

I.N.I.

Twenty-second Sunday after Pentecost
November 9, 2014
Matthew 22:34-40

In Christ Jesus, whose perfect love toward His Father and toward all of mankind has fulfilled the LAW for us, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

What would you answer? What would you answer to the question: What is the greatest commandment in the Law? Last Sunday in Bible Class we mentioned that if we could perfectly keep the First Commandment---with perfect respect, love and trust to God--- then we could also keep all of the rest. So that sounds pretty important to me. But what about loving our neighbor and being obedient to those in authority? What commandment would you choose?

This morning we see the Pharisees, one of Jesus' most embittered opponents trying to trap Him in His answer. In their self-righteous pride they denied God's grace and rejected their need for forgiveness and salvation. This denial of a need for the Messiah in the person of Jesus plus their jealousy over Jesus' popularity with the people ignited hatred in their hearts and led them to try to embarrass and publicly disgrace Jesus in the eyes of the people whenever they could. But they never succeeded, for Jesus used the Word and quickly and easily thwarted all their attacks against Him.

The Pharisees were immersed in the Law of God so much so that they had divided the Torah—the Law of God into 613 commandments—248 were positive commands and 365 negative commands. All of these were then graded as to their importance as well. In other words one sin, one breaking of a command would be greater than another.

The Pharisees spent their time debating and arguing such minor, insignificant things as these—how do we list all of these commandments as to their importance in our life? And that is why they sent an expert in the Law to try to, once more, trap Jesus. The question was a loaded one and the Pharisees hoped it would blow up in Jesus' face.

How could Jesus choose one greatest commandment when they had ranked over 600 of them? This surely would cause a great controversy and stir up the people for not many would agree with each others rankings.

But just like every other attack, Jesus easily answered this profound question with the WORD. He quoted Deut. 6:5 **"YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND."** This is the summary of the first table of the Law, the summary of the first three commandments: **YOU SHALL HAVE NO OTHER GODS; YOU SHALL NOT TAKE THE NAME OF THE LORD YOUR GOD IN VAIN; REMEMBER THE SABBATH DAY TO KEEP IT HOLY.**

What kind of love is here commanded? First of all we find it is to be **PERFECT LOVE** with **ALL** your heart; with **ALL** your soul and with **ALL** your mind. And secondly it is not a love of emotion; but of action. It is Agape! The highest form of love. The kind of love that God has for us sinners; a love that is always unselfish, ready to serve and to give and to do for others—totally selfless! This was man's purpose and function that God originally planned; that man love, serve, honor, worship and glorify Him their Creator.

The second summary is like it Jesus says **"YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF."** This is the summary of the second table of the Law, the summary of the 4th-10th commandment: **HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER, DO NOT MURDER; DO NOT COMMIT ADULTERY; DO NOT STEAL; DO NOT BEAR FALSE WITNESS; DO NOT COVET.**

What is Jesus doing here by laying before this man and also before us these two commands? First Jesus is answering this man's question in such a marvelous way that in Mark's Gospel we are told **AND AFTER THAT NO ONE DARED QUESTION HIM.**

Secondly the Lord is laying the Law of God before us like a mirror. A mirror shows us what we look like. A mirror truthfully reflects our image, our likeness. So also the Law truthfully reflects what we are like, shows us our thoughts, our words, our actions. And what do we see? Perfect love?

Perfect love for God? Far from it. For every time we sin, God is pushed out of that first place in our lives and we no longer fear, love and trust in Him above all things. We break the first commandment with every sin. We break the second commandment with every curse word that crosses our lips, with every sinful oath or use of God's name in a sinful way. We break the third commandment when we despise God's Word by not coming to hear His Word regularly, or not read God's Word, or not listen to His Word and not believe it. We also show our failure to love God perfectly by not being able to love our neighbor as ourselves.

In I John 4:20 John tells us **IF SOMEONE SAYS, "I LOVE GOD," AND HATES HIS BROTHER, HE IS A LIAR; FOR HE WHO DOES NOT LOVE HIS BROTHER WHOM HE HAS SEEN, HOW CAN HE LOVE GOD WHOM HE HAS NOT SEEN?**

Just a quick superficial glance into the mirror of God's Law reveals to us all the pimples, wrinkles and warts of sins that crop up every day. And we can't apply wrinkle cream, or acne wash, or wart remover to take them away. We see our loveless actions toward fellow workers and friends; loveless words toward our spouse, parents, children and other loved ones. We see our sinful, lustful, selfish, often angry thoughts that we have everyday. The mirror of the Law does not lie, does not flatter, does not cover up. How far from love, much less perfect love we all are!

The Law thunders down at us, reflects our sinful image and condemns us. **I AM A SINNER THROUGH AND THROUGH!** In fact Scripture tells us that we **ARE DEAD IN SINS; THAT THERE IS NOTHING GOOD IN OUR SINFUL NATURE; THAT EVERY INCLINATION OF OUR SINFUL HEART IS EVIL FROM OUR YOUTH; THAT OUR SINFUL MIND IS ENMITY (HOSTILE AND AT WAR) WITH GOD.**

That is how the Spirit uses the Law; to lead us to despair of ourselves; to lead us to acknowledge our miserable condition; to realize that we cannot--no matter how hard we try--we cannot meet God's demands of **PERFECT LOVE!** What a blessing that mirror is, for it is truthful and never misleading. **IT SHOWS US OUR SINS!** So the Spirit uses the Law to bring us face to face with the **MIRROR of the LAW**, and see our sins.

But notice who that God is that we are to love above all things. It is the LORD Jehovah!---- The **I AM** God of the Covenant with mankind. He is the never changing God who brought sinful man back into a covenant relationship with Him by promising and then sending His Son Jesus as our Substitute.

Jesus means "**Jehovah saves!**" His unconditional, perfect love for us led Him to keep this Law perfectly. He loved His Father with **ALL** of His heart, with **ALL** of His soul, and with **ALL** of His mind; **ALL** of the time! And He loved His neighbor; the whole world **PERFECTLY** as well! He never thought one sinful, selfish thought. He never spoke one sinful word. He never committed one sinful act. He always did what was right and never did what was wrong. And He did this all of the time for all of us and all of mankind.

God does not gloat when we sin, nor does He rejoice when we are caught in sin. He is not like the policeman who clocks you speeding and says "Gotcha" and then gives you a ticket! He hates it when we sin, but His love for us led Him to send His Son to remove the debt, to pay the fine, to meet the justice, to take our place and to be put under our punishment. And Jesus willingly came and took that punishment for us. He did pay our immense, unpayable debt; He did suffer what we deserved—damnation and separation from His Father. He did remove that barrier of sin between us and the Father. Jesus' love was in action for us!

The Apostle Paul declared in Romans 5:8-10: **BUT GOD DEMONSTRATES HIS OWN LOVE TOWARD US, IN THAT WHILE WE WERE STILL SINNERS, CHRIST DIED FOR US. MUCH MORE THEN, HAVING NOW BEEN JUSTIFIED BY HIS BLOOD, WE SHALL BE SAVED FROM WRATH THROUGH HIM. FOR IF WHEN WE WERE ENEMIES WE WERE RECONCILED TO GOD THROUGH THE DEATH OF HIS SON, MUCH MORE, HAVING BEEN RECONCILED, WE SHALL BE SAVED BY HIS LIFE.**

The Spirit uses the Gospel to bring us face to face with the **KEEPER of the LAW**, our Savior Jesus. And with that same Savior alive and living in our hearts through faith we will be moved to want to love the Lord our God with all our hearts, souls and minds. And we will be moved to want to love our neighbors as ourselves. John tells us **WE LOVE HIM BECAUSE HE FIRST LOVED**

US. In Christ alone we can have the power, the motive and the desire to love God and to love our fellow man.

Perfect love is what God demands. We cannot meet such a demand, no more than we can walk on water, raise the dead or calm the wind. We desperately need God's perfect and unconditional love for us in Christ Jesus. God showers this forgiving love upon us through His Gospel; His Good News of what His Son has done for us. Then with this love of our Savior living in our hearts through faith we will be empowered and inspired to imitate His love in our dealing with others.

Salvation free by faith in Thee, That is Thy Gospel's preaching,
the heart and core of Bible lore in all its sacred teaching.

In Christ we must put all our trust, not in our deeds or labor;
with conscience pure and hearts secure love Thee, Lord, and our neighbor.

Amen.