that or do we just sort of take the higher altitude approach? And so I decided

on the higher altitude approach, but it wasn't an easy decision because this passage is packed with so much important truth for us.

But as I'm thinking through this and I'm thinking, okay, let's really spend a little bit of time. Understanding it, getting it, what, what it is that Jesus is saying to love God with all of the self. What was helpful for me was to reflect upon the words of a theologian who I think has probably written more about the affection towards God than any other theologian.

That would be Jonathan Edwards. Jonathan Edwards. Was helpful for me in that. He describes the human soul this way. He says the human soul is capable of two things. It's capable of perception of understanding things and then having understood things. It's capable of either having affection for those things or repulsion.

For those things. And he says that that describes all of the human experience that your soul will perceive will grasp truths and realities and concepts. And you will sense or you will feel towards those things, either a gravitation, an attraction or a revulsion. And those attractions and revulsions.

can be all over the gamut. They can be strong or they can be weak. So as I thought about this, I thought about the concept of magnets because this is just really is tailor made to be applied to a magnet. You know how magnets, you got the two magnets and when you put the same poles together, they repulse each other.

And then you flip one and you put opposite poles together and they attract one another. And that's the idea that he's getting at here is that the soul will perceive things. about reality and the soul, the self will sense either an attraction to that or a revulsion to that. And it could be very weak or it could be very, very strong and it can be one or the other.

And so as I thought about this, I thought, well, this is really helpful. I think for us to picture what Jesus is saying here. So picture with me, I'm going to use an illustration that I heard to explain this passage that was really helpful for me was the illustration of a number line. Think about a number line.

You familiar with a number line? It's this little horizontal line, and in the center of the line is zero. And what a number line is, is a spatial representation of numbers. And so you have zero in the center, and then you'll have, going to the right, one, two, three, four, five, up to ten. And then going to the left, you'll have negative one, negative two, negative three, up to negative ten.

Okay? You get the idea? And so on that number line. Zero perfect indifference, perfect indifference, could not care less. Or is it couldn't care? Which one is it? Is it could I could care less or I couldn't care less? Whichever one it is, it's perfect. Indifference just absolutely makes no difference whatsoever.

But then as you go to the positive side, positive one would be. Yeah, I mean, I'm kind of favorable towards that. I sort of like that, but I mean, it's not that important to me. So maybe on number one, you might have. Well, I don't know. I prefer tomatoes on my hamburger. But I mean, it's not that big a deal if there's no tomatoes.

Yeah, I kind of like it. It's not that big a deal. But then as you go further over, you get more towards a stronger, like a stronger affection, a stronger attachment. And you might get over to, say four or five and you say, well, you know, I really, Really like this certain show on TV or this certain author who writes these certain kinds of books.

I really am attracted to that. And then you go further over, you know, eight, nine, now we're talking about family, friends, spouse. But then on the other side of the number line, you know, negative one is just, I mean, I kind of, I don't really care for that too much. I can deal, it's not a big deal. But it's not my favorite thing, but then as you go further over into more negative numbers now, the distaste is getting stronger and stronger and you get over here and somewhere along there is, oh, I don't know, cold pizza and you say, well, some people are over here on the cold pizza and other people over here on the cold pizza.

And I say, why in the world would anybody ruling a perfectly good piece of pizza by eating thing cold? But anyway, you get the idea. And there's varying degrees of affection or distaste. And you come all the way over to number nine, number ten, and now we're in hate, hate. But then you come all the way over to positive ten, and you're in love.

God says to you, I am to be number ten.

In fact, I am to be so much number 10 that even the second place like in your life in your life is to look like it's on the negative side compared to me. What does he say in Matthew's gospel? If anyone would come after me and he does not hate his father and mother, you cannot be my disciple. What he's saying is, My number 10 is so strong is so far off the charts that the next one looks like it's on the other side of zero compared to how you feel about me.

Are you getting a grasp of the severity of what Jesus says? And don't dismiss what Jesus is saying by saying, Oh, what he's talking about is, is how we love God with our action. We love God with our life, you know, because love is an action word, right? We've all heard that sort of thing. Listen, if what Jesus is talking about is simply what you do in your life, then the passage you've taken the passage and stripped it of all meaning, because for the passage to make sense, Jesus has to be talking about not just what you do, but how you feel.

Jesus is not telling us some sort of idea of loving God that's separated from our affection toward God. He is saying your affection toward God is to be so strong and so prominent that everything else in your life is to look as though it falls on the other side of the gamut. Compare to your affection for Him.

Is anybody feeling the weight of what Jesus is saying? Can you see why this is just such a convicting passage for me? Now, one of the things that we're accustomed to saying when we come across this command is, well, we all know that we don't love God that way. We all know that. And we just sort of dismiss that as though, OK, God understands.

He's good with this and let's just go on because we know nobody loves God like this and I don't love God like this. I never have not for one moment of my life if I ever loved God like this, but we hear that we just sort of dismiss it as though it's okay. If God, if Jesus, I'm sorry, if Jesus describes this as the greatest commandment, then what would he describe the failure of this commandment as?

Would he describe it as the greatest sin? Would he describe the failure to keep the greatest commandment as some minor little stumbling block that, oh, we all know that nobody loves God that way. That's okay, we understand. At least you're not murdering people. At least you're not sleeping with other people's wives.

You know, at least you're not telling untruths and lying to people. But we understand if you don't love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength.

You see why I say this is this is, I think, if not the heaviest, it's one of the heaviest passages in scripture, which Jesus is unequivocally the greatest commandment is for every moment of your existence. God occupies the one place all the way. On the positive side, I've never loved God like that. Not for one second.

Neither have you. Neither have any of us. But yet this is how Jesus describes this. And now we feel the weight upon this. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind and all your strength. And the second is this. You shall love your neighbor as yourself. Now, the, the, when Jesus says this, he's not saying anything new.

The Old Testament taught the same thing. He's quoting from Leviticus 11. So Jesus isn't coming up with something new. You shall love the neighbor, your neighbor as yourself. But Jesus is doing two new things here. First of all, he's the first one to ever connect the two of these together. He's the first one to take the commandment from Leviticus to love your neighbor as yourself and putting it together with the greatest commandment.

The other thing Jesus does is he redefines neighbor. Because you see the ancient Jew, the Old Testament Jew, understood neighbor to be their fellow. But Jesus will redefine neighbor to be what? Another human being. Because in Luke's gospel, this passage is followed by, you can imagine what passage? The good spirit where he's asked the question, who's my neighbor?

Jesus says, well, let me tell you a story. And the point of the story is if they breathe, they're your neighbor. So that's the radical things that Jesus is doing. He's redefining neighbor to mean all humanity. And then he's taking that command and he's elevating it to the, to the place of the second greatest commandment.

You shall love your neighbor as yourself. What he's saying is that the expression, the manifestation of your love for God. Is the manifestation of loving neighbor. Just as James will say in James chapter two, faith without works is dead. Jesus is saying here, loving the father without loving your neighbor is the same thing as dead.

So he's saying that loving your neighbor, the command itself isn't equal to that first and greatest commandment, but that is the command that Manifests or expresses that you're keeping the first coming because you cannot express a love for God in that way You cannot express a love for God. That's all your heart soul mind and strength You express that by showing that love to a neighbor.

All right, so that's what he's doing now Let me just make us all aware of what I think is the most One of the most, if not the most, irresponsible, juvenile, and demonstrably incorrect interpretations of scripture that I personally have ever heard. You've heard it too. This was popular in the 80s, it was popular through the 90s, if you listened to Bible teachers through the 90s, then you heard it taught this way.

And it goes like this, Jesus is saying to us, in order to love your neighbor, you've got to learn how to love yourself. You ever heard that? I've heard that so many times I want to throw up. In order to love your neighbor, you got to learn how to love yourself. Let me just show you just how idiotic that understanding is.

First of all, that's not what the text says whatsoever. Jesus says to love your neighbor as yourself. In other words, your love for self is a measurement. It's not a step. It's not something Jesus is telling you to do. He's saying this is a measurement for the level, for the degree that you are to love yourself.

Secondly, think of how nonsensical it would be if Jesus were really saying, in order to know how to love your neighbor, you got to learn how to love yourself first. That would be like me saying to, to you, I don't know, think of something that you don't know how to do, like maybe, oh, I don't know, Say, say, I don't know how to cook a good steak.

And I would say, well, you, in order to learn how to cook a good steak, You've got to learn from Leanne how to cook a good steak, and she doesn't know either. That's the same thing. That's the same thing as saying you need to learn to do something from somebody that doesn't know how to do it. Can you see how that's a perfect parallel?

Jesus cannot be saying that you must first learn to love yourself before you can love others, because in that way of thinking, you don't know how to love yourself either, which we know to be one of the most demonstrably false statements that you could possibly make. All human beings are born knowing how to love themselves.

That's what we do from the very earliest moments of life before you can speak. You are loving yourself. That's what the baby crying in the night is doing. The baby crying in the night is loving himself. And so he's making this noise because there is a person in his life that he knows that when he makes that noise, this person comes and meets his needs.

And so that's what he's doing. I'm loving myself. That's how we're born. That's how we're wired. No one has to learn to love oneself. Our problem is we love ourselves too fanatically. And so Jesus is saying, take that fanatical love, take that baby crying in the night, and that's the way that you love your neighbor.

You have never in your life not loved yourself. No one, no human being has ever not loved themselves. You say, well, I think I can think of some examples of when people were pretty hateful to themselves, when they had destructive activities, they engaged in destructive habits, or maybe think of suicide like that.

Isn't that not loving yourself? That's still loving yourself because even in something like suicide, what you're doing is you're seeing that this is a better solution for me, for me. And you're still putting self first. No one, no human being has ever naturally not loved himself. And this is Jesus point.

He's choosing the strongest measurement he can possibly choose to say, That's how you love your neighbor. So everything that you do in life, If you think about this, if you go home and you really ponder this, you, you will see how everything that you do in life is a form of loving yourself when

you decide what movie you want to watch, when you decide what you want to eat, when you decide where you're going.

All the decisions and all the efforts in your life are all ultimately loving yourself. Jesus says that is the measurement. That is the way that you love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. By loving yourself.

Did I just take the passage and make it a whole lot heavier?

Is this not one of the most convicting passages that we have ever considered? The second is this, you shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these. Now, in doing this, as Jesus explains all this, as he goes through this, again, this is not new information. You see from the scriptures.

Not only in the Old Testament, you see prolifically how the New Testament will take that concept of loving neighbor and saying that loving of neighbor is keeping the law. 1 John 4 and verse 20, Romans 13 and verse 10, Galatians 5 and verse 14, James 2 and verse 8. You can read those on your own. You can see how in each instance it's saying the same thing.

All of the law of God is found in that, in loving neighbor as myself. And so in saying all this and elevating ethics. Over the sacrificial system, because the question to Jesus was this Jesus, which type, which sort of commandment is more important, the sacrificial, the ceremonial commandments or the ethical commandment, Jesus says, there's no question.

There's no question the ethical is far more important. Once again, Jesus is not saying anything new here. The Old Testament had already taught this in places like 1st Samuel 15 and verse 22. We're familiar with this. Samuel said, Has the Lord as great delight and burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord?

Behold, to obey is better than to sacrifice and to listen than the fat of rams. Or Hosea 6 and verse 6, For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice. Amen. The knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings. That's what Jesus is saying here. He's restating those principles that far more important to God than keeping of ceremonies is the recognition of loving God with all of yourself and expressing that by loving your neighbor as yourself.

And so here's how the scribe responds. Let's look, let's look to his response. Now, verse 32, and the scribe said to him, You are right, teacher. Now, in the original, the word there is the word for well, and that word is fronted. We've mentioned that before when the Greek, the Greek language has a very specific word order to the sentences.

And when you take one of the, one of the words in a sentence and take it out of its ordinary order, then you're emphasizing it. When you take that word and put it at the front of the sentence, you, it's like a double underline. It's like a heavy emphasis. You can, you can underline that word in your Bibles because that's the way it's written In Mark's gospel.

Well, well, have you said this in our modern vernacular? It's something like, Amen, brother, you got it. Hallelujah. It's something like that. His response is enthusiastic. It's clear. It's direct to say, yes, truth. What you're saying is true. You are right. Teacher, right on teacher. You have truly said that he is one and there is no other besides him.

We've already looked at that. This affirmation that we're talking about loving a person, a one and only the only exclusive God who is not a force or an idea. We're talking about loving. You've truly said that He is one and there is no other besides Him. Verse 33, Now, that's a different word there.

Understanding is a different word than mind. But the concept, He's not changing the concept. He's restating what Jesus said. To love with all the heart, all the understanding, with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as oneself is much more than all the burnt offerings and sacrifices. What's the point of this whole section?

This sacrificial system is passing away. The sacrificial system is dead because the reality that the sacrificial system pointed to, the reality that the temple pointed to, is here. So the temple's got to die. Now we have the professional interpreter of the law declaring you, in essence, are greater. This is greater.

What you are here to teach us, what you are here to model for us, is greater than all of this system. He says is greater than much more than the, all the burnt offerings and sacrifices. That's a two phrases put together there that would describe the greatest expression of worship to the ancient Jew.

That's the greatest expression. How does the Jew express worship to God prior to the coming of Christ? They express it in these sacrifices and offerings. And so the greatest expression of worship is what the scribe, who is the teacher of the law, says, This is greater than greater than all of this sacrifices.

That word just refers to generic sacrifices that could be any type. It could be, grain sacrifices, wheat sacrifices. It could be wave offerings. It could be, it could be animal sacrifices. Many of the animal sacrifices were partial sacrifices where they would give an animal and then the priest would take part of it as their portion.

Or it may be even the offer would But then there was another type of offering called burnt offerings. That was, that was where nobody took anything, but all of it was put on the altar and all of it was burned up. In fact, the word that is translated whole burnt offerings is the word that we get our word Holocaust from.

It means completely gone, completely burned up, completely consumed, completely given to him. And the teacher of the law says, this is greater. This is greater than all of this temple system, than all of this temple sacrifice, all of this. But then notice, verse 34, notice what Jesus is going to do. And when Jesus saw that he had answered wisely.

If you're in the King James, it says discreetly. Now that word translated wisely or discreetly, It's, it's most often translated discreetly. It's an interesting word. It's a, it's a compound word in which they take the word for mind and put it together with the word for to hold. And so it literally means to hold one's mind.

That's what it means to be discreet, to hold your mind, to not be swayed by the popular opinion, but instead to hold your mind, to not let your mind be conformed to the culture around you, but to hold your mind. That's what discreet means. That's what wisely means here in this context. And so to not be swayed by all the people around saying, have you ever seen a building as great as this?

Jesus, have you ever seen such a magnificent structure as this building? Have you ever seen such a great system of worshiping God as we have here in Jerusalem? Instead, he holds his mind and he answers wisely to say, this great building, this great system, this great heritage, this great culture is nothing compared to loving God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength.

So when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, you are not far from the kingdom of God. Did you notice how Jesus turned the whole conversation? He came to him with a question about the law. A question about the Torah. And Jesus now has just turned the conversation to the question of eternal life.

Don't you love when Jesus does things like that? Jesus, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me. Who made me a judge over you? But here's what I got to say to you. You better repent. Jesus, what do you think about those who were killed while offering the sacrifices? The tower fell on them. What do you think?

We got all this stuff going on. Here's what I think. You better repent. You see, Jesus would do that. He would do that magnificently. He does it here. He takes a question from the categorizing of the law and he takes it to eternal life. You're not far from the kingdom of God. But let's think about this statement.

You are not far from the kingdom of God. What a strange and odd statement for Jesus to make to this man. You are not far from the kingdom of God. So he hears his answer. His answer is perceiving The Well, should we say that the importance of the spiritual reality over the physical reality, the importance of loving God and loving neighbor over the ceremony, he perceives that he gets that, and he answers.

You are not far from the kingdom of God. And then we have this concluding statement. After this, nobody dared to ask him any questions any further. So in conclusion, I think there's just two. Well, two or three. I forgot to count two or three ways in which We we can take this and we really need to make sure that we get these things from this just important applications Important understandings that we are to gain from this first of all and we touched on this earlier Just let the severity of what Jesus is Weigh heavily upon your heart.

Let the seriousness of what Jesus said, don't brush this off to say, well, God understands that I don't love him that way. Jesus meant for this to be taken seriously. And he meant for his hearers to, to receive this and say, my Lord and my God, not only do I not love you that way, I never have, and not only have I never loved you that way, I don't know how I can,

and let that drive us. just as it's driving Jesus. Have you noticed here? Jesus says these words. This is the beautiful part. We can measure the time between this question and the cross now by hours, just hours before the cross is when Jesus gets this question. And the cross is the place where he will go.

That will be the solution for this man and the millions and billions of others who say, I can't love God that way. I never have. He will go to that cross and he will become the curse of the billions of his people who can't love God that way because we're so consumed with love of the earth and love of the earthly things and love of the here and now and we're so distracted with the trinkets down below that we cannot love him.

We cannot have that type of spiritual affection for him while the one who does love God God with all of his heart, all of his whole soul, all of his mind, all of his strength. He will then go to the cross and become the curse that's upon all those who don't. And the one who loved his neighbor perfectly as he loves himself will go to the cross and become the curse of all those who have not loved their neighbor.

He will go and he will pay that penalty in just a few hours. Now, as Jesus says to him, you are not far from the kingdom of God. That brings up to me a couple of questions. First of all, well, Jesus could have meant this a couple of ways, couldn't he? He could have meant this as though to say, listen, I'm trying to encourage you.

You understand the concepts now? You understand this principle? There's just one, one more final step that you gotta make. You're near the kingdom, you're not in the kingdom, but you're near it. So let me just encourage you, there's one more step to make. He could have meant it that way. And if Jesus did mean it that way, then we don't know what happens to the man.

We never hear from him again. If we ourselves love God, if we are part of his people and we love him, Peter tells us though. You've not seen him. You love him So if we love him and we are part of his people then we will read this and hope That this scribe is among those in the book of Acts that were told that many of the Pharisees believed upon him, but we don't know that, but perhaps this is perhaps this is a step and perhaps he's going to make that step.

If that's the case, then what we can do is we can look at this and we can see how Jesus used his mind. We've talked about this many times. Don't be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind. Your mind, your thoughts, your perception of the reality of God is the gateway. It's the window into your soul.

That's how the spirit enters in to bring conviction of sin. It's through the thoughts, through the recognition of the truth, the reality of God, the higher things of God. So if that is scribe then goes on to be in the kingdom, then we can see. How Jesus touched his mind, how Jesus began that the spirit worked with his thoughts.

His thoughts became correct. He began to see the ceremonial system that that's, that doesn't even compare to loving God with heart, soul, mind, and strength. Loving my neighbor as myself, perhaps it led into that. That's one option. The other option is Jesus says, you're not far from the kingdom of God, meaning he never made it.

There was one more step. There was one final step, just one step. But what does Jesus say about that step? Jesus says that step is impossible. Jesus says you can be as close as you care to be. And that step into the kingdom, you can't do it. That's the impossible step. That's like, oh, I don't know. Camels passing through eyes of needles and things like that can't be done.

And so if that's the case, then we would read this story. And we must say when he heard these words, you are not far from the kingdom of God. Why would he not fall down and plead with the master? What more must I do? What do I lack to be in the kingdom? Or he might have a prayer like the prayer of the tax collector and the Pharisee in that story in Luke's gospel.

Have mercy upon me for a master. I've never loved God like that. I've never loved my neighbor like that. Have mercy upon me. What am I to do? So that takeaway is this, Oh, how tragic it would be on that day to hear the same words from our savior. Amen. You were not far from the kingdom of God on that day in which we meet him face to face to have him say to us, you were not far.

But master, didn't I do things in your name? Didn't I profess your name? You were not far. But master, didn't I go to church? Wasn't I part of a church? You were not far. But master, didn't I pray over my meals? Didn't I refrain from profanity? Didn't I refrain from watching R rated movies? You were not far, but I read your word.

Some days I listen to your word. I listen to Bible teachers. I shared spiritual means on social media. You were not far. The point is, make certain that that is not what the Savior will say to you. Make certain that you are not near, make certain you are in the kingdom. How do I do that? That's passing through the eye of a needle.

We plead. I cannot love God like that. Have mercy upon me. Cover me with your robe of righteousness. Spread your blanket over me. Spread your righteousness over me. Cause your love for the Father. To be what he sees in me, take your love for your neighbor and give it to me, your righteousness, not mine. Let me be found in your righteousness, not the righteousness that comes from the law.