

The Greatest Commandment

Matthew 22:34-40

October 23, 2011

How many commandments are there in the Old Testament?

Which one is the most important?

What is the purpose of all these rules or commandments?

The law is supposed to _____ us love, not keep us from loving.

In the Bible, love is not:

In the Bible, love is:

We think of the heart as the center of:

In the Bible, the heart is the center of:

1 John says we know what love is because:

What kind of love does God have for us?

Karl Barth: The Bible is not our quest for God but:

How does God want us to respond?

You can't just _____ that you love someone, you have to _____ it with _____.

Some of the concrete ways we are called to love God and our neighbor:

Prayer Concerns:

Monday: Read Luke 10:25-34

Luke's account of Jesus' encounter with the lawyer is a little different than Matthew's. In Luke, we see several motivations that the lawyer has for asking his questions. He is trying to test Jesus, but he also wants to justify himself. He thinks that he is a good person, and he is doing what he should. But he quickly finds out that Jesus has a much broader expectation about those who he is called to love.

* Exactly who do I have to love? the lawyer asks Jesus. Do you ever draw boundaries on who God loves or who you are supposed to love?

* Samaritans were despised by Jews in Jesus' day. Who is despised, outcast, or looked down upon in our society? In your community? Try retelling the story in modern terms. Who would Jesus expect us to treat as a neighbor in your story?

Tuesday: Read Psalm 86

This is an individual lament, meaning it is the prayer of a person who is in trouble and asking God for help. Many times in laments, the outcry turns to praise, as in vv. 8-14. The psalmist recalls the wonderful things that God has done in the past and finds strength in this.

* Why does the psalmist ask for an undivided heart (v. 11)? What do you think divides people's hearts? What divides your heart and takes God's place?

* The psalmist thanks God with his/her whole heart. For what do you thank God with your whole heart? How do you glorify God in your life?

Wednesday: Read Matthew 5:43-48

In the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5-7, Jesus calls his followers to go beyond the law, to exceed it. Not only are they to love their neighbors, but they are to include enemies in the list of those persons that they love. Anybody can love the people who love them; there is nothing specifically Christian about this. But Jesus calls for more.

* Can you think of any examples of Christian people who have demonstrated love of their enemies? What kind of witness is this? How did they find the strength to do so?

* Who do you count as an “enemy”? Try adding that person or persons to your prayer list, and ask God how, with God’s help, you can show love to them.

Thursday: Read Deuteronomy 6:4-9

This is one of the best-known passages in the Old Testament. It is called the *Shema* (hear), and it is recited by orthodox Jews multiple times during the day. Most Jewish persons know these verses by heart. The fact that Jesus calls this the most important commandment shows that he is steeped in the rich tradition from which he comes.

* Verse 7 calls upon the people to tell these words to their children and talk about them in their homes. Do you have conversation in your home about God: who God is, what God has done, what God is doing, what God will do, and what we should do about it?

* One aspect of loving God is remembering and telling the story of God’s love, how God has been faithful. Have you told a story like this recently? Who could you tell this week about God’s love?

* How do you keep God’s word in your heart? Do you have any scripture memorized? Consider working to memorize one of the scripture texts from this week.

Friday: Read 1 John 3:16-20 (*This is NOT the same as the Gospel of John! It is at the end of the New Testament.*)

1 John appears to address a congregation that has experienced division among its members. There is a great emphasis in this book on God's love and the love of the Christian community. Notice that once again, God's love is the standard for our love. Because God has loved us, we are called to love others, even to the point of laying down our lives.

* Verse 7 says that we can't say we love God if we have resources and do not help those in need. How do you reach out in concrete ways to help those in need? How do you use your resources for this?

* What does it mean to love, not in words but in action? Can you think of any examples of people who say that they love but don't show it in their actions? How do you show with your actions that you love God and others?

Saturday: Refer to the notes about 1 John from the previous day. God's love is a concrete act (sending Jesus). Christian love is also called to be a concrete act. Notice the emphasis placed on seeing. No one can see God except through the way that we love (v. 12). We can't love God, who we can't see, if we don't love our brothers and sisters who we can see.

* Who are the people right in front of you who God has given you to love? How are you showing love in concrete ways? How might you reach out in a concrete way this week?

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