

Sermons on Matthew
Loving God and Our Neighbors
Matthew 22:34-40
A Sermon for Children

With Study Questions

*Pastor Paul Viggiano
Branch of Hope Church
2370 W. Carson Street, #100
Torrance, CA 90501
(310) 212-6999
pastorpaul@integrity.com
www.branchofhope.org
11/4/2007*

Loving God and Our Neighbors
Matthew 22:34-40

A Sermon for Children

But when the Pharisees heard that He had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. ⁻³⁵⁻ Then one of them, a lawyer, asked *Him a question*, testing Him, and saying, ⁻³⁶⁻ “_Teacher, which *is* the great commandment in the law?_”

⁻³⁷⁻ Jesus said to him, ‘_You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind._’ ⁻³⁸⁻ This is *the first and great commandment.* ⁻³⁹⁻ And *the second is like it:* ‘_You shall love your neighbor as yourself._’ ⁻⁴⁰⁻ On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets_” (Matthew 22:34-40).

Testing Jesus

People were always trying to test or trick Jesus into saying the wrong thing. They did this so they could make people think it was okay to crucify Him. They would fail every time. Here we read of another man trying to get Jesus to say the wrong thing. He would fail also. Next week we’ll read about how Jesus starts asking the questions. Then the Bible says that “**from that day on (no one dared) question Him anymore**” (Matthew 22:46b). This was probably because they realized that Jesus truly has all the answers.

The Bible says that in Jesus “**are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge**” (Colossians 2:3b).

This man asked Jesus a question. What would you ask Jesus if you could see Him face to face? Think about that for a second and we’ll get back to it.

But when the Pharisees heard that He had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. ⁻³⁵⁻ Then one of them, a lawyer, asked *Him a question* testing Him, and saying... (Matthew 22:34, 35)

A Muzzle

The Pharisees and Sadducees were the people who were supposed to know the most about God and help shepherd God’s people, to help them learn things about God, like the elders in your church. These were the people who kept trying to trick Jesus. We read that Jesus “**had silenced the Sadducees.**” What that really means is that it was like Jesus had put a muzzle (*ephimosen*) on them—like you put a muzzle on a dog to make it stop barking.

It can be a powerfully good thing to learn to speak the truth. There is another way to put a muzzle on those who believe and tell lies. The Apostle Peter wrote:

For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence
(*same word for muzzle*) **the ignorance of foolish men (1 Peter 2:15).**

So we should always be ready to say the right things and behave the right way.

A Question

Let's go back to our question. What would you ask Jesus? Would you ask Him if there is life on other planets? Why there are bad guys in the world? Where did the dinosaurs really go? Who shot Kennedy? Where's Waldo?

The thing about questions like those is that they don't really affect your life. If you received answers to those questions you might be happy to know the answer but it wouldn't change one decision you would make for the rest of your day, week, or life.

This lawyer (a lawyer was an expert in the law—they studied and taught the law God gave to Moses) was going to ask a question that none of his fellow experts in the law could agree upon. He figured Jesus couldn't answer it either. He didn't realize how wrong he was.

The lawyer might have been trying to test or trick Jesus. What he might not have realized is what a great question he was about to ask; because this question affects everything. I don't think there is a better question that can be asked, except for maybe one, which I'll get to in a minute.

So what was the question?

Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law? (Matthew 22:36)

What a great question! This question makes all the difference in the world. The answer to this question affects every last thing I do every day for the rest of my life. It affects the way I think, speak, and act; at home, at school, at work, and at play. The God who created me and all things, and who knows what's best, is about to tell me the greatest thing I can do. I can't think of anything more important than that.

I wonder if it got really quiet before Jesus answered. I'd be shushing people. There are some things you just really want to know. I remember really wanting to know something one time...

I'm very afraid of heights. So I decided to try to face my fear and jump out of an airplane with a parachute. So I signed up and began taking the class that prepares you to jump out of the plane. You study all day long and at the end of the day, you jump. During the course of the day I would see people jumping out of airplanes and I stayed scared pretty much all day. You see, I was afraid that my parachute might not open; I think other people were afraid of that also.

So when someone raised their hand and asked, "What do we do if our chute doesn't open?" it got very quiet. You know what you do if your chute doesn't open? See how you're listening. You open your emergency chute. You know what you do if

your emergency chute doesn't open? You ask God the other question I'm about to get to.

Back to this question. What is the most important thing a person can do—the great commandment?

-Jesus said to him, __' *You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.*_' -³⁸ This is *the first and great commandment.* -³⁹ *And the second is like it: __' *You shall love your neighbor as yourself*_' -⁴⁰ __ *On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets*_" (Matthew 22:37-40).*

Two-Part Answer

Jesus gives a two-part answer: we are to love God and to love our neighbor. Now this wasn't something new that Jesus came up with. This was in the Old Testament shortly after the God gave the law to Moses.

- *You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, __with all your soul, and with all your strength* (Deuteronomy 6:5).

- And in Leviticus (also in the Old Testament) God tells us:

...you shall love your neighbor as yourself (Leviticus 19:18b).

So this wasn't new. God's commands aren't like people's commands. His commands are eternal because God is completely good and knows everything. That's why Jesus said, "**Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away**" (Matthew 24:35). Anything this important isn't going to change.

Something else about this two-part answer: Jesus says that on these two commandments "**hang all the Law and the Prophets**". The law and the prophets "hang" on this. Maybe we can compare this to a Christmas tree. Loving God and loving our neighbor is like a Christmas tree, and the Ten Commandments (the law) are the ornaments. Until you decorate the tree you can't say that it is really ready for Christmas. Unless we're seeking to obey the Ten Commandments, we can't say we're loving God or our neighbor.

Loving God

According to the Ten Commandments loving God means we don't have other gods, we don't create any pictures of images of god (thus making God something other than He is), we don't use God's name in meaningless ways and we remember the Lord's Day and go to church and recognize Sunday as a special day. There is a lot more to this than we can talk about right now. We spend our whole lives trying to be better at this.

Jesus says we should do this with our whole (*Hole*) heart, soul and mind. Our heart (*Kardia*) means our decisions, our thinking, our desires and feelings. Our soul (*psuche*) means our inner selves but it can also mean our decisions and our hearts. Our minds (*noia*) means our intellect or our understanding of things—our thoughts and ideas. In Mark's gospel our "strength" (*ischyos*) is included which means everything we're capable of.

The point I think Jesus is making is that we're supposed to love God with everything we have. Like Psalm 103:

Bless _the Lord, O my soul; And all that is within me, *ble*ss His holy name! (Psalm 103)

Loving Our Neighbor

Loving our neighbor (according to the Ten Commandments) means we obey our mothers and fathers, we avoid violent and evil actions and thoughts toward our friends and neighbors, we don't steal from them or lie to, or about, them, and we don't envy what they have and want their things for ourselves.

But loving our neighbors is a little different than the way we love God. We love our neighbors, not with all our heart, soul, mind and strength (not that we shouldn't always try our best). But it's as if such a great love is reserved only for God. Loving God is greater than loving our neighbor. Jesus tells us that we are to love our neighbors as ourselves.

It's like the Golden Rule:

Therefore, __whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for __this is the Law and the Prophets (Matthew 7:12).

We are to love others and treat others the way we want to be treated. And this, of course, assumes we want to be treated in a godly manner. If I'm a weirdo and I like people to hit me on the head, I shouldn't start hitting other people on the head and the say it's okay because I like it when I get hit on the head. The Apostle Paul writes:

For the commandments, _" _You shall not commit adultery,_" " _You shall not murder,_" " _You shall not steal,_" __" _You shall not bear false witness,_" " _You shall not covet,_" and if *there is any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying, namely, __" _You shall love your neighbor as yourself."* ⁻¹⁰⁻ Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore __love is the fulfillment of the law (Romans 13:9-10).

So I love other people by treating them the way God tells me to treat them.

Two Commands Working Together

We also should know that these two commands always work together. What I mean is that I shouldn't think that I'm actually loving God if I'm not loving my friends and neighbors. We read in James that it is wrong for men to speak in such a way as **"bless our God and Father, and... curse men... out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing... these things ought not to be so"** (cf. James 3:9-10). If I'm not loving my neighbor, I'm not loving God.

We should also realize that if people stop loving God, not only will they stop loving their neighbors, they won't even know what it means to love. People are capable of doing awful things and calling it love. That's why loving God is the greater commandment. If we don't love God first, we won't even begin to know how to love one another.

A Better Question

Remember I said that I thought this was the best question anyone could ask, except for maybe one? The only question I can think of that would be more important than what's the greatest commandment is, "What must I do to be saved?" or put another way, **"What shall I do to inherit eternal life?"** (Luke 10:25b) That would have a bigger effect upon our lives, not just here but for all eternity.

What is really interesting is the answer Jesus gave (or had the lawyer give of his own question) when He was asked just that question.

And behold, a certain lawyer stood up and tested Him, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" ⁻²⁶⁻ **He said to him, "What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?"** ⁻²⁷⁻ **So he answered and said, " 'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind, ' and 'your neighbor as yourself. ' "** ⁻²⁸⁻ **And He said to him, "You have answered rightly; do this and you will live"** (Luke 10:25-28).

So the answer to the question regarding the greatest command is the same answer given to, **"What shall I do to inherit eternal life?"** Now this puts us in a little bit of a pickle because who obeys these commandments without ever making one mistake? The Apostle Paul teaches that we're cursed if we don't **"continue in all things which are written in the law"** (Galatians 3:10b). He also teaches that it is obvious that no one goes to heaven by keeping the law (Galatians 3:11). No one is good enough.

So why did Jesus answer that way to this lawyer? For one, because the lawyer wouldn't admit he needed God's mercy. This lawyer and his friends **"trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others"** (Luke 18:9b). They thought they were better than other people and figured God liked them more because of how good or smart they were. We can tell by this man's response to Jesus when Jesus told him to love God and his neighbor.

But he, wanting to __justify himself, said to Jesus, “_And who is my neighbor?_” (Luke 10:29).

He tried to “justify” himself, or make himself look right, even though he wasn’t. So was Jesus being insincere when He answered this man’s question about how to inherit eternal life? No! God does require perfect obedience in order to be saved. At this point we all might say “uh-oh.” But God also provided the perfect obedience by sending His Son, Jesus. Let me explain.

Jesus kept the law perfectly. He never sinned (Hebrews 4:15). The Apostle Paul wrote:

For _He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin for us, that we might become _the righteousness of God in Him (2 Corinthians 5:21).

This might be a tricky verse to understand, but it means that if we believe in Jesus, God the Father looks at us as if we never sinned. And the reason He can do this is because Jesus took all of our sin upon Himself when He died on the cross. He “bore our sins” when He went to the cross (cf. 1 Peter 2:21-24). He carried us. He did what we could not do and He gave it to us. In obedience to His Father, He took our sin and gave us His righteousness.

So one thing we learn here is that nobody ever loved the way Jesus does.

Questions for Study

1. Why did people try to test and trick Jesus (page 2)?
2. What question would you ask Jesus if you saw Him face to face (page 3)?
3. What did the lawyer ask Him and why is that a good question (page 3)?
4. What were the two parts to Jesus' answer (page 4)?
5. How does one go about loving God (page 5)?
6. How do we love our neighbor (pages 5, 6)?
7. How do these two commands work together (page 6)?
8. What was the other good question a lawyer asked Jesus? What was Jesus' answer (pages 6, 7)?
9. Can any person be good enough to go to heaven (page 7)?
10. How does a person get to heaven (page 7)?