



“ALL IN...” Matthew 22:34-40

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Matthew 22:34-40 *But when the Pharisees heard that He had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. 35 Then one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, and saying, 36 "Teacher, which is the great*

commandment in the law?" 37 Jesus said to him, "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' 38 "This is the first and great commandment. 39 "And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' 40 "On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."

The question was herein posed to Jesus concerning an aspect of the Old Testament law. Despite the common understanding today, the law was and is more than just the Ten Commandments, right? There were, in fact, about 613 commandments that governed the nation of Israel. Out of those 613, 300-plus were prohibitions, things you're not to do; 285 were things we **are** to do. The high religious folks of the day, the Pharisees and Sadducees, they would get together, and would argue about which ones were the greater commandments and which ones were the lesser.

In other words, which ones are the misdemeanors, and which ones are the felonies. What they wanted to know ultimately was the answer to the question, "Of all the commandments, which is the greatest? Is it keeping the Sabbath day holy? Is it, 'don't murder'? Or 'You're not to have other gods before the true God'? Which are the biggy's? No doubt they wanted to know so they knew which ones should be adhered to at all cost and which ones they could break with minimal consequences. We often seek those same answers! And so they came to Jesus.

Now Jesus didn't mess around on this answer. No parable here. No avoidance. He answered straight out and plainly: "*You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.*"

No doubt this commandment, *and note that it is a commandment not an ideal or a hopeful suggestion*, is even yet today the foundational center of the whole of Christianity. In this passage, we have the "bottom line." It is where the "buck stops." It seems that suddenly our faith is quite simple, *at least in its concept*. For with this aspect firmly in place, we will find that all of the other aspects of our faith fall naturally into their place. In other words, if we "*seek first the kingdom of God, all these (other) things will be added unto us.*"

Many things in the passage before us might tend to overwhelm with their weightiness and gravity. Firstly we see the serious all-encompassing and emphatic nature of our Lord's words! Three times Jesus uses the word "*all*." Such lies in stark contrast to a religious culture that continually seeks an elusive balance between one's faith and our worldly pursuits. We try to negotiate. To "cut a deal" with God for control of various aspects of our lives. We haggle. We debate. We compromise. We talk in terms of "levels" and "percentages" and sacrifices, when God speaks of absolutes, vehement positions and unequivocal commitments. We embrace His mercy and play the grace card repeatedly, but never seem to remember other aspects such as holiness, faithfulness, and the "new man."

We fail to remember that the Bible clearly teaches principles such as 2Corinthians 6:17 *“Therefore, come out from among unbelievers, and separate yourselves from them, says the LORD. Don’t touch their filthy things, and I will welcome you.”*

Today, we so often use phrases such as *“put Jesus first.”* Meaning that as long as Jesus is mentally *first* in our lives, (which is rarely the case), we are then free to pursue as much of the world’s offerings as we can consume. But that’s not what the verse says is it? This verse doesn’t say love Him *first*, it says love Him *all*; all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind. And it goes without saying that such a love will reflect in one’s living and one’s service. *“And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you? He requires only that you fear the LORD your God, and live in a way that pleases him, and love him and serve him with all your heart and soul. And you must always obey the LORD’s commands and decrees that I am giving you today for your own good.”* Deut 10:12. It means that every aspect of our lives is run through the sieve of *“what do you want me to do Lord?”*

The apostles understood this. As Jesus approached the cross, He took that last Passover meal with His followers. In chapter 22 of Luke, verse 9, you see the faithful heart of a true follower of Christ when His disciples asked Jesus *“Where do you want us...”* Not *“I’m going to do this God, please bless it,”* or even *“Can I do this over here God?”*

Hmmm: how can we achieve such a standing in what seems like a humanly impossible scenario? Deuteronomy 30:6 tells us the secret: *“And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, (so you may) love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul that you may live.”*

The act of Jewish circumcision, the cutting away of the flesh, was meant to be a representation of a greater act. It was meant to be the *spiritual cutting away* of the flesh; a departure from our old man, our old life, the world and its passions. *“Therefore circumcise the foreskin of your heart, and be stiff-necked no longer.”* Deut 10:16 NKJ. *“...a true Jew is one whose heart is right with God. And true circumcision is not merely obeying the letter of the law; rather, it is a change of heart produced by God’s Spirit. And a person with a changed heart seeks praise from God, not from people.”* Rom 2:29 NLT

So we gather that such a status is not achieved through our efforts and good works. But rather **God does this** in us and frankly **to us**, if we will let Him! Now most physical circumcision these days is done for health reasons and done to newborn male children. Thus seldom do we get a report from the patient as to what the experience is truly like. But I can’t imagine that it is an overall pleasant experience! And often neither is the act of *spiritual* circumcision, when God *“cuts away the flesh...cuts away the desires and pursuits of this world.”* Please note the word is *“cut”*...not gently nudge or softly suggest. It is a **cutting away** of **my** pursuits and **my** wants in this world and replacing them with God’s desires and plans for me.

So the God of love Himself gives us of His love, that we might love Him in return! What is *our* part then? To first seek such a state of living, and then to *allow* His work to take place in our lives. A task that takes a lifetime to live out, *if we are willing*. We have to surrender our lives to that process and allow him to cut away the flesh and the love of the flesh from us.

Note the reading of this verse. The command is to **“Love the Lord your God.”**

“Love the Lord thy God.” *Loving* God is an act that is alive and **active**, not dead and inactive. It is dynamic, not sublime. We are, therefore, to maintain a personal relationship with God that is alive and active. It moves and breathes. It is living and active. It is sacrificial and busy! It is love according to the biblical and Christ ideals, not the new definition that the world has adopted. It’s love as manifested by Christ. A love that is gracious, patient, corrective, active, teachable, and instructive. It is a love that is close in proximity to Him.

“Love the **Lord** your God.” Such may seem to be a trivial point, but the passage doesn’t say to just “love God,” but with the addition of the word “lord” it is made personal and impacting. Because for so many of us, “lordship” **is** the problem! We love God in the respect that we love the *idea* of God, and maybe even love Him for His saving grace and the sacrifice of His Son for our redemption. But all of that...*however good and righteous it might be*, often has no real practical impact and manifest in our lives! Lordship denotes the relationship of His control over our lives. We want Jesus friend, Savior, Redeemer, guard, physician, and banker. But few of us are looking for, or allowing for, a “lord” in the controlling aspect of our lives. The word LORD in its original form here means “*He to whom a person or thing belongs. He who has power of decision making. A master. The possessor and the owner; one who has control of the person.*”

Ahhh...now that’s a whole different issue for most of us! And it is that which eventually and ultimately separates us from true Christianity! It is that which separates us from the blessings, the maturing, the relationship, the consistency, and the peace. We fail to grasp that salvation and redemption involves a “purchasing” us out of bondage, sin and death: Real salvation means He bought you and owns you now.

"Love the Lord **thy** God." Love God as *your* very own God. The word “*your*” is a personal relationship, not a distant relationship, not a corporate church relationship. God is not impersonal, far out in space someplace, distant and removed. If we are indeed His, God is beside us and within us, and we are to be personally involved with Him on a face to face basis.

We are called herein to love God with all our being. Christ breaks our being into three parts: the heart, the soul, and the mind. The full package. The total encompassing of who we are.

Jesus then gives commandment number two: “*Love your neighbor as yourself.*”

Now the irony of this verse is the twisted interpretation that is often given by those who attempt to dance out of the ramifications of it. There is a common stance out there that says that we must therefore *really* love ourselves in order to *really* love our neighbor! So we must of course work *very* hard to love ourselves: *how’s that for reasoning?*

Anyone who has a shred of understanding of the heart of mankind, knows that that is hardly the problem! In truth, we generally love ourselves like no other. Jesus is not asking that we beat ourselves down, but rather to simply *redirect* that love toward others, as God Himself as done.

On these two commandments hang all of our walk in Christ. Certainly this puts to rest the commonly held belief that this whole Jesus thing is complicated and confusing. This passage easily becomes the chief barometer for a follower of Jesus Christ, and really for his church, as to what it is that defines us or defines you as a follower. In other words, if we were to just stop and ask ourselves...*How do people see me? How am I defined by those around me? Is it a genuine and passionate love for Christ? Or am I known for something less? Something of this world instead?*

How about us as a church? How are we known here in this town? How are we known in the communities around us? Is this fellowship known first and foremost, as a church that passionately loves Jesus Christ and loves others around us? Is that how we’re known? If it’s not, then we have missed the main thing. For if we boiled down these main two commandments even further, what would we find? We would find **love**. That’s the common issue. Now be careful here! For this is not the love defined by the world. One must grasp that fact or the whole thing becomes a big mess real fast.

One must open one's eyes and heart to the love that Jesus exercises, not the gooey emotional "I'll-support-anything-you-do-and-anything-you-want-to-be" scenario. Did Jesus do that? **Absolutely not.** A simple cursory review of the gospels would dispel that illusion quite quickly! Ours is to love as Jesus loved, but one must seek out Christ to know and understand that love, and not let the world dictate what Christian love should look like. Often outsiders will point their finger and say we are so "unloving." And what they mean is we fail to love in accordance to the common, worldly, and ever changing definition of that concept. Guilty as charged! And I hope that will always be the case! But with that being said, we must then actually practice true Jesus love in the daily lives we lead.

How often we can approach the faith as these religion brokers, looking for the steps 1-2-3 to execute the recipe for religious standing. We look for what we are to **do** not what we are to **be**. But the way to God is never about a method or a "system." It is about surrendering your life and the control of it to God. It is having a trust...*a faith*, that God's design for you is greater and ultimately better than anything you could come up with on your own accord. It is your new identity. Your new center and focus. Your everything.

This is why so many of us who play church each Sunday are in fact not real Christians, because we are not real followers. All of religion is easy in comparison to what Jesus is asking of His true believers herein! And that is to *surrender*. To see every aspect of their lives through the lens of "*loving the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.*" This is why Jesus spoke of those who would appear before Him in the afterlife with their litany of good works in their pocket but Jesus says "*depart from me, I never knew you.*" (Matthew 7:22-23)

You see, it's not about the rules and regulations of churchdom. It's not about our church activity. It's not how much we can cram into our week, how much you serve around here and how many events you attend. It's not about moral religiosity and how holy you can present yourselves in public. Such outward manifests are not bad in and unto themselves, but they are not the answer. They are not the key to unlock God's love and grace. The cross did that already! The one imperative is to love and be loved. If that one aspect is firmly grounded, then your life will overflow with all of the peripheral aspects of love...all the peace, power, and success in life that love carries naturally with it.

Now, before we walk away from all of this with a self-satisfied glow of religious virtue, I encourage you to reflect upon your life. 2 Corinthians 13:5 calls us to "*Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you—unless indeed you fail the test?*" Do all aspects of your life say that you "*love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind?*" Does your handling of your finances? Your financial giving? Your communication? Your decision making? Your future plans? Your vocational pursuits? Your dating practices? Your priorities and your passions? The thing about love, is it digs way down deep into your life and profoundly undermines every other motivator!

Is Jesus your "first?"

Or is He your "everything?"