

*** The Heights Baptist Church * Sermon Series: Doctrine ***

*** Topic: The Greatest Commandment * Mark 12:28-34 * 6/7/26 ***

MAIN POINT

As followers of Christ, we are commanded to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and love our neighbors as ourselves.

INTRODUCTION

What are some of the unique or quirky ways you've shown love to someone you are close to (spouse, child, parent, etc.)?

What are some ways you've seen the word "love" used that fall short of the love we are to have for each other as Christians?

As Christians, one of the goals of our lives is to grow in Christlikeness, a journey we will be on for the rest of our lives. As we learn to be like Jesus, it is important that we learn to follow His command to love God and others. He set the example for us. Following Jesus well means loving God and others with a self-sacrificing, agape love.

UNDERSTANDING

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ MARK 12:28-34

Jesus gave His great commandment in response to a question a religious leader raised about the most important of God's laws. Although the leader only wanted to know the single most important, Jesus gave it to him in two parts: love God and love your neighbor as yourself.

Describe what your life should look like if you love God the way Jesus put it in these verses.

What are some of the things that make it challenging to love God as Jesus tells you?

This question was posed to Jesus during an effort by the religious leaders to trap Jesus in His words (Mark 12:13). The scribe who asked the question was trying to "test" Jesus (Matthew 22:35). Looking at Mark 12:28, what stands out to you about the scribe's answer to Jesus?

He seems to be considering the fact that Jesus may actually be who He said He was.

What did Jesus mean that the scribe was not far off from the kingdom of God?

Loving God with everything in our beings is a challenge for us because we have a sinful nature, and we live in a world that tempts us with everything it offers, including money, security, power, acceptance, and so on. These tend to lure us away from God but, Jesus makes it clear we should love God more than anything else in the world. And out of that love should grow a love for others.

***Note 1 to study leader:** The rest of this lesson will look more closely at the two parts of the greatest commandment given by Jesus.*

***Note 2 to study leader:** When comparing the English translations of this command in Deuteronomy 6:5, Matthew 22:37, and Mark 12:30, there are slightly different attributes listed in English about the parts of our being by which we are to love God. This is related to the fact the Jewish and Greek words tend to land between these English words. For example, the Hebrew word translated as "heart" can mean inner part, heart, soul, mind, knowledge, memory, inclination, emotions, or appetite.*

LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, WITH ALL YOUR MIND, AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH

Is it surprising that loving God is something that God had to command us to do? Why or why not?

Jesus identified the greatest commandment as loving God with all your heart, soul, and mind. Part of His answer comes from the passage in Deuteronomy known as the Shema, which means “hear” or “listen” (see Deut. 6:4-9). These verses served as part of a general confession of faith offered by devout Jewish males every morning and evening.

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ DEUTERONOMY 6:4-5

This Old Testament passage—known as the “Shema”—contains the commandment that Jesus selected as the greatest commandment. Why do you think Moses reminded the people that God is One, before instructing them to love Him?

“The LORD is One.” This means that God has no rival, no substitute, no peers. The only appropriate response to God’s revelation of Himself is total devotion. It is not enough to know there is only one God. Instead, this is a foundational truth we must live by. The truth of God’s oneness reminded the Israelites that they could have no competing loyalties—whether idols or other people—when it came to loving God.

What are some common objects and relationships that rival God for our devotion?

The Great Commandment emphasizes loving God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. What do each of those aspects of a person’s being represent?

Of these areas of your person, which is hardest for you to love God with on a regular basis? Why?

Love for God rises as a response to His gracious love for people demonstrated in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Our love for God is to be unconditional and undivided in the way that He and His love for us is unconditional and undivided. This love is to extend from all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. To love God with all our heart means to love Him with our emotions and our feelings. The soul represents the deepest part of who we are, which means loving God with the stuff that makes you. Loving God with our minds means loving Him with our intelligence. And strength means with all our energy.

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ JOHN 14:15-21

Jesus includes the Holy Spirit in His discussion about loving and obeying Him. Why would it be impossible to carry out this command to love God and love others without the help of the Holy Spirit?

The Greek word for “helper” in verse 16 is “paracletos,” and it is used to describe an advocate or a counselor (c.f. John 14:25, 15:25, and 16:7). The original thrust of the word contains the meaning of “working on someone’s behalf” or “coming alongside someone.” The Counselor picked up where Jesus left off after His ascension. We cannot carry out God’s version of love without God’s help.

Twice in these verses Jesus said that if we love Him, we will keep His commands (verse 15 and 21). How are love and obedience related?

We demonstrate our love for God by obeying His Word. To say we love Jesus while we choose to go our own way shows we don’t really love Him with self-sacrificing “agape” love. There is an inseparable, cause-and-effect relationship between these two tasks. Our love for Jesus is not merely an emotion, but an active, abiding relationship with Him that naturally results in our desire to obey Him. The Bible is clear that in this life, we won’t reach sinless perfection, but we should see an inner desire in our new nature to obey Him. We won’t become sinless in this life, but we should be sinning less.

LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF

ASK VOLUNTEERS TO READ GALATIANS 6:9-10, JAMES 2:14-16, AND 1 JOHN 3:16-18

What points do these verses make about what our love for each other should look like?

Our love should go beyond just “sending positive thoughts” people’s way, it needs to include intentionally helping others.

According to what we read in Galatians, which group of people should we especially focus on helping? Why might we sometimes get off track on this?

Pastor Shay Osborne has described our “box” ministry as the ministries we carry out inside the church, and our “circle” ministry as the ministries we are involved with outside the church. Both are important.

We are to do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers. We may lose sight of this if we overfocus on our “circle” ministries while neglecting our “box” ministries.

Biblical love includes these three attributes: It is Christ-centered, intentional, and grace filled. Why are each of these characteristics essential for biblical community?

Which of these attributes is most difficult for you to practice in biblical community?

Biblical community doesn’t happen by accident. It takes work and commitment on our part. But pursuing deep connectedness with the people of God is one of the most important things we can ever do. It’s God’s plan for all of us. We are better together; that’s how God has made us. The only way we truly come together is when we declare with our lives that we will love others like Jesus loved.

APPLICATION

Is there some area in my life related to my heart, soul, mind, or strength where I am holding out on loving God as devotedly and completely as He commands?

***Note to study leader:** We will be starting to regularly include the “LIFE of a Disciple” acronym from our “Starting Point” classes in our sermon-based lifegroup lessons. For a summary of this acronym, look at the first portion of the Commentary section of this lesson. Include a brief description of “LIFE” as part of introducing this application. Today’s application is based on the “L” in the “LIFE” acronym.*

Loving neighbor: I am motivated to show God’s love and compassion to others where I live, work, and play.

What are some tangible ways I can love my neighbor as myself this week: At home? At Church? At work? With my friends? In my neighborhood?

Is there someone in particular in your life who most needs to know the love of Christ? What can you do to demonstrate God’s love to them today?

PRAYER

Thank God for His love, shown most clearly in the person and work of Jesus. Ask God to help each of us abide in Christ and surrender to the leadership of the Holy Spirit. Pray that He would develop the fruit of love in our lives; love for God, love for our fellow believers, and love for the lost people in this world who desperately need Jesus. Thank Him that His love drives out fear. Ask Him to show us where we can love more and fear less, that we might be better reflect Jesus to the world around us.

COMMENTARY

Information on “The LIFE of a Disciple” Acronym (There may be a poster in your classroom to use as a teaching aid)

This acronym is part of our “Starting Point” training programs. The letters in LIFE stand for the following:

Loving neighbor: I am motivated to show God’s love and compassion to others where I live, work, and play.

Intentional friend: I am purposefully cultivating relationships within my church family.

Faithful follower: I am sensitive to the moving of the Holy Spirit in regular times of prayer, worship, and Bible study.

Engaged disciple-maker: I am regularly looking to invest in others to help them take their next step in following Jesus.

Mark 12:28-34

This pronouncement story contains two authoritative sayings, one in vv. 29–31 and one in v. 34. The former is by far the more important. This story differs somewhat from the preceding one in that it does not involve a controversy. Indeed, the friendly attitude of the scribe, which is different from all other exchanges between Jesus and these teachers of the law, supports the authenticity of Mark’s account.

12:28 The question reflects the fact that the scribes had identified 613 separate commandments, 365 of which were negative and 248 of which were positive. They divided them further into “heavy” and “light,” i.e., more important and less important. An example of a similar question but a different answer is found in the reply of Hillel (ca. 40 b.c.–a.d. 10) to a Gentile who asked him to summarize the law while he stood on one leg: “What is hateful to you, do not to your neighbor: that is the whole Torah, while the rest is the commentary thereof.”

12:29–30 The quotation is from Deut. 6:4–5, the first part of the famous Shema. In the second century the confession of faith that consisted of Deut. 6:4–9; 11:13–21; Num 15:37–41 was recited twice daily by pious Jews. Matthew and Luke do not have the prefatory sentence, “Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one”; but it is crucial because the obligation to love God is based on his oneness. Because he is one, love for him must be undivided. The inclusion was important for Mark’s church in their debates with Jews in order to affirm that they also were monotheists, not polytheists as the Jews sometimes accused them of being. “With all your mind” is added to the statement in Deuteronomy. The piling up of the terms “heart,” “soul,” and “mind” is just a way of saying “with your whole being” and is not intended to designate the component parts of human nature.

The New Testament contains comparatively few references to loving God. In addition to the present passage and its parallels in Matt 22:37 and Luke 10:27, there are: Luke 11:42; John 5:42; 14:31; Rom 8:28; 1 Cor 2:9; 8:3; Jas 1:12; 2:5; 1 John 2:5, 15; 4:20; 5:2–3; Jude 21; Rev 2:4. John 14:15, 24; 21:15–17; 1 Cor 16:22; Eph 6:24; 1 Pet 1:8 refer to loving Christ. If any significance can be attributed to this phenomenon, it is that the New Testament writers were preoccupied with the amazing love of God for sinful human beings. 12:31 The second quotation is from Lev 19:18. In the first part of that verse the neighbor is defined as “one of your people,” i.e., a fellow Israelite. Leviticus 19:33–34 extends the love command to resident aliens. It is not likely that many first-century Jews extended it any further. Therefore one of the most significant elements in the teaching of Jesus was to redefine the neighbor as everybody, including the hated Samaritans and Gentiles (cf. Luke 10:30–37, which follows immediately his account of the discussion about the greatest commandment).

One of Jesus' other great teaching contributions was to bring together and virtually merge the commands to love God and to love fellow human beings. Some deny that Jesus was the first to relate the two. The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs (second cent. b.c.) seem to do so. Philo of Alexandria, a contemporary of Jesus who probably died about a.d. 50, seems to have also. Even if a few others before or during the time of Jesus saw the interrelationship of the commands to love God and love others, no one else put such great emphasis on the combination and made it essential. Jesus showed that it was impossible to really love God without loving neighbors. Love for God is expressed by loving others.

The statement "as yourself" does not justify the self-love advocated by modern psychology as necessary for a healthy self-image. It merely acknowledges that human beings do love themselves—far too much in fact—and that God deserves as much—actually far more.

12:32 The material in vv. 32–34 is peculiar to Mark. Verse 32 is the only place in the Gospels where a scribe is described as being favorably disposed toward Jesus, and v. 34 is the only place where Jesus commends a scribe. Not all scribes and Pharisees were bad. Indeed, at their best they represented the finest element in Judaism.

12:33 The elevation of an ethical quality over sacrificial worship stands in the tradition of 1 Sam 15:22; Hos 6:6; and perhaps also Isa 1:11–17. The word translated "burnt offerings" refers to those offerings totally consumed on the altar. The word translated "sacrifices" refers to offerings in general, only a small portion of which was burned, and the remainder was given to the priest or returned to the worshiper to eat as a sacred meal. The two terms summarize and represent the entire sacrificial system.

12:34 There is not much difference in loving God and trusting him. In addition to acknowledging the necessity of loving God and humanity, the man evidently committed himself to do just that. He was receptive to Jesus as a person as well as to his teaching. No wonder Jesus indicated that the man was not far from entering the kingdom, from letting God reign in his life. By saying that he was not far, Jesus encouraged him to go the remainder of the way by wholeheartedly following Jesus. Whether he did so cannot be known, but every reader of Mark hopes so.

John 14:15-21

14:15–18. How do people know that they are Christians? How do you and I gain confidence that we are born again by the regenerating power of God's Holy Spirit? The world cannot know because the world cannot accept the Holy Spirit. But the disciples were told that the Holy Spirit lives with you and will be in you. Pentecost was still in their future, so at the present time the Holy Spirit was constantly with them. But after Pentecost, he would actually be in them and in every other believer since that day. Consequently, they were identifiable (as we are) as God's children, not orphans.

What did Jesus mean by the promise at the end of verse 18: I will come to you? Some interpreters suggest this refers to the resurrection, while others see another promise of the second coming. But in the context of these verses, it surely means the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Jesus lives in us through the person and power of the Holy Spirit.

14:19–21. How well we remember the song that states, "Because he lives, I can face tomorrow; because he lives, all fears are gone." Perhaps the idea for the lyrics had its birth in John 14:19. When did the disciples (later called the apostles) realize that Jesus was in the Father and that they dwelt in Him? Did they have to wait for the second coming for that? Of course not. The reference to that day must refer to the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. That frightened, hesitant group of believers huddled in an upper room knew the power of the Holy Spirit broke forth upon them because it literally blasted them around the city, around the country and around their world.