

**Sermon Text: Mark 12:28-34** <sup>28</sup> Then one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, perceiving that He had answered them well, asked Him, "Which is the first commandment of all?" <sup>29</sup> Jesus answered him, "The first of all the commandments is: 'Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one. <sup>30</sup> '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.' This is the first commandment. <sup>31</sup> "And the second, like it, is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these." <sup>32</sup> So the scribe said to Him, "Well said, Teacher. You have spoken the truth, for there is one God, and there is no other but He. <sup>33</sup> "And to love Him with all the heart, with all the understanding, with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as oneself, is more than all the whole burnt offerings and sacrifices." <sup>34</sup> Now when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, He said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." But after that no one dared question Him.

**Sermon Theme: The First and Second Greatest Commandments of God.**

- 1. Love the Lord our God with our entire being.**
- 2. Love our neighbor as ourselves.**

In the name of Jesus Christ, who revealed and fulfilled the law of God for us, dear fellow redeemed;

In catechism class when going through the teachings of the ten commandments, I have asked students to give me one word that best sums up God's holy will for our lives. After giving this question some thought, catechumens have given me words like - commandments or laws. They could also have given me other biblical terms like - statutes, ordinances, precepts, or judgments. All these words are good descriptive biblical words for God's holy will. However, there is one word that best captures God's holy will and that is 'love'. The apostle Paul says of love, "love is the fulfillment of the law." (Rom. 13:10)

This kind of love of which the Bible speaks is no ordinary kind of love. It is not merely an emotional, filial, friendly, or romantic kind of love. It is the highest form of love where we place another before ourselves in the affection of our hearts.

In today's Scripture text, Jesus found Himself on the receiving end of a question along this line of thought. A Jewish scribe, who was an expert on Old Testament religious laws, asked Jesus, "Which is the first commandment of all?" With these words the scribe was asking Jesus what is the most important commandment of all.

This question was asked of Jesus in the setting of Jews trying to trip Him up in order to find fault with Jesus. The scribe might have thought this question would be very difficult for Jesus to come up with the right answer. For consider this, not only were there the 10 commandments and the many levitical laws handed down at Mount Sinai, but there were also the hundreds of religious laws the Jews had added to biblical laws.

So then, with all the many religious laws to chose from which did Jesus say is the most important commandment of all? The Lord Jesus answered, "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.’ This is the first commandment.

“And the second, like it, is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”

All the ten commandments can be summarized in this one word, namely ‘love.’ The first three commandments or the first table of the law deal with love for God and the next seven commandments or the second table of the law deal with love for our neighbor. As we heard Paul state earlier, “love is the fulfillment of the law.”

You may have noticed that the most important commandment of all the Lord Jesus gave was declared by God in today’s Old Testament Scripture reading in Deuteronomy 6. What the LORD declared in the Old Testament and repeated in the New Testament is the unchangeable will of God for all time for all people.

Before Jesus gave the first and second greatest commandments of all, namely love for God and love for neighbor, He prefaced it by stating, “Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one.” It is absolutely critical that we know and accept this fact if we are to have a correct understanding of what God’s holy will is for us.

This brief declaration is stating there is only one true God. That one true God is the Lord God Jehovah who has revealed Himself in Holy Scripture as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This is the Triune God, the Trinity, the three-in-one God. He and He alone has the divine right and authority to command all people all over the world to do His holy will in their lives.

Just think of what we could end up with if we didn’t know or accept this fact, that is, the Triune God is the only true God. We could fall prey to any number of false religions in the world like the Muslim religion.

Take a brief look at the kind of religious commandments this false religion has contrived to the detriment of its followers and those who don’t believe in Islam. They have developed what is called Sharia law which Muslims want to be the prevailing law throughout the world. According to Sharia law women are to be completely covered from head to toe when going out in public. A thief could be punished by having a limb cut off or be publicly whipped. It is permissible and even commendable to kill so called unbelieving infidels who have fallen away from Islam or wouldn’t be converted to Islam. And a martyr who kills himself in the process of killing others in jihad, that is, in a holy war is assured of going directly to heaven. None of this reflects the holy will of the one true God to love Him and to love our neighbor.

What does it mean to love our God with all our heart, with all our mind, with all our soul, and with all our strength? With all these personal features listed one after the other we receive the understanding that we are to love our God with our entire being. He is to be loved to such a high degree that He holds first position in our hearts and lives before all other people and before all other things. Instead of saying, I’m number one or we are number one, it is God’s will for us to say from the heart and put into practice in our lives that God is number one.

With God having first position in our hearts and lives, we are to have the highest regard and highest respect for Him so that we place His Word and His commands above all

others. This highest regard for God would cause us to dread the very thought of going against Him and thereby offend Him. We are to be more concerned about pleasing Him than anyone else. Instead of worrying or putting all our trust in ourselves or other mortals or any earthly thing, we are to put all our trust and all our confidence in God above all else.

If we were to love our God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength, it naturally follows that we would want to and be willing to keep all of His commandments. The apostle John writes in his first letter, “this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome.” (5:3)

If we were to use the mirror of this holy law of God to reveal what is in our hearts and in our lives, we would all have to confess that we have miserably failed to love God with all our heart, all our mind, all our soul, and all our strength. We are all evidence of this statement in the Bible, “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” (Rom. 3:23) None of us have always put God first in our hearts and lives. Just look at all the many commandments of God we have failed to keep in thought, word, and deed. All this shows that we have not given God first place in us. Oh Lord, have mercy upon us, for we have sinned against Your commandments to love You above everyone and everything in this world.

Thankfully we have Jesus who is our righteousness and our salvation. The Lord Jesus, who informed the Jewish scribe that the greatest commandment of God is to love Him with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength, is the very One who was faithful is perfectly loving God the Father all His earthly days as our Savior. He did what we couldn't do so that His righteousness and holiness could be credited to us and make us acceptable to God as His holy children.

Jesus put God the Father first in His heart when He made the tremendous sacrifice of leaving behind His throne of glory in heaven and coming into this world in the lowly form of a servant to carry out the Father's plan for our salvation. In the wilderness when the devil tempted Jesus for 40 days and 40 nights to break God's commandments of love, never once did Jesus give into his temptations and transgress any of God's commands. And when in the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus was approaching the final and most difficult part of His work for our salvation in paying for all our many sins on the cross, Jesus said to the heavenly Father in prayer, “not as I will, but as You will.” And again He said, “O My Father, if this cup cannot pass away from Me unless I drink it, Your will be done.” (Lk. 22:39,42) Because God the Father held first place in Jesus' heart, the Lord Jesus fulfilled the Father's will of redeeming us from our unloving ways and our deserved punishment.

Secondly, the Lord Jesus revealed to the Jewish scribe the second greatest commandment in saying, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” This love for our neighbor means that in the affection of our hearts after our love for God, our neighbor is to hold the next position in our hearts. This means after God and our neighbor we come last. Such love is foreign to our natural way of thinking. What is natural for us is the selfish way of thinking ‘me first’ - me first before my neighbor.

The apostle Paul gives us a good commentary on what is involved in loving our neighbor as ourselves when he writes in Romans, “Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law. 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.' Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law." (13:8-10)

All of our neighbors whether they be family, friends, acquaintances, strangers, or enemies are to be shown love by us. We are to do no harm to them either in word or deed. Rather, out of loving concern for them we are to help and befriend them.

Here again, if we were to hold up the mirror of God's law to love our neighbor, it would lay bare unloving thoughts, feelings, and emotions in our hearts toward our neighbor. It would expose words we have spoken which hurt our neighbor. And it would reveal actions taken on our part which injured our neighbor in some way. Oh Lord, have mercy upon us, for we have sinned against your commandments to love our neighbor as ourselves.

Thanks be to Jesus, who gave us command to love our neighbor as ourselves, fulfilled this commandment to absolute perfection in every way for us as our Savior. Looking over the record of Jesus' earthly life, we find Him placing all the neighbors of the world before Himself. He was placing us before Himself when He came into this world as our Savior. Throughout His ministry He can be seen tirelessly helping all those in need, whether it be preaching the Word of God to them, miraculously healing them, feeding them, or rescuing them from physical or spiritual harm and danger. And then at the end of His earthly mission, Jesus placed all the spiritual and eternal needs of every man, woman, and child throughout human history before Himself by suffering and dying for our salvation. Yes, Jesus loved us all so much that He laid down His life for us so that we could be saved eternally. No greater love can we ever find than the love Jesus showed us as our Savior.

After Jesus answered the scribe, this Jewish expert said to Him, "Well said, Teacher. You have spoken the truth, for there is one God, and there is no other but He. And to love Him with all the heart, with all the understanding, with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as oneself, is more than all the whole burnt offerings and sacrifices" Since the scribe approved and accepted Jesus' answer, the Lord Jesus said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God."

Yes, he was not far from God's kingdom, but it is not enough to just know and approve of God's great commandments to love Him and our neighbor in order to have a part in God's eternal kingdom. It is also necessary to know and confess with a contrite heart that we have failed to love God and our neighbor as we ought. And then, it is also absolutely essential that we look to Jesus in faith for forgiveness and to receive His righteousness.

May God have mercy upon us through Jesus Christ for failing to love Him and our neighbor. May we put our faith in God's forgiving love for us in Christ Jesus. And may God's great love for us fill our hearts with love for Him and our neighbor. Amen.