



**Adult Sunday School Lesson Summary for April 18, 2010
Released on Wednesday, April 14, 2010**

"The Necessity of Love"

Lesson Text: Matthew 22:34-40

Background Scripture: Matthew 5:17-20; 22:34-40

Devotional Reading: Romans 5:11-20

Matthew 22:34-40

34 But when the Pharisees had heard that he had put the Sadducees to silence, they were gathered together.

35 Then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked him a question, tempting him, and saying,

36 Master, which is the great commandment in the law?

37 Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.

38 This is the first and great commandment.

39 And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.

40 On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

TODAY'S AIM

Facts: to learn about loving God and loving those around us.

Principle: to affirm that without love we cannot keep the commandments.

Application: to show that when we love God and our neighbors, we fulfill the law of God.

INTRODUCTION

We live in a world of broken connections. Some of it is caused by failures of technology. Cell phones drop our calls; work stops when "the network" is down; a power outage interrupts our access to entertainment. These kinds of broken connections are relatively new in the timeline of history.

Other kinds of broken connections are very old. Think of the inequities in society. Sometimes these are holdovers of racism; such may continue long after prejudicial laws have been revoked. Sometimes there is misguided nationalism, with hostility directed indiscriminately toward foreigners. Sometimes there is a great divide between the rich and the poor, with the tacit assumption that money "makes the person."

The worst of the broken connections are very personal. Broken marriages set the partners adrift and put the children in limbo. Old animosities fester against the boss, against the neighbor, against the in-laws. Many people just feel alienated from their own world, longing to connect with someone ... anyone!

Jesus taught about two great laws that fix broken connections. The first law is to love God. Making peace with our Creator is the most important reconnection of all. The second law is to love our neighbor, whoever he or she may be. When people live out this kind of love, one by one the old breaks in life's connections can begin to disappear.

LESSON BACKGROUND

In the final week before His crucifixion, Jesus successfully answers a number of challenges to His teaching. One of those challenges comes from the Sadducees, a sect of the Jews that does not believe in resurrection. They create for Jesus a question that shows their contempt for that concept: If a woman has been married seven times, they ask, which man will be her husband in Heaven? Jesus easily handles their challenge, explaining that in Heaven people will not be paired off in marriage (see Matthew 22:23–33). That is the immediate backdrop to our next passage. Mark 12:28–34 is parallel.

CHALLENGING QUESTION (Matthew 22:34-36)

1. Why did the religious leaders come together to ask Jesus questions? (v. 34)

The Pharisees, in contrast with *the Sadducees*, do believe in resurrection. The two groups frequently argue about it, as we see them doing in Acts 23:6–10. When the Pharisees hear that Jesus has put their opponents *to silence*, they are favorably impressed according to Mark 12:28. But they are not finished challenging Him.

2. What did one Pharisee lawyer attempt to do to Jesus (v. 35)?

To be a *lawyer* in a religious sense is to be an expert in interpreting the fine details of God's law (also known as a scribe cf. 2:4; 7:28–29). As a legal expert, this man is clever enough to come up with yet another challenge for Jesus.

On the surface the lawyer seems to be an earnest seeker of truth. But it is clear that when he asks Jesus a *question* he is also *tempting him*. This means that the lawyer is daring Jesus to come up with a good answer to a very difficult question. The implication is that the man wants Jesus to fail the test. The lawyer wants the crowd to see Jesus as a fraud.

3. What question did the Pharisees ask Jesus? Why? (v. 36)

The lawyer asked, "Master, which is the great commandment in the law?" (Matt. 22:36).

The rabbis frequently argue among themselves about the relative importance of God's laws. This is an issue with practical implications, because some situations force a person to choose among laws when they apparently conflict with one another. When performing one religious duty means that another religious duty has to be ignored, which one should take precedence?

There are more than 600 laws in the Old Testament. Ideally, if the law at the top can be identified, then it will be easier to place the other laws in their proper positions below it; this procedure is called *rank ordering*. In actual practice, however, no consensus on the rank ordering is ever reached by the rabbis. What will Jesus say about this complex problem?

CONCLUSIVE ANSWERS (Matthew 22:37-40)

4. How did Jesus respond to the Pharisee in dealing with the commands of the law? (vs. 37,38)

As He did so often, Jesus went directly to the heart of the matter. The question, whatever the critics' intent, was really a worthy one and deserved a correct answer. But His answer was more profound than the Pharisees expected. The key to keeping any of the commandments is love—first love for “the Lord thy God.”

Jesus draws His answer from what is called *the Shema*, a Hebrew word that means “hear.” Deuteronomy 6:4,5: “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord: and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.”

The Jews used “heart” to speak of the core of the entire human being, the center of physical, rational, moral, and spiritual life. To love God with all one's heart thus means to be devoted to Him from the depths of one's being.

The “soul” to the Jews was the entire person (cf. Gen. 2:7), with life imparted by the Spirit of God. To love God with all one's soul is to give Him one's whole personality, with all its faculties and expressions.

The word “might” (Deut. 6:5) or “mind” (Matthew 22:37) speaks of the power or ability with which human beings are endowed. It includes the ability to reason, reflect, and make moral judgments. Thus, to love God with all one's mind is to use all reasoning and reflection to bring glory to Him.

God desires our love. We are to love God in every way, with everything we have. It is in this light that Jesus presents Deuteronomy 6:5 as *the first and great commandment* in answering the question of the lawyer.

5. How would your life be different if you truly loved God with all your heart, soul, and mind? How can you make progress in this regard, and why should you?

Probably we would find ourselves much more zealous for any kind of contact with God. Such contact includes prayer, Bible study, worship, and fellowship with other believers. We would no doubt manifest more fruit of the Spirit (love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance; Galatians 5:22, 23).

The result would be a transforming of everything from our relationships with others, to our attitude toward material possessions, to our interest in the shallower aspects of popular culture. The visible difference in our lives would surprise some people, open opportunities to share our faith, and even cause some to come to Christ.

6. How had the Pharisees fallen short of Jesus' great commandment?

Here was the tragic irony of the Pharisees in Jesus' day. They posed as the champions of the Mosaic code and even tried to guarantee its enforcement through a body of tradition. Yet they failed to please God in all this because they did not really love Him. Their motives in defending His laws were improper. They sought the praise of men instead of the glory of God (Matt. 23:5-7). They did seek His favor, but they wrongly assumed that it could be earned by keeping the law.

They therefore did not really know the God they claimed to worship. They remained outside the kingdom of heaven and kept others from entering as well (Matt. 23:13).

This is also the tragedy of present-day religious people who seek God's favor through good deeds. However pious they may appear to others, their unregenerate nature makes it impossible for them to please God. They are spiritually dead (Eph. 2:1-3) and can produce no good works until they receive His gracious salvation by faith (vs. 8-10).

7. What is the second great commandment? How is it like the first? (v. 39)

Even though the lawyer has not asked for it, Jesus gives him *the second* greatest commandment as well. It is *like unto* the first command, for it is also about *love*. Not only must people love God, they must also love other people.

When Jesus says *love thy neighbor as thyself*, He is not commanding self-love as a priority, as some have proposed. What He means is that just as truly as all well-balanced, sane people take care to attend to their own needs, to that same extent we should be careful to attend to the needs of others.

Jesus' Parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:29–36 leaves no doubt that "neighbor" is defined by action, not by location, social status, or biological descent. Interestingly, that parable is preceded by a lawyer's affirmation that the way to eternal life is to "love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself" (Luke 10:27).

8. Why did Jesus single out these commands as most important? (v. 40)

When these *two commandments* are correctly understood and followed, they sum up all the requirements of *the law and the prophets*. When a person truly loves God, there will be no question about profaning His name or turning to idols. When a person truly loves a neighbor, he or she does not need to be told not to harm that neighbor in terms of stealing, lying, or having an adulterous affair with the neighbor's spouse.

Every law that is necessary for the good of society is an outgrowth of these two laws. The more that people live by these two laws, the less any other law is needed. Conversely, the more that people ignore the laws of love and try to regulate society with an ever-increasing number of legal statutes, the more frustrating the situation becomes. God's people are to live out these two laws from the heart.

PRACTICAL POINTS

- 1.** Those seeking spiritual truth can find no better source than Jesus (Matthew 22:34-35; cf. John 14:6).
- 2.** No question is too difficult for Jesus to answer (Matthew 22:35,36; cf. James 1:5).
- 3.** Neither time nor men can change the truth of God's Word (Matthew 22:37; cf. Deuteronomy 6:5).
- 4.** Loving God is both man's duty and his privilege (Matthew 22:38).
- 5.** Loving one's neighbor is not a suggestion but a duty (v. 39).
- 6.** A person cannot fully love God without also loving his neighbor (Matthew 22:40; 1 John 4:20-5:3).

CONCLUSION

There are several reasons why laws are often inadequate. Some laws are written badly, such as those that prohibit a certain act but provide no means of enforcement. Some laws are unrealistic and are sooner or later repealed.

Other laws are just bad to start with. Rosa Parks saw a bad law, a law that perpetuated racial barriers. So in 1955 in Montgomery, Alabama, she defied the order to move to the back of the bus. Her action sparked the Montgomery bus boycott and helped to propel Martin Luther King, Jr., to leadership in the American civil rights movement. Bad laws and broken connections between people just seem to go together.

Even good laws do not seem to be enough to achieve the ideals that society wants. That may be why some claim that "You can't legislate morality." The more we depend on the letter of the law, with all its fine print and clever definitions, the less

we seem to be able to achieve our goals. There is something inherently wrong with living a life that is made up only of the letter of thou shalt and thou shalt not in contrast with the spirit of those laws.

PRAYER

Loving Father, we praise You that You loved us before we loved You. Forgive us when our lives have failed to reflect Your love. Help us to share Your love with everyone. We pray this in the name of Jesus, the perfect embodiment of love. Amen.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

Love God. Love one another.

ANTICIPATING NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

In our lesson next week we are invited into the kingdom of God. The imagery is of a banquet that God Himself has prepared for us. God has no favorites. Each and every person in this world has the opportunity to walk into the kingdom and sit at this banquet table because Jesus has prepared the way for us. **"All Are Invited."** Study Luke 14:15-24.

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