

The Great Commandment

Mark 12:28-34

MEMORY VERSE

MARK 12:33

"And to love Him with all the heart, with all the understanding, with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as oneself, is more than all the whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.

WHAT YOU WILL NEED:

As many small prizes (stickers, erasers, pencils, etc.) as the number of children in your class.

ATTENTION GRABBER!

What Would You Ask?

Ask your class what question they would ask the Lord if they could only ask Him one question. What would their question be? Take time to allow your class to think of and ask their questions. You may even want to write them on the board and allow for some class discussion.

Follow up with answers from Scripture. If you are unsure of the answer to some of their questions (some of these might be really tough questions), do not be afraid to say that you do not know. Look it up yourself during the coming week and get back to the class on the following Sunday. Explain to the class that they will hear a very important question that was asked of Jesus in their lesson today. We will learn about the question and Jesus' answer as we study further. **Love is the fulfillment of the Law.**

LESSON TIME!

In today's lesson we are going to learn what Jesus thought was the greatest commandment. The question asked in our lesson today is a good one. If we want to be followers of God, we need to know what is important to Him and how to follow His commandments. First, we will look at the question; then we will focus on the answer.

MARK 12:28

Then one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, perceiving that He had answered them well, asked Him, "Which is the first commandment of all?"

This passage of scripture begins with a man called a "scribe" asking Jesus an important question: "Which is the first commandment of all?" A scribe was a man who was a teacher of the Law of God. He also copied scripture like a secretary might type or copy a letter for their boss. One of the responsibilities of a scribe was to know all the commandments of the Law. A lawyer today must know all the rules of the law and the Constitution. To be a good lawyer today, one must know all of the things that are right to do and wrong to do.

Just as a lawyer studies right and wrong, a scribe would study what God says we should and shouldn't do. These are called "commands." The Law of the Bible was filled with commands. There were 613 commands for the scribe to learn. Three hundred and sixty-five of these commands were things that God said we are not to do and 248 of them God said we are to do.

Have you ever wondered what the most important thing is to the Lord? When the scribe asked this question it was like he was asking, "Jesus, out of everything in the Bible, what is the most important command in it for us to do?" A sincere heart that is asking that question will always get an answer from Jesus. We need to have sincere hearts that are honestly seeking the Lord and how we can please Him.

The Ten Commandments

Ask your students if they know what commandments are the most famous of God's commandments. The answer, of course, is the Ten Commandments. Have your class read through the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20 or Deuteronomy 5).

Ask your students to observe some things from the commandments. For example, how many commandments are things we should do? Things we shouldn't do? How many are about our relationship with God? How many are about our relationship with others?

Commandments are like rules. If you are playing a game and someone doesn't play by the rules, it makes the game not very much fun. When someone cheats on the rules it ruins the game. God has given us commands to help us with the game of life. If we play by the rules, life is the best it can be. But if we cheat or break the commands of God, it ruins life for us and for others. God knows how to play the game of life better than any one else does, so if we are smart we will play by His rules.

Something else that is very important about God's law is that it teaches us about God's perfection and righteousness. It leads us to Jesus because the reality is that none of us can keep all of these rules no matter how hard we try. The Bible even tells us that. So when we see that we can't measure up to God's standards and that we are sinners and separated from God we can then see our need for Jesus. When we ask Jesus into our lives, He changes us and helps us to live according to God's standard. **Love is the fulfillment of the Law.**

One of the biggest debates between all of the scribes was which of the 613 commands was the most important. They were always arguing over which one was the greatest commandment. So when the scribe asked this question of Jesus, he was sincere. This was the question he wanted answered more than any other question he could think of.

MARK 12:29-31

Jesus answered him, "The first of all the commandments is: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.

'And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' This is the first commandment.

And the second, like it, is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."

The question was asked and Jesus had the answer. Jesus always has the answer. His answers are always perfect. Jesus is never shocked by our questions. He is never at a loss for an answer. He doesn't laugh at our questions. He is not afraid they might be too hard. He always welcomes our questions, as long as they are from a sincere heart. In Matthew 7:7-8 Jesus tells us to ask, seek and knock. Never be afraid to bring anything to God (James 1:5-8).

Jesus answered the scribe and said, "love the Lord your God." This is the first question we should ask ourselves. Do we love God? If we want to obey the greatest

commandment, we need to love God. God is love and anyone who wants love needs to seek God (1 John 4:7-8). We love God because He first loved us (Romans 5:8). He loved us so much that He gave us His Son, Jesus, to die on our behalf (John 3:16).

How are we supposed to love God?

- 1) WITH ALL OUR HEART: from the deepest part of our lives; our innermost being.
- 2) WITH ALL OUR SOUL: with our very lives, our will and emotions.
- 3) WITH ALL OUR MIND: our thoughts.
- 4) WITH ALL OUR STRENGTH: with our abilities, power and might.

Why does God want us to love Him? Why is love so special to God? God desires our love more than anything we could ever offer Him. The reason why is that love is free. It is a gift given freely. You cannot make someone love you. God will never make us love Him; we choose to love Him. When we love God we show others that we know Him (1 John 4:7-8). **Love is the fulfillment of the Law** (Romans 3:8-10).

The first part of Jesus' answer was a prompting of a vertical relationship of love between us and God. The second part of the answer can only be fulfilled if we first love God with all we have. The second part is to love our neighbor. Who is our neighbor? Our neighbor is anyone near to us. It could mean someone we do not even know.

Getting to Know Your Neighbor

Give your class some time to get to know each other. Go around the class and have each child give their name and one reason why they love Jesus. Spend about five minutes doing this activity. To test them have each of them close their eyes and recite as many names of fellow students that they can remember.

Reward the students who have remembered the most with the privilege of passing out small prizes.

Imagine what this world would be like if everyone loved their neighbor as themselves. There would be no more war, famine, crime, or abuse. No one would have to lock their doors at night. You could walk any street, night or day, without worrying about being mugged or abducted. Our schools would be safe from drug pushers and gangs. All children would share their toys and let others go first. The secret is in fulfilling this one command: love your neighbor as your self.

Jesus did not answer the scribe with one commandment but with two. Actually, he took two commands and made them one instruction. If we seek to do these two commands, we will fulfill all the law (Matthew 22:40). The scribe must have been very happy to finally know the answer to his most difficult question.

Jesus took 613 commands and simplified them down to two: First, love God and second, love others. If you were playing a game that had 613 rules to remember, it would be a very difficult game. But if someone came along and gave you two simple instructions to follow, summing up the 613, wouldn't it be great? Sure it would.

Jesus summed up all the law and the prophets in two commands. If we love God with all our hearts, souls, minds, and strength, and love our neighbors as ourselves, we will fulfill all 613 commands (Romans 13:10). Love is the foundation for all obedience to God. God's love in our hearts and lives will help us love our neighbors. **Love is the fulfillment of the Law.**

MARK 12:32-34

So the scribe said to Him, "Well said, Teacher. You have spoken the truth, for there is one God, and there is no other but He.

And to love Him with all the heart, with all the understanding, with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as oneself, is more than all the whole burnt offerings and sacrifices."

So when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, He said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." And after that no one dared question Him.

The scribe knew that Jesus' answer was the truth. Jesus always tells the truth. The question is do we follow His truth? The scribe was getting close to the kingdom of God. All he needed to do was to receive the truth and follow Jesus.

Today you might be like the scribe. You know Jesus speaks the truth. You know He is truth. All you need to do now is to accept Jesus as your personal Savior and Lord and follow after Him. Being close to accepting is not good enough for salvation. You must be born again (John 3:3). If you think there are too many rules to follow Jesus, you are wrong. There are only two simple commands, first love God, and second, love your neighbor as yourself. How do we do that? We can live this life through the power of the Holy Spirit when we ask Jesus to come into our life. **Love is the fulfillment of the Law.**

PRAYER

Lead the children in a prayer of commitment to love the Lord and love our neighbors. If there are any children who have not yet responded to the gospel, give them an opportunity to do so.