



Monday Morning Faith

July 16-22, 2023

MAIN POINT

God calls us to love Him fully, not just with parts of ourselves. Doing so includes loving others the way God does.

INTRODUCTION

What would you say your default ways of worshiping God are? How do those ways line up with what you know about your personality type?

How does the practice of your faith impact others? Are you conscious of that impact? Do you think it's important to be intentional about the impact our personal discipleship has on others? Why or why not?

In this session, we will examine what it means to love God as a whole person. The answer lies in an answer that Jesus gave to a representative of the Pharisees, who was actively seeking to trap Jesus in His words. With His answer, Jesus not only exposed the failed attempt to trap Him, but also plainly stated what it means to love God fully. In addition, Jesus directed that love for God results in love for others.

UNDERSTANDING

Read Matthew 22:34-36.

The Pharisees, represented by this expert, were trying to get Jesus to pick the most important part of God's Word. All the Pharisees would have to do would be to construct an argument about why a different part of Scripture was more important than Jesus' answer. As authorities in the Law, this would have been easy for them. The summary of the question to Jesus was tantamount to, "What's the most important rule to follow as one of God's people?"

What are some ways that we, perhaps unintentionally, elevate certain aspects of the Bible above others? Give examples.

What are the dangers of selectively using pieces of the Bible while ignoring other parts of its teaching? What are some ways you can avoid doing so?

Elevating a particular part of the Bible—or a particular aspect of Christian discipleship—as being more important than the rest is extremely dangerous. The other side of the coin is to diminish other aspects of what it means to faithfully follow God. The Pharisees knew this, which prompted them to ask a seemingly unanswerable question.

Read Matthew 22:37-38.

The first part of Jesus' answer was a quote from Deuteronomy 6:4-5, which is known as "the Shema." This passage was recited multiple times daily by Jewish men and considered to be a summary of the whole body of God's law. Jesus' answer moved the focus from right action to right affection. Jesus answered that the greatest commandment was not something to do or not to do; it was Someone to adore. Obedience begins not with a checklist, but with an all-consuming love for God. Jesus' point was that all of Scripture points to the same thing: God and His glory are the center of all things.

Consider the categories that Jesus mentioned in quoting Deuteronomy 6:4-5. Which of the ways He mentioned do you most naturally love God? Which one is the most significant challenge? What next steps can you take in pursuing God in light of that?

What would you identify in your own life as the strongest competitors for your affection? What do you need to reprioritize?

Read Matthew 22:39-40.

After answering the question straightforwardly about the greatest commandment, Jesus added a second part. If a person loves God in the all-consuming way that Jesus described, there is a natural outflow that must happen. The outflow is that the love a person has for God is expressed outwardly in love for other people. The reason this second part is necessary is because it represents the heart of God: as a person loves God more fully, that person is transformed into God's likeness. God's desires become the person's desires.

What does it mean for believers to love their neighbors as themselves? How should the believer understand who his or her neighbors are?

What impact would the church have on their community by loving their neighbors, both individually and collectively?

APPLICATION

What descriptors would you use for the way in which you love God?

What are some practical ways that you can demonstrate the love of God to those in your path this week?

How aware are you of your preferences in worship and service? What percentage of your time do you spend intentionally expanding your horizons in praise and service?

PRAYER

Pray that God would grow our love for Him beyond a calendar appointment or activity. Pray that we would be obedient when the Holy Spirit prompts us to serve those around us, even if it is in a way that is beyond our comfort zone.

COMMENTARY

Matthew 22:34-40

22:34-36. The Pharisees had regrouped after Jesus turned their first trap against them in 22:15-22. Seeing the same thing happen to the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together, seeking power and courage in numbers. The one expert in the law whom they chose to ask the testing question must have approached Jesus with some trepidation. For the third time in three challenges, the questioner addressed Jesus as Teacher.

This time the question was simple but profound: Which is the greatest commandment in the Law? Matthew used the simple adjective “great” (megas), but it carried superlative force (“greatest”) in this context. The question demonstrated the way the religious leaders looked at the law. In their tradition, they had reduced the law to 365 negative and 248 positive commandments. They spent much time trying to prioritize these innumerable technicalities. They thought they could trap the Lord of the law.

22:37-38. Jesus drew his answer from the most memorized and recited passage in all the Jewish Scriptures: Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength” (Deut. 6:4-5).

Jesus quoted the Septuagint almost verbatim, but he substituted mind (dianoia) for the similar sounding “might” (dunameos). We are to take this list as an emphatic way of saying, “Love God with everything you are in every way possible.” But it was not without significance that our Lord deliberately substituted “mind” here rather than some other term. Christians need to take a lesson from this. We should learn to think critically and biblically.

Jesus emphasized his answer by identifying this commandment as the first and greatest commandment. This commandment was greatest because of the statement in Deuteronomy 6:4 which preceded it: “Yahweh is your God, Yahweh alone” (paraphrased). To honor Yahweh as the one true God is to love him exclusively, from among all others who claim to be gods.

22:39. But Jesus went beyond the critic’s question and added a second command, which is like (homoios, “resembling”) the first, this time drawing from Leviticus 19:18 (cf. Matt. 19:19): love your neighbor as yourself. This commandment and the first complement each other, so Jesus mentioned them together. They are not to be separated. It is impossible to love God without loving people, for his law and heart’s desire is to love others. The measure by which we know if we are truly loving people is if we love them as much as we love ourselves (cf. Eph. 5:28-31).

22:40. Every Old Testament commandment and teaching fulfilled the commands to love God and to love people.