

## Mark 12:28-34

### “What the world needs now”

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#### Introduction

If you have been following our study through the Gospel of Mark than you know that we have chronologically come to the final week of Jesus earthly life known as the “*passion week*”. During this week Mark points out the examination from varying religious and political groups designed to either entrap Him or make Him look foolish. The context of these inquisitions was 11:18 after Jesus cleansed the temple for the 2<sup>nd</sup> time we read that they “*sought how they might destroy Him...*” This morning we will see yet another question posed to Him but it is radically different than all those who approached Him. The difference is not in the group or even the question but rather in the heart of the person who asked Him as it is ***the only honest inquiry***. Most of the scribes were Levites and were called upon to copy the scriptures and they belonged to the sect of the Pharisees. The Jews had in the 5 books of Moses 613 commandments in the law. Three hundred sixty-five of those were negative one for each day of the year. Two hundred forty-eight of them were positive, one for each of generations from Adam to their present day. Ah but if you go to David’s Psalm 15 you will find that he reduced them to only 11. But Micah in his book in chapter 6:8 reduced them down to only three. Now here Jesus reduces down to only two, ***love God and love your fellow man!***

## II. Vs. 28-31 Four dimensions of our devotion

Vs. 28 Mark records for us the primary reason this scribe was different than the delegations that had been sent to try Jesus in that he had been *only* an observer of the inquisitions not a participant, “*having HEARD THEM reasoning together*”. Further more he had become quite impressed with Jesus’ answers. This caused this scribe, whose career it was to copy and study the commandments, to ask Jesus “*Which is the first commandment of all?*” The word “*which*” is a Greek word that refers *not to an individual commandment* but of quality or importance. He was asking Jesus the distinction between the **ritual** and **ethical** aspects of the law. There were two schools of thought: One placed a higher importance upon the ritual laws of circumcision and Sabbath-keeping and the like. While the other led by Hillel emphasized the ethical and moral aspects of the law such as how you should treat your fellow man. ***Love is moral not ceremonial!*** If a person loves then they will do everything else they should do, but even if they do many right and good things except love then the moral obedience and motivation is lost. ***Every sin known to man is a violation of the law of love, and every grace and virtue is an expression of love.***

Vs. 29-31 The quotation is from the Shema Yisrael or “*Hear, O Israel*” as it makes up the first two words of this section. It goes like this: “*Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength*” from Deuteronomy 6:4-5. There are alternate interpretations of “*Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one.*” Some render this “The LORD our God *is one LORD.*” Others have it “*The LORD is our God, the LORD alone.*” It was recited twice daily at the morning and evening prayer service by every Jewish person. All

the males 13 years and one day would carry this on a small scroll placed on phylacteries bound on their foreheads or arm. This passage was the preamble of the confession of faith and duty as it spoke of the “*individual’s devotion of their whole being to God*”. The scribe wanted to know of all of God’s commandments which one held the “*priorities of life*” and Jesus answered that all human priorities begin with “***Loving God completely***”. No matter what situation or circumstance a person finds themselves in when you don’t know what to do, start first with the only Person who has the **Power** and **Resources** to handle all of life. Most of us when we are hurting and disappointed don’t start with “*Loving God*”. Instead we obsess with our problems, wrapping ourselves up in knots with our struggles which keep us from the Answer to what confronts us. But Jesus says, start with the One who sees and knows all about our problem, He is the only One that can see it from every angle. There are two things Jesus words inform us that may be a surprise:

1. First, from our perspective it doesn’t seem possible to “***love God from a commandment***”. You can’t be expected to “love” unless it is free and spontaneous, from the heart. But this perspective is based upon a misunderstanding of our relationship with God that assumes that God is demanding and commanding that we “*love Him or else!*” But nothing could be further from the truth. Instead the perspective is from a child’s loving trust for their parents, who have brought them into the world and demonstrated their care and concern through consistent nurture. They have provided for their needs, cared and been concerned over their every hurt and heartache. They have affirmed them and taught them through their continual affection and love. ***It is only natural that a child under those circumstances respond towards their parents with affectionate loving trust!*** The apostle John put it in the right perspective in 1 John 4:19 where he wrote “*We love Him because He first loved us.*” It’s easy to love some One who has loved us first and the reason why it is placed in a command is so that we will remember and recall His loving us first. We so easily forget what God continually does for us, we just don’t live with a continual awareness of God’s love for us but when we become aware of it our response is natural and spontaneous.

2. Second, the fact that Jesus tells us “HOW TO LOVE” reveals that the love for God in which Jesus is speaking of is **NOT** a mere emotion or sentiment but is instead an “***ACTION***”. ***In the Bible love is more than a feeling it is a logical choice seen in a specific action!*** This action Jesus says has four dimensions to it that are in a

different order as the three given in Deuteronomy 6:4-5. These four dimensions are what love is all about and what we need to put into practice. First the Greek word for “love” here is “*agapo*” which speaks of the Holy Spirit generate love in the heart of the yielded Christian. A divine love, which is do God from His creation.

a. **“Love God with all your heart”**: The Jews viewed the “*heart*” and “*mind*” differently then we do today. They saw the “*heart*” as the organ of the intellect and the “*mind*” as the organ of the desires and affections. As such the heart was the center of the human will as we read in Genesis 8:21 where God says that He saw that **“IMAGINATION of man’s heart is evil from his youth”** which speaks every deliberate willful intention! The Bible also speaks of the “*hardened heart*” which speaks of the deliberate choosing to disobey God. As such Jesus in using the word “*heart*” in conjunction with “*loving God*” to illustrate **making a deliberate willful decision to give back to God the love He has first given to us.** We are not to wait until He has performed up to our expectations or standards before we make this deliberate choice we choose to do so. He has already shown His continual unending love towards us as Jesus said in Matthew 5:45 *“He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.”* This is a moral and spiritual decision on our part, to cling to God’s love!

b. **“Love God with all your soul”**: The word for “*soul*” is the word “*psuche*” and it describes the innermost part of us the seat of our emotions and feelings. **To love God with all your soul describes not only loving Him with deep passion and emotion but also choosing to do in spite of deep emotions of hurts and fears as well as joy and elation.** The psalmist described it this way in Psalm 42:1 *“As the deer pants for water brooks, so pants my soul for You of God.”* But we do so not only when times are good but during seasons of great fear and anxiety as we read in Psalm 94:19 *“In the multitude of my anxieties within me, your comforts delight my soul.”* To love God with all your soul means we go to Him with all our joys and sorrows longing just to be with Him in the midst of our emotions and feelings!

c. **“Love God with all your mind”**: The word in the Greek for “*mind*” means the faculty of thought and understanding, especially moral understanding. It is with the mind that read God’s word, reason and comprehend all that God has done for us. Isaiah the prophet wrote in 26:3 that God would *“keep him in perfect peace whose MIND is stayed on You, because he trusts in You.”* Paul also reminds us of this in Philippians 4:8-9 that *“whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy-- meditate on these things. The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you.”* **God created our minds and wants us to meet Him in the quiet sanctuary of our thoughts where we can hear His still small voice.**

d. **“Love God with all your strength”**: Finally, once our heart’s as seen in our will have been moved towards God, then the emotional being of our soul has been lifted into His presence, which will move our mind to think of Him which only leaves

“*all our strength*”. This means that **we are to demonstrate our devotion towards God by obeying Him in all that He says. Applying our daily strength fulfilling His will for your life, daily living out His loving commands.** The will of God for us isn’t so mystical that no one can know what “God’s will” us for your life. In fact, Paul wrote of God’s will for each of us in 1 Thessalonians 4:3 saying “*For this is the will of God, your sanctification*” and went on to describe areas where they need to bring their life under His word.

Vs. 31 Then Jesus went on after stating the four dimensions of our love towards God the 2<sup>nd</sup> most important priority: “*You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*” **There is a love of self which is necessary as there is a self-love that is destructive.** The point Jesus is making is that we must have the same loving care we naturally exhibit towards ourselves aimed at others. What we wish good for ourselves, we should wish for others and what we wish others to do for us we should also wish to do for them. As you and I reflect upon God’s continual demonstration of love towards us even when we have been particularly difficult and ornery we are softened by the truth that we didn’t deserve His love and we certainly didn’t earn it yet God has still offered it to us. Why what we are being asked to do by God is so small in comparison its not worth mentioning. You are free to love another person who is just like you because God has so loved you. We have been loved and forgiven in part so that we can love and forgive others. Paul’s second letter to the Corinthians says that, “*all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation.*” Love is how we are to respond to those who irritate us even if they miss treat us or are unfair in their dealings with us. **Love is the only act that can change a person who is unlovely or unloving!**

### III. Vs. 32-34 Not far from the Kingdom

Vs. 32-34 This unknown scribe immediately understood the great truth he had just heard and commented on it. He realized that God is not into religion with all its rituals and outward performance. God is not concerned with religion, He is concerned with

relationships both towards Him and towards our fellow man! And this all starts with our love towards Him then flows to our love towards others.

Jesus recognized that this scribe was on the right path and commended him for it but I notice that Jesus told him that “*You are not far from the kingdom of God.*” That fascinates me because the scribe had the right answer, he valued relationship above religion, so why wasn’t he IN the kingdom instead of just NOT FAR from it? I believe because knowing the truth is only the first step, the next is the application of truth! That’s why we read that we are to “*get wisdom*” and not “*get knowledge*”.

- **KNOWLEDGE** is by definition **the accumulation of truth!**
- **WISDOM** is by definition **the application of truth!**

How terrible a thing it is to realize that a person can be near the kingdom of God without entering in it! “*So near, that you hear the sounds from those who have found their pardon! So near, yet unwilling to give up their sin, while Jesus is waiting to welcome them in!*” That being the case what was that this scribe needed to get him beyond knowledge to wisdom, what was He lacking? Ah we will take up the answer to that question next Sunday!