

“LOVE THE LORD THY GOD... AND... LOVE OTHERS”

of this, we read that it was at a time when the religious leaders were trying to entrap Jesus into saying something that they could persecute Him for expressing.

The question that leads up to our answer was expressed by one of the leaders. We are told that he was a “lawyer” in Matthew and Luke and that he was a “scribe” who asked Jesus in Mark’s account. In the New Testament, scribes were also referred to as “lawyers.” These “lawyers/scribes” were experts in the Mosaic Law which was the sole legislation both, in civic and religious matters, that governed the Jewish people. The lawyers or scribes usually were associated with the Pharisees – the religious leaders. The question was, “*Which is the greatest commandment?*” The Jewish understanding and belief was that every part of the Law was just as important as the other. There were 613 of these laws. Therefore, it was a question designed to trick Jesus.

We all know Jesus’ answer. He told them what the scriptures had always told them, as well as it tells us today. We are to love God and to love others. These were the two “basic” and “fundamental” commandments that the entire Law rests upon. The question that we must ask ourselves is, “Do we truly live according to these two basic commandments every moment of our lives?” Do we truly love God with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our mind? Do we really love our neighbor? Do we even love ourselves? If we are truthful, we know that we all do not really live the way God truly intends for us to live out these commandments.

You see, that is the problem. We can never, nor could we ever, fulfill what Jesus and the Word of God tells us, to its fullest. Jesus tells us that there is no greater love that can be expressed for another person and to God, than to give of your own life for the betterment of another.

That means that we are to give our lives to the extreme measure – even dying – for the betterment or safety of someone else. Jesus was the greatest expression of this kind of love. Now, Jesus calls each and every one of His true disciples to do the same.

Love the Lord thy God... and... love others. This was the answer Jesus gave when He was questioned concerning which is the “greatest commandment.” In all the accounts

We must remember, that as true believers in Jesus, we are to strive to love God with all our heart, soul, and mind. However, the truth is that to be able to truly love our God with all our heart, our soul and mind, we must also love others. That is how we love God. Jesus makes it very clear. He tied these two commandments together. They are actually one commandment. It is the commandment of “love.”

We must always remember that these are “commandments.” They are not suggestions. Yes, I know that we are not under the Law. However, Jesus tells us that as true believers and followers of Him and then ultimately, the Father, we are “commanded” to live out these two “commandments.” We must never forget that these words Jesus spoke are the fundamental aspects of what every child of God is to be expressing and living out within their lives.

You see, when we truly “live out” these two commandments we will ultimately be living out all of the rest of the commandments that God tells us in His Word. That is the essence of the Ten Commandments. They simply express to a greater extent what these two commandments are actually saying to the true believer and the true child of God.

Here is what we mean:

Loving God – The Ten Commandments tell us:

- Thou shalt have no other gods before me
- Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness to represent the Living God
- Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain
- Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy.

Loving others – The Ten Commandments tell us:

- Honor thy father and thy mother
- Thou shalt not kill
- Thou shalt not commit adultery
- Thou shalt not steal
- Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor
- Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbor's.

These are what are known as the “moral aspects” of the Law. All of the ceremonial aspects which refer to cleansing one’s own self with sacrifices and approaching God with ceremonial washings and other offerings and sacrifices were all fulfilled and done away with by Jesus with all that He did on the cross. However, these moral aspects are still in operation.

Jesus fulfilled all of these moral aspects for us. Now, as His children, as the Father’s representative figure upon this earth, we are to continually live out these “moral aspects” within our lives – both unto God and to others. When we love God, we do so by loving others. When we love others we are truly loving God. It is a cycle – a never ending cycle of God’s love being expressed to us. We then express it right back to God by and through loving others. When we love others, we are loving our God.

As a child of God, there are no exceptions to this. We are to love others as God has loved us **and** as God continues to love everyone. God is no “respector of persons.” He truly loves the saved and the unsaved; the just and the unjust. He desires that no one perish but that they would all “repent” (turn from being separated from God) and come to the saving knowledge of Jesus. (2Peter 3:9)

Let’s read these passages in the scriptures to see what Jesus was actually saying when asked about the “greatest commandment:”

Matthew 22: 34-40 - “But when the Pharisees had heard that he had put the Sadducees to silence, they were gathered together. ³⁵ Then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked him a question, tempting him, and saying, ³⁶ Master, which is the great commandment in the law? ³⁷ Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. ³⁸ This is the first and great commandment. ³⁹ And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. ⁴⁰ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”

Mark 12:28-34 - “And one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, and perceiving that he had answered them well, asked him, Which is the first commandment of all? ²⁹ And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord: ³⁰ And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment. ³¹ And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these. ³² And the scribe said unto him, Well, Master, thou hast said the truth: for there is one God; and there is none other but he: ³³ And to love him with all the heart, and with all the

understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love his neighbor as himself, is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices. ³⁴ And when Jesus saw that he answered discreetly, he said unto him, Thou art not far from the kingdom of God. And no man after that durst ask him any question.”

Luke 10:25-28 - “And, behold, a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted him, saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? ²⁶ He said unto him, What is written in the law? how do you read it? ²⁷ And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself. ²⁸ And he said unto him, Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live.”

As we know, this man who approached Jesus was a shrewd individual. He was a religious leader and he went to Jesus to see if he could trick Jesus into saying something that was incorrect. That was his ultimate goal. He did not want to necessarily ask Jesus an honest question but rather he wanted to see if he could get Jesus to say something incorrect about the Word of God for the purpose to discredit Jesus.

Jesus knew this. Jesus was quite aware of what they were doing. However, Jesus was also very truthful. Actually, in Luke's Gospel we read that Jesus asked the lawyer to answer his own question. How did this lawyer see it in the Law? The lawyer/scribe answered correctly. In Mark's Gospel, we see that man had concurred with Jesus' response. Jesus even tells the man that He was correct. He also tells the man that he was not far from the Kingdom. This is interesting.

Jesus would never refute God's truth. However, even though the man was correct, his heart was not correct. His heart wanted to simply “out duel” Jesus and to show everyone how much smarter and “religious” he was. This just shows us that religion does not make you a child of God. It must be in our heart and not just in our head. Hmmm.....

As mentioned, we see that there was an ulterior motive that this man just could not get past. He did not want to really hear the truth. Even though he may have spoken the correct response his heart was not right. His motive was to try to trick up Jesus. In Luke 10:29 we read, “*But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbor?*” This tells us that the man did not get the result that he had wanted and wanted to press Jesus further to try to, again, trick Jesus. He continues and asks what seems to be a “loaded question” that could get Jesus into trouble.

According to the Jewish leadership's thinking, the only "neighbor" that would be righteous enough to be loved was only those Jewish people who they thought would be good enough to be child of God. Even if a person was Jewish, if they did not meet the leadership's standards, then they would not be good enough for God. That was totally incorrect and it is totally far, as far as you can be, away from the true heart of the Living God.

That is why in Luke, Jesus goes on to express what these two commandments really meant. He goes on to tell them the parable of the "Good Samaritan." We all know this parable. If you do not, then I would suggest you read it in Luke 10:30-37.

A "Samaritan" was considered a "half-Jew." The Jewish leadership thought of them as being even lower on the scale of being right with God than the Romans and other barbarians. In other words, they did not think they were any good at all. That is exactly why Jesus used a "Samaritan" in this example/parable.

These "Samaritans" were from the area known as Samaria, an area about 5 miles north of Jerusalem. It was a small area and it is still in existence, even today. These Samaritans, even though they were "half-Jewish" were never allowed back into Jerusalem (even today), nor were they allowed to go to the Temple. They have been, and still are, looked down upon by the Jewish leadership.

In the parable, Jesus tells a story of this "hated" Samaritan man helping an injured man who was in need. Whether this injured man was a Jewish person or not we are not told. It did not matter; it was someone in need of help. Two Jewish men, a Jewish priest and then a leader, would not help this man who was in need. However, this hated Samaritan came by and helped the man. Notice Jesus' question in Luke 10:36 when He asked, "*Which now of these three, do you think, **was neighbor** to him that fell among the thieves?*" This whole parable was about what it really meant to "love your neighbor."

In essence, it meant that we are to love our neighbor, a person, just as if that person was the God whom you love. For if you truly love your God, than you would love all people and if you did, than you would be truly loving your God!!! Jesus was stating that the two commandments go hand in hand. They are actually two parts of the same commandment – love. Love should be the main force in a true child of God's heart!!!

Love has nothing to do with the person we are in relationship with. Love is the express “attitude of heart” of the true child of God. Yes, it is difficult. That is why we must continually seek after and grow in our relationship with the source of love, that “agape” love, that unconditional love, which is only found in and through our loving God. We can say that we love God but it is only truly expressed and declared when we go forth and love our “neighbor” – love others, all others.

According to the Word of God, we are all “neighbors” for we all live in this world. That includes the Muslim, the Hindu, those that do not even believe in God or any god. Our heart should be that we should desire none to perish but that ALL would come to saving knowledge of Jesus. Will that happen? No. However, we are not to stop doing the Word of God or stop being the child of God that we say we are. There are many, throughout the world, who are coming and receiving Jesus – from all walks of life.

It may be easier for us to love those who love us. But... as true believers in Jesus, we are to love everyone and to treat everyone with the same love that Jesus did. I know that this is difficult. It is a “learning and a growing in Jesus” process. We have been given the Holy Spirit to help us... if we allow Him to. Ultimately though, it is your choice; it is my choice; it is our choice, to truly be the actual children of God upon this earth and in this hour.

Yes, loving God truly means loving others...and...
When we love others, we are then truly loving our God!!!