



Oct. 29, 2023 Mt. 22: 34-46 Deut. 34:1-12

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ENTERING THE SCENE:

Our overburdened lawyer with his bulging briefcase and armloads of books is a stand in for all of us who also want to know which of the commandments is the greatest. One hopes that he originally came with an honest question, but as so often happens we bow to the opinion of others we think important. Many times a loving response is our first response to a need or question, but we cave in to “common sense” answers and override our best instincts. Law helps us hide behind ‘reason’ when love is really the answer. Jesus points to where the truth resides; it is in the heart. We are invited to answer whose son the Messiah is as well as the Pharisees.

Mt. 22:34-46 34 Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. 35 One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: 36 Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law? 37 Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' 38 This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' 40 All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

41 While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, 42 What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he "The son of David," they replied. 43 He said to them, "How is it then that David, speaking by the Spirit, calls him 'Lord'? For he says, 44 The Lord said to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet." 45 If then David calls him 'Lord,' how can he be his son?" 46 No one could say a word in reply, and from that day on no one dared to ask him any more questions.

DISCUSSION QUESTION: Jesus teaches that the greatest commandment is to love with all you have and are. How does this help you when you have to make a decision?

PRAYER: Before you came into our world Lord, I could only guess what God is like from my experiences. Who would have thought that you would reveal yourself as Love incarnate? Once in a while I get a glimpse of the kind of love you revealed, but it is such a fleeting thing. It is only when I am loved by someone that I connect with this fundamental reality again. Help me as I stumble from glimpse to glimpse towards you. Amen.

WORD STUDY AND QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

SILENCED: To be silenced is to have someone or something render you powerless.

What do you think the Pharisees made of the fact that the Sadducees were silenced? What happens to you, when those in power and supposedly the source of answers come up voiceless?

SADDUCEES: The Sadducees were in charge of the Temple and official worship practices. They did not believe in a personal afterlife. Normally they would not collaborate with the Pharisees.

What common bond drew these two groups together at this time?

PHARISEES: Pharisees believed in a life beyond physical life. The Sadducees violently disagreed with this belief.

What about Jesus' teaching and preaching enabled these two groups to overcome their mutual disagreements and join in the effort to trap Jesus?

TOGETHER: To be together is to gather two or more entities into a combination that creates a new reality.

What new reality is created by this combination of opposites, i.e. Sadducees and Pharisees?

LAW: A law is something a group of people agree to uphold in order to make humane life possible. The Ten Commandments served this purpose. The law was one way God shared God's fullness with humanity.

Are there any ideas or beliefs, that you presently have, that prevent you from the fullness of God's love for you?

Can the truth of this gospel help remove the impediment that keeps you from this fullness?

QUESTION: A question is a form of quest; a search for that which is still unknown. It can be a source of information or of challenge.

Are you a questioning, wondering, pondering person? When you are asked a challenging question, what is your first "gut level" reaction? How do you feel when someone gently leads you into a deeper consciousness by their use of questions?

TEACHER: A teacher is one who is recognized as one having expertise in an area that you lack.

How do you recognize a teacher? Who are teachers for you?

GREATEST COMMANDMENT: A commandment is an instruction given by someone in authority. There were 613 commandments by this time. The average John or Jane could hardly even know all the 613 let alone have the freedom to follow all the fine points of interpretation.

What impact would Jesus' condensation of 613 laws to two basic laws would have had on the people. How might that have changed their lives? What would that have done for the simple people? The learned ones?

LOVE: Love seems to be the energy that brings everything/everyone into being and holds them in being.

Examine the word love. What does it mean? What goes into deciding what or whom one loves or value above all else?

HEART: The ancients thought the heart was the seat of all emotions, the source of the will, and the very essence of the person. It was the center of thought, courage, and motivation.

What does it mean to love someone/thing with all your heart given this understanding of 'heart'? How do you love God with all your heart?

SOUL: The soul signified the self of a person in Jesus' time.

Has this word taken on any additional meanings in our own time? If so, what are they?

MIND: Our mind is the place where we learn, decide, and reflect. It is the place where we assign meaning to experiences. In Dt. 6:5 it is not included in the commandment Jesus is quoting. In a system that forbids adding or subtracting anything to the scripture Jesus is challenging the accepted understanding of the commandment.

What does adding 'mind' to the commandment do to the way people would respond to Jesus' message? How does this added dimension affect the individual when they are called to decide something?

NEIGHBOR: A neighbor is one who lives near (neigh) to you and often meant one of your own tribe. In the time of Jesus is usually meant someone who was of the same belief.

What does Jesus do to the meaning of the word neighbor? How do you define the word in this global era?

YOURSELF: We are a composite of heart, soul, mind, and strength. We coexist with all of creation and cannot be understood apart from all creation. Both Jesus and Rabbi Akiva taught that God, our neighbor, and ourselves are united in one whole, and we are to love each in order to love anyone.

Do you love God and others easier than you love yourself? Why? Is there anything in your belief system that leads you into this temptation? How can this affect your faith life?

PROPHETS: The prophet was a bridge between the giving of the law and the coming of the Messiah. In their level of understanding, the lack of a prophet signaled that God had withdrawn and was leaving them to their own devices.

What implications would a prophet have for this part of the gospel?

CHRIST: Christ in the original language means savior, the anointed one. Kings were anointed.

What do you think Jesus was asking by using the word Christ?

SON: A son is the future of the father, as well as the whole family, in the Jewish frame of reference.
What do you think Jesus was asking by using the word son?

DAVID: David was the high point in the life of the Jewish people. The Messiah was to come from the house of David.
What is Jesus saying about their understanding of the Messiah? What is going on in this line of questioning?

SPIRIT: People conceived spirits of two sources of power, good and bad. It was imperative that one defined just what spirit was the source of a person's power. In the days of Jesus, God's spirit was seen as the energy that enabled people to follow God's plan.
Reflect on the power of the Spirit in your life. How does it enable you to identify the source of energy that you are operating out of when making decisions?

LORD: The word Lord was an honorific title used for a king, a god, the owner of a slave, or a husband. It signified a superior rank, and was used as a polite form of address.
In what way do you think the word Lord is being used by the Pharisees and Sadducees? How is Jesus using this word?

RIGHT HAND: To be at someone's right hand is to have the place of honor and power.
Who is the one at the right hand in this saying of David?

DARED: To dare is to challenge someone.
Why do you think they backed off from any further questioning?

PARALLEL TEXTS: Mt. 22:34-40 // Mk. 12:28-34; Lk. 10:25-28; Jn. 13:34f; Mt. 22:36 // 1 Jn. 4:21; Mt. 22:37 // Dt. 6:5; Mt. 22:39 // Lev. 19:18; James 2:8; Mt. 22:40 // Rom 3:18f; Gal. 5:14; Mt. 22:41-6 // Mk. 12:35f; Mt. 22:42 // Mt. 9:27; Mt. 22:44 // Ps. 110:1; Acts 2:35; Heb. 1:13; Mt. 22:46 // Rom. 2:22f;

OTHER TEXTS OF THE WEEK: Ex. 22:20-26; [Ps. 18: 2-4, 47, 51](#); 1Thess. 1: 5-10; Mt. 22:34-40; Revised Common Lectionary: Dt. 34:1-12; [Ps. 90: 1-6, 13-17](#); 1 Thess. 2:1-8; Mt. 22:34-46

SUPPORTIVE INFORMATION:

By obeying the divine commandments the people that God has chosen will experience His nearness to a degree greater than that of all other peoples. Obedience to the Law is therefore not slavery to a divine despot; it is the way of regular encounter with God. Law in Judaism is not the enemy of mystical experience; it is that experience, generalized and regularized for all kinds and conditions of Jews. Pg. 35 Hertzberg, Arthur. Judaism. NY. Touchstone Books. 1991.

The Pharisees intervened in Jewish history in the painful aftermath of the Maccabean revolt against the imposition of alien cultures and foreign gods. They focused upon the Jewish behaviors that were, in their experience, appropriate historical responses to their religious and political situation. Pg. 116 Lee, Bernard. The Future Church of 140 BCE. NY. Crossroad Pub. 1995

[Maimonides](#) (Moses Maimonides (March 30, 1135 Córdoba, Spain – December 13, 1204 Fostat states that the prime function of the Messiah, when he comes, will be to reestablish the full hegemony of all the laws of the Torah, even though Gentiles need not accept any of these laws but the [Noahide](#) commandments. Ochs, Peter, et al Ed. [Christianity in Jewish Terms](#), Boulder CO. Westview Press. 2000. Pg. 121.

Matthew's version (of the love commandment) very likely reflects the hostility between Matthew's Jewish-Christian community and certain other Jews around A.D. 90 as they competed for spiritual leadership among Jews after the destruction of Jerusalem and its Temple in A. D 70. The opponents are identified in 22:34 as "Pharisees," who were at least in part other spiritual progenitors of Matthew's rivals. Their spokesman is a "lawyer," an expert in Jewish Law or Torah. Pg. 78. Harrington, Daniel –Keenan, James [Jesus and Virtue Ethics](#), NY. Sheed & Ward Book. 2002.

Matthew 22:37-40). "Do unto others" is the classic expression of reciprocal altruism. This central principle of evolutionary morality is here declared by Jesus to be the basis of all the teachings of the Jewish Law and the basic moral rule for Christians. Significantly, it is subordinated to only one other commandment, a complete devotion to God-which is consistent with the evolutionary logic of religious ethics. God serves to uphold the laws that bind society together and enables reciprocal altruism to function in a large complex society. This supreme commandment signals a complete commitment to the being that oversees the good of the group and thus is a sign of commitment to that group. Teehan, John. The Evolutionary Basis of Religious Ethics. [Zygon](#). 9/06. Pg. 762.

And then he (Jesus) summarized the Ten Commandments in terms of love. This abbreviation of their details was anything but a relaxation of their demands. Yet precisely here he excited to bitter debate some who saw themselves as standing sentinel over the law. For the law could not consist of love unless it were itself an instrument and tool of love – unless, that is, the God of righteous, holy love see as such a God of grace and mercy, whose justice embraced the very ones whom the judgments of the law excluded. Lewis, Alan E. [Between Cross and Resurrection](#). Grand Rapids, MI. Eerdmans. 2001. Pg. 46.

Love as Free Self-Giving: "Whenever we love, whether we love God or our neighbor, we must love with our whole heart, our whole soul, our whole mind, and all our might. Otherwise, it isn't love, because that's what love means, giving your whole self. ...love has to be absolutely free. That is, it cannot be the effect or result or consequence of something else. It is not determined, not necessitated, not done under compulsion. It is not caused. But not only that. Real loving, divine loving, is not even done for some good and sufficient reason. God does not love us because we deserve it, because we are worthy, because we are lovable. Nor does God love us because we are unworthy, don't deserve it, are not loveable. I believe that one of the basic principles that Jesus taught is that God doesn't operate in terms of "deserving" at all. Page 105. Bruteau, Beatrice. Radical Optimism. Crossroad. N.Y. 1993.

Because we have forgotten the links that Jesus made between the love of God and the love of neighbor, because we have tried to live them as two separate realities, we have understood the fullness of neither. Unless we reunite them, we cannot respond to the most fundamental call of Christian baptism – a call to live as friends. Unless we reunite them, we risk sacrificing one at the cost of the other. Ripple, Paula. Called to be Friends. Notre Dame, IN. Ave Maria Press. Page 14.

Rather, this God (of Jesus) breaks the law, breaks it because the strong interpretation of the Love Command is the foundation of all other laws.(Mt. 22:36-40). Jesus disobeys the law. He breaks ritual laws, works on the Sabbath, forgives sins, and remits the legal penalty for adultery. His followers also break laws. They obey visions that tell them to ignore Jewish dietary rules (Acts 10:10-15) and to mingle with gentiles, converting them not to Jewish law but to Christian freedom (Acts 11:1-18 and 15:23-31). They are expelled from the synagogues for not keeping the laws of Torah (Acts 21:27-28) and persecuted by the state for not keeping the laws of Rome (Justin 1877). This is the God whom Jesus reveals, a God who helps human beings break their biological laws, their evolved dispositions toward exclusive love of self and kin, because the higher law is the strong interpretation of the Love Command. Williams, Patricia. Christianity and Evolutionary Ethics: Sketch Toward a Reconciliation. Zygon. Vol 31, no. 2 (June 1996) Pages 253ff.

Hefner (Philip Herner. The Human Factor: Evolution, culture and Religion. Minneapolis. Fortress. 1993. Pg.207) sees the basis of agape in God, "that is, in the way things really are". Given this foundation of love in ultimate reality, altruistic love attains an intrinsic, ontic character. Love, is "written into the fundamental nature of human reality". It thus becomes apparent that altruistic love does not ultimately spring from the family or other human relations, as theories of kin selection or reciprocal altruism presuppose. Msisinger, Hubert. Sociobiology: The Conversation Continues: Christian Love and Biological Altruism. Zygon. 12/2000. Pg. 769.

Socrates saw human nature as made up of two winged steeds, one noble, one ignoble, harnessed to a single chariot and struggling against the control of a charioteer. Hillel (Jewish rabbi) experiencing tension between two opposing promptings in his life, wrote, "if I am not for myself, who will be for me? But if I am for myself alone, what (good) am I?" Christ, acknowledging the conflict, admonished us to struggle to love our neighbor as ourselves. Gerald A. Corey Jr. From Maclen's Triune Brain Concept to the Conflict Systems Neurobehavioral Model: The Subjective Basis of Moral and Spiritual Consciousness. Zygon. June 2000. Page, 402.

According to Biblical scholars, there three terms – heart, soul, and mind – describe differing but overlapping human characteristics and activities rather than distinct faculties of components of the person... Barbour, Ian G. Neuroscience, Artificial Intelligence, and Human Nature: Theological and Philosophical Reflections. Zygon. 9/1999. Page. 363.

My neighbor is the one who crosses the road for me! Henri Nouwen Lk. 10: 29-37)

Mt. 22.34–40: The greatest commandment (Mk 12.28–34; Lk 10.25–29). 35: Lawyer, Gk "nomikos"; the word occurs only here in Matthew, and in Lk 7.30; 10.25; 11.45,46,52; 14.3; Titus 3.13. Except for Titus, where "Zenas the lawyer" seems to be a member of the community, lawyers appear only in the gospels, as here, to provoke Jesus with a question. There is not enough textual evidence either in the NT or elsewhere to determine whether this title indicates a special class of Jewish authorities different from the scribes (on the latter, see 7.28–29n.; 13.52n.). Test, see 4.7; 16.1; 19.3; 22.18. 36: Which commandment, the traditional number of commandments in later rabbinic literature is 613; some attempted to epitomize the Law (see, e.g., b. Makk. 23b; b. Yebam. 47b, citing Mic 6.8 and other verses). 37: You shall love the Lord, Deut 6.5. Deut 6.4–5 is the "Shema," the basic affirmation of Jewish belief. 39: Love your neighbor, Lev 19.18; m. Avot 1.2; cf. Rom 13.9; Gal 5.14; Jas 2.8. 40: Hang all the law, see 7.12n. Pg. 41-2.

Pharisees and Judas

Jesus' enemies are more persistent in Matthew's Gospel than in Mark's, as the expanded role of Judas indicates (27.3–5). Judas's acceptance of the thirty pieces of silver in exchange for his betrayal of Jesus (a Matthean addition) contributes to the stereotype of the venal and disloyal Jew. Jesus' other opponents, such as the Pharisees, appear more devious than in Mark's Gospel. Matthew alone contains the famous "woe to you scribes and Pharisees" in ch 23. The Pharisees (sometimes accompanied by other adversaries) constantly question and harass Jesus, especially regarding observance of Torah (9.10–13; 12.1–8,24–28; 15.1–9; 16.1–4; 19.3–9; 22.15–22, 34–40). Even the word "rabbi" has a negative connotation in Matthew: Judas refers to Jesus by that title while betraying him (26.49). Matthew's Pharisees may represent rival Jewish scribes competing for community loyalty following the Roman war, and thus

Matthew's Gospel may provide a look into the tensions existing between Jesus' followers and other Jews in the late first century. (See "Jewish Movements of the NT Period," p. 526.) Adherents of a particular group or set of beliefs often polemicize most strongly against those who share similar, but not identical, beliefs; this may be responsible for some of the strong anti-Pharisaic rhetoric in Matthew. [The Jewish Annotated New Testament](#) Pg. 44

SUGGESTED READINGS:

Links to all the books mentioned in this guide are on The Ark web site: www.theark1.com

Beck, Robert. Sunday Homilies: Cycle A 2014. Pgs. 201-204. To order contact [Carol Oberfoell](#)

Beck, Robert. Sunday Homilies: Cycle A 2008. Pgs. 166-169. To order contact [Carol Oberfoell](#)

Beck, Robert. Sunday Homilies: Cycle A 2001. Pgs. 158-161. To order contact [Carol Oberfoell](#)