

July 28, 2019

“The Great Commandments”  
Matthew 22:34-40

FCF: Needing guidance for life

**PROPOSITION:** (anchor) Jesus alone has the right to tell us how to live.  
(magnet) We need to heed what He says.

**SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:**

Here’s a recent news item that should interest you ([READ “Lead Astray”](#)):

An aggressive Google Maps driving direction led to dozens of drivers getting stuck in mud en route to Denver International Airport. A large crash on Peña Boulevard in Aurora, Colo., on June 23 caused GPS applications like Google Maps to search for a quicker route to the airport. Driver Connie Monsees told KMGH that she and about 100 other drivers seemed to be following smartphone directions onto a dirt road. Unbeknownst to the mapping program—or the drivers—the dirt road was impassible after recent heavy rainfall, and most of the motorists became stuck behind a few cars that had become bogged down in mud. Those with all-wheel drive vehicles were able to get through, and Monsees says she picked up a few stranded motorists and delivered them to the airport.

GPS systems can be a great convenience. But we can obviously become too dependent upon them. That said, we still need to find our way. We still need maps, guidance, and direction.

We see that very thing in our text. A man comes to Jesus pressing Him on His view of the maps, guidance, and direction needed for life. And Jesus’ response is well worth our hearing.

**SCRIPTURE READING:** [Matthew 22:34-40](#)

**PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION****SERMON INTRODUCTION:**

I’m continuing the Apollo 11 stories from last week. Again, it was a dramatic mission. As the spacecraft approached Earth, storms were brewing in the landing zone. If it continued on its planned course, high-altitude winds would tear the parachutes, causing a splashdown with enough force to kill the astronauts. But the danger was seen, thanks to another US space effort, the “Program 417” weather satellites. So the crew changed course to a site 200 miles away.

But imagine another scenario. Let’s say the Program 417 folks told NASA what they had seen and the response was a dismissive and angry, “We’ve got this all planned out and don’t need to be bothered. Besides, who are you to tell us the steps to take and what to do?” Who indeed?

Which brings us to Matthew 22. “Who has the the right to speak?” On Sunday, Jesus rode into the city. On Monday, He cleansed the temple. It’s as though He thought all of this was His. So the religious leaders pushed back. This is the third of three attempts to embarrass Jesus. Two down and one to go. With each one, Jesus not only counters the attack but gives profound insight into the very question raised. In this case, “How are we to live?” That’s what’s at issue.

Jesus alone has the right to speak here. He alone has the authority to tell us how to live. And we need to heed what He says. Especially when we consider just what it is that He says, what the topics are that He is teaching on - life, law, and love. Those are three weighty things.

**I. LIFE**

First, life. That is, the two basic diverging paths for life. This is the basic backdrop.

*A) According to God’s Law*

The first path is to live according to God’s law. Meaning that it’s your center and hope.

## 1. The Pharisees - their values

Consider the Pharisees. Who were they and what did they value? They were characterized by adherence to extensive extrabiblical traditions, which they rigorously obeyed as a means of applying the law to daily life. They were focused on what was external, measurable, attainable.

## 2. The Pharisees - the result

The result? They were morally upstanding folks. Likely good neighbors. But self-righteous. The very idea of needing repentance and forgiveness provoked resentment and deep hostility.

### *B) According to God's Love*

Living according to God's law means "We love and so He loves us." On the other side, we see something entirely different (**READ 1 John 4:19**). This is living according to God's love.

#### 1. His initiative

It is a life born of His initiative. The triune God so loves ungodly persons that the Father has given the Son, the Son has given His life, and the Father and the Son now give the Spirit. Why? So as "to save sinners from unimaginable misery and lead them into unimaginable glory."

#### 2. Our response

This is all God's initiative. Ours is but to respond, to believe in and to be overwhelmed by the amazing reality of this love. Our lives become an expression of thanks for His love for us and are to be molded and modeled by that love. The Apostle John also writes (**READ 1 John 3:16**).

By law or by love. These are two very different paths, two very different ways of life.

### *Application:*

The choice between those paths is set before us still today. The path of law appears good on the outside and can look self-assured. But on the inside it is a raging cauldron of uncertainty, insecurity, and defensiveness. And such people tend to be pretty prickly. Those on the path of love may or may not look so good but they have a certainty of God's grace. And deep within there is change underway, growth in humility and hope. Which tends to be pretty attractive.

Again, these are two very different paths. The question is, which one are you on? Which one is it for you? Jesus alone has the right to tell us how to live. We need to heed what He says.

## **II. LAW**

You might be wondering, "Does Jesus then reject the Law?" "Do God's commands have any place in the Christian life?" And the answers are, "Absolutely no." And, "Absolutely yes."

### *A) The Answer Given*

This lawyer, this expert in the Law, comes to test Jesus. How does Jesus respond?

#### 1. He engages the question

For starters, He engages the question. He doesn't dismiss it. He speaks about the Law.

#### 2. He quotes the Scripture

And, in answering, He quotes from the Scriptures, from Deuteronomy and Leviticus. He brings these two commands together and demonstrates a thorough understanding of the Law Himself.

### *B) The Assumption Made*

Jesus does not dismiss the Law. And that is because of His assumptions about the Law.

#### 1. Source

First, its source, where it comes from (**READ Matthew 22:41-43**). There's a lot going on here but note this. Who is the writer? David. Who is the author? The Spirit. This is Jesus' view.

#### 2. Value

Jesus holds up the Scriptures because of their source. And their value. Back in Matthew 4, an account of a time of intense temptation by Satan in the wilderness, Jesus demonstrates this. With each parry by the enemy, Jesus counters by calling to mind the precepts and promises of God.

#### 3. Permanence

Jesus holds up the Scriptures because of their source, value, and permanence (**READ Matthew 5:17-18**). An abiding inclusive permanence. This is the highest possible view of the Law.

These are Jesus' assumptions about the Law. And they are what drive His answers. He holds up God's commands as good and necessary. So He engages this scribe and his question.

#### *Application:*

Jesus treasures the Scriptures. And the clear implication is that His followers must do the same. Think back to what we read from Psalm 19. This world is what He has made. And these words are what He speaks. The first we must study and steward well. And the second we must study and hear. We are to breathe in what He has breathed out. And then seek to live it out.

So do we see the Law as Jesus does? And do our reading habits actually reflect that?

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### **III. LOVE**

So Jesus clearly has a high view of the Law. But how does He read it? (**READ Matthew 22:34-40**). Love is the predominant factor, the grid through which He sees and reads the Law.

#### *A) What They Mean*

He speaks of two summary commandments. What are they and what do they mean?

#### 1. The greatest commandment

With the great and first commandment, Jesus quotes from Deuteronomy 6. It's worth saying that these are not separate but overlapping categories here. Meaning that this is a love that involves the whole person, all we are. This love for God is to be a total loyalty, an exclusive devotion.

#### 2. The second greatest commandment

With the second commandment, Jesus quotes from Leviticus 19. He means for us to long for and to earnestly seek the good of our neighbor, whoever they are, even ahead of our own. To love them as we love ourselves - the good we rightly desire for ourselves we also desire for them.

Putting all of this together, we are to love what God loves. And also who He loves.

#### *Illustration:*

Think of it like this. The best way you can love me is to love my family. Encourage my wife. Don't think of her as "the CPC suggestion box." Be kind to my children. Pet my dogs. That's loving me. How do we love God and our neighbor? By loving what and who He loves.

*B) How They Relate*

That's what the commands mean. How do they relate to each other? Jesus speaks to this.

1. To each other

The first and second great commands are "like" each other. Meaning they are similar. Neither can be raised over the other. Each is dependent upon the other (**READ 1 John 2:9-10; 4:7-8**).

2. To all the rest

So these two commands relate to one another. And to all the rest as well (**READ Matthew 22:40**). These two do not dispose of the rest. Rather, the rest depend upon these two. Meaning that all the commands are expressed here. They are precisely how we love God and one another.

Put another way, these two commands are at the very core of Christian ethics.

*Application:*

And they are needed all the more in a day when everything is said to be fluid. Truth, our beliefs and values are shifting. Marriage, sexuality, and gender is all up for grabs. Name a thing what you will and everyone around you is then to yield to that. But that yielding may not be loving. Love would mean listening, praying, speaking, weeping, and waiting. That is love.

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**CONCLUSION:**

What do we do with this? If we're to take it seriously, we have to discern if this is all just a legend. That is, scholars - Christian and non-Christian alike - acknowledge that Jesus is an historical figure. There's really no debate about that. But did He say these things? Let's assume that He did. We can safely do that and if you'd like to dialogue about the reasons, we can talk.

Okay, He's real and He said it. Now what? As C. S. Lewis (and others before him) have argued, now we have to decide if we can believe Him. Is Jesus a lunatic, a liar, or Lord? Lunatic - does He sound crazy and delusional? Hardly. And surely the people around Him would have known. Liar - does He sound like a megalomaniac, intentionally deceiving His hearers? Hardly. And, again, the people who were with Him day in and day out didn't seem to think so. And they gladly gave their lives for Him and His kingdom. So where does that leave us? Lord - He is who He says He is. He does have the right, He does have the authority to speak and speak on a wide range of issues. How wide? As far as the horizon goes. As far as the heavens reach.

Listen. It is wise and good to have advisors (and no few of them) on the lesser everyday matters. It is good to do your research, to get input and counsel, to weigh all the options. But Jesus alone has the right to tell us how to live. He's Lord. We need to heed what He has to say.

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