

The Greatest Commandment

Matthew 22:34-46 Text vs. 37 *“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.”*

Our text this morning is a powerful reminder of the importance of loving God with every fiber of your being. It says the Pharisees were together when they heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees and had told them that because they did not know the Scriptures, or the power of God, they were in error about marriage. When the crowds heard that, they were astonished at His teaching. Then a lawyer, who was a religious man, approached Jesus to ask a question by which he would try to confuse Jesus. He wanted to make Jesus look bad. He wanted to discredit Jesus in front of the others. Now realize, at this time, there were 613 Jewish commandments put upon the Jewish people by the religious leaders. If you were a good, righteous person you had to follow all 613 of them. That’s how you remained holy and faithful.

So, the lawyer asked Jesus, *“Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the law?”* (Matthew 22:36) Or, to put it another way another way, *“Of the 613 laws that lead to righteousness, which is the most important to follow?”* And Jesus answered, *“‘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. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”* (Matthew 22:37-40) Jesus took those 613 religious laws and made them so easy to understand. Just love God! And love your neighbor as yourself. It’s that simple! *“All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”* There weren’t 613 rules anymore. There were just those *two!*

That’s easy. How hard can that be? Anybody can keep just two rules. Who doesn’t want to love Jesus? And how hard can it be to love your neighbor? In theory, this sounded great! *“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. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’* Pretty straight-forward, isn’t it? And if that’s all it takes, then all the other commandments hang on these two and everything’s going to be okay. But in today’s world, it’s easy to get caught up in the hustle and bustle of life. It’s easy to forget about your spiritual well-being.

This verse is to remind you, you *must* put your relationship with God above anything else. You *must* love Him with all your heart. With all your soul. And with all your mind. Loving God with all your heart means you must have a deep and genuine love for Him. You must be enthusiastic about your faith. You must grow closer to Him every day. Loving God with all your soul means you must be willing to surrender yourself completely to Him. You must trust His plan for your life. You must have faith He will guide you on the right path in life. Loving God with all your mind means you must be aware of your thoughts and your actions. You must try to line yourself up with His will. You must glorify Him in everything you do.

Now, think about this! The word *“heartache”* refers to the pain you feel *“in your heart”* when something awful happens to you. You say your heart is broken! In the Biblical sense, your heart is where your emotions reside. Your heart is the seat of your emotions. Think back upon the experiences you’ve had in life. You may not be able to describe every emotional experience you’ve ever had in exact detail. But you can describe how it felt!

Bobby Bowden coached the Florida State Seminoles football team 30 years from 1976 to 2009. He’s considered one of the greatest college football coaches of all time for his accomplishments with the Seminoles. He’s best known for his 14 consecutive seasons with 10 or more wins. Two national championships. And 12 Atlantic Coast Conference championships. He was inducted into the College Football Hall of Fame as a coach in 2006. But in college, he played baseball. And he never hit a home run! During his senior year at Howard College, now Samford University in Marion, Alabama, he was the only player to never hit a home run! One day he hit a line drive against Auburn. As he ran the bases to second base, the third base coach was waving him on to third base. He made the turn to go home and heard the third base coach yell, *“Hurry!”* Bobby touched home plate. His team was excited. Running out of the dugout to slap his back and shake his hand they heard the Howard College first baseman yell to their catcher, *“Throw me the ball!”* He did! The umpire yelled, *“out!”*. Because when Bobby ran the bases, he never touched first base! So, he never hit a home run! Later, he would tell his football players he knew how it felt when *“you don’t take care of first base. After that, it doesn’t matter what you do.”*

And that’s the way it is with God. If you don’t take care of God *first* in your life, it doesn’t matter what else you do after that. *“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.”* (Matthew 22:37) And it all begins with worship! Worshiping God is the foundation for everything you do in life. When the foundation of Christ’s church is built on worship, His church can then be built into what He desires it to be. A community of Christ followers who believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ who are ready to proclaim the Good News of His salvation to the world. Church provides a place for believers to worship God through prayer, hymns, and other forms of worship. Church provides a community where believers can connect with one another and build relationships. Church provides opportunities for believers to grow in their faith through Bible studies, small groups, and other discipleship programs. Church provides opportunity for believers to share their faith with others and invite them into a relationship with Jesus Christ. Church

provides opportunities for believers to serve others in their community and around the world. Church is where you learn how to meet God everywhere you go. Church is where you learn how to surrender your life for the glory of God.

The Book of Psalms shows how important worship is to the Lord. Repeatedly, there is the call to *praise Him*. To give Him glory. To magnify His Holy Name! Worship is when you give up your own desires and surrender all that you are to Christ. Worship is more than what happens at 11 AM on Sundays. Worship defines your relationship with the Lord. And when Jesus was asked about the *"greatest commandment,"*

He also gave the "2nd greatest commandment"—*"love your neighbor as yourself."* It was a call to service. Notice, service *follows* worship! And they *must* be kept in that order. Service is what you do for others, *because* of what Christ has done for you. Service is reaching out in love to those around you. Jesus said, *"Whatever you do for the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me."* (Mt. 25:40) Then He said in Matthew 28:19-20, *"Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age."*

Discipleship is a learning process. And you can't learn anything if you aren't *taught something!* And that *something* is what you are called to teach. God's Word! You're not called to teach the Word just for knowledge's sake. You are called to teach God's Word so believers can apply its truths to their lives and live each day for Jesus. Christ's church needs to be helping people discover God's Will for their lives. And that begins with *you* studying God's Word. It begins with *you* Loving God. It begins with *you* Loving God's people. That's the Lord's command. It is not a suggestion. It is a commandment.

A *command* is an order that you *have to* follow, as long as the person who gives the command has authority over you. And the *first* commandment is that YOU are to love God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. And the second is like that. Love your neighbor as yourself. Love God. Love people. So, here you are this morning. Do you feel like you don't know what God wants you to do with your life? Well, now you know! He wants you to do two things! Love God. Love people. In that order. Get this right, and all the other things in your life will fall into place. Get this wrong, and you better watch out!

Sadly, some people don't remember this! But it's still in the subconscious corner of their mind. Whether they are conscious of it or not, the pains and pleasures that are stored up in your mind affect the other areas of your life. Ever wonder how your memories of the past affect you? Especially the negative ones? Imagine you're sitting calmly, and out of nowhere you remember how one time your peace of mind was completely shattered. Thinking about it makes your palms get sweaty. Your heartbeat increases. You think, *"Here we go again."* You might even remember how faint you felt. Or how your vision turned blurry during a stressful situation. From that point on, every little thing reminds you of that awful incident. And the reason you remember it, is for you to beware of, and be better prepared for such situations in the future.

If you think this happens only to you, it's not true. Dwelling on old, negative thoughts happens to everyone! That's why having to remember *613 laws that lead to righteousness* would be a burdensome task. And that's why Jesus simplified it. He said, *"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. And the second is like it: "Love your neighbor as yourself."* So, Matthew 22:37 is a powerful reminder of the importance of loving God with every fiber of your being. Strive to love Him with all your heart. Love Him with all your soul. Love Him with all your mind. Then grow closer to Him every day. If you love God. If you love people. Then, my friend, you're keeping the Greatest Commandment. AMEN