

Theme: Gospel > Law

Matthew 22:34-46 (EHV)

³⁴ When they heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees met together. ³⁵ One of them who was an expert in the law asked him a question, trying to trap him. ³⁶ “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment of the Law?” ³⁷ Jesus said to him, “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’” ³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹ The second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ ⁴⁰ All the Law and the Prophets depend on these two commandments.” ⁴¹ While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them a question: ⁴² “What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?” They said to him, “The Son of David.” ⁴³ He said to them, “Then how can David in the Spirit call him Lord, saying, ⁴⁴ The Lord said to my Lord, ‘Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet’?” ⁴⁵ “So if David calls him Lord, how is he his son?” ⁴⁶ No one was able to answer him a word, and from that day on no one dared to ask him any more questions.

Do you remember learning about the “greater than / less than” symbols in school? It is a symbol that looks like this > and is used when comparing two numbers. You also see it used when comparing two things. For example 3 > 2, 13 > 0, 62.5 > 62, or coffee > tea, warm weather > cold weather, leaving our clocks alone > Daylight Saving Time changes, or the Warriors > the Lakers, the 49ers > Rams, and of course, the Giants > the Dodgers. (These are just mathematical facts, people. ☺)

In our text, the Pharisees came to Jesus with a question of comparison—but not about math or numbers, or some good natured, silly comparisons of two subjective preferences. No, they **“asked him a question, trying to trap him” (v. 35)**. Not surprisingly, it was a question about the Law. This is what the Pharisees were most interested in, and in fact, the man who brought the question to Jesus was **“an expert in the law” (v. 35)**. In their minds, the Law > just about everything else. They thought the Law was where they could find righteousness. Many of them actually thought they had kept God’s Law because they *outwardly* had obeyed it. This, of course, really didn’t make them righteous before God, but it did make them very “self-righteous!” Over the years their rabbis (“teachers”) had concocted over 600 laws and thought they could “trap” Jesus, or at least trip Him up in His own words, by asking Him, **“Teacher, which is the greatest commandment of the Law?”**

Now, clearly these Pharisees were intelligent men, but how foolish can you be?! They were trying to “trap” the One who, as true God, is the author of not only the Law of God, but of all language—the One who is the Word of God made flesh—they were trying to trap Him in His own words?! Good luck with that fellas! What they did not realize or believe, if we’re going to use the “greater than / less than” comparison again is that not only is Jesus > the Law, Jesus > everyone and everything!

This is good news for us—literally “Good News!” That is what the word Gospel means. The Gospel is the “Good News” that Jesus came to save us from our sins and fulfill the Law’s demands for us because there is absolutely no way we could do it!

Just listen to Jesus’ masterful answer to these “experts” in the Law: **Jesus said to him, “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’”** ³⁸ **This is the first and greatest commandment.** ³⁹ **The second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’** ⁴⁰ **All the Law and the Prophets [which is a reference to the entire Old Testament] depend on these two commandments.”**

The question is: Have you and I kept these two greatest commandments? Let’s do a quick quiz: Have you always gotten along with your siblings? Have you always honored, respected, and obeyed your parents? Ever gossiped about a coworker or classmate? You ever “hated someone’s guts?” Can you remember times in your life when you could have helped someone else who was in need but just didn’t

take the time to do it? How about your relationship with God? Have you always made God your dearest treasure in life and loved Him above everyone and everything else? Have you always honored, respected, and obeyed God above everyone and everything else? Have you always fully trusted God and turned to Him first for help in every situation, no matter how frightening, no matter how difficult, or how hopeless things looked?

How'd you do? Were you able to answer with an unequivocal "Yes!" to every one of those questions? Of course not. If this makes you feel guilty that's because the bad news is we are guilty—guilty of breaking both parts of "**The Greatest Commandment**" that Jesus speaks about in our text. We have *NOT* always loved the LORD with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our mind (v. 37). (In fact, we might ask if any of us ever have!) We have *NOT* always loved our neighbors as ourselves (v. 39).

Thank God that His Word doesn't end there with the Law! Even these "Greatest commandments" are not greater than Jesus and they are not greater than the "Good News" of the Gospel! Again, if we were to use that "greater than" symbol again: **Gospel > Law**.

This is what Jesus tried to show these Pharisees in our text. It was one of the reasons Jesus went on to ask them some questions. He wanted to turn them from relying on themselves and looking to the Law for their righteousness and instead turn them to look to Him, Jesus, the Christ. We read in our text, **While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them a question:** ⁴² **"What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?"** (v. 41-42). This was an easy question for the Pharisees to answer: **They said to him, "The Son of David."** In the Old Testament it was clear that the Messiah, the Christ, would be the Son of David; that is from the line of King David. Jesus then goes on to ask them a pair of questions that they simply could not answer, **He said to them, "Then how can David in the Spirit call him Lord, saying,** ⁴⁴ **The Lord said to my Lord, 'Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet?'"** ⁴⁵ **"So if David calls him Lord, how is he his son?"** ⁴⁶ **No one was able to answer him a word, and from that day on no one dared to ask him any more questions.** (v. 43-46). The reason the Pharisees could not answer Jesus was because they really didn't have the correct understanding of who and what the Christ would be. They believed the Christ who was promised by God in the Old Testament would be an earthly ruler, a military Messiah. They saw no need for Him to come as a spiritual Savior or the ultimate sacrifice for sin. After all, they really didn't think they had any to forgive!

But Jesus with His words here shows them that His true glory as the Messiah was the fact that as true God He was King David's Lord, but in His grace and mercy He humbled Himself and also became David's Son. He came as one of us—a man of flesh and blood just like you and me—in order to put Himself under God's holy Law including His "Greatest Commandment." The difference was Jesus kept God's **Greatest Commandment**—and all of His commandments perfectly! He *always* **"loved the LORD [His] God with all [His] heart, with all [His] soul, and with all [His] mind."** He *always* **"loved [His] neighbor as [Himself]."** We probably can't even imagine doing that perfectly for an hour, much less our whole lifetime from conception to the casket! And yet, the astounding thing is that God counts that perfection of Jesus as our perfection—yes, even in regard to God's "Greatest Commandment!" That is why Jesus became the Son of David.

It is through faith in Jesus, the Son of David, that the Holy Spirit gives us the desire and the strength to love God and love our neighbor. Not to *earn* God's love by doing it—we already have that—and not because we can do it perfectly—Jesus already did that—but rather to show our love to God in return. Listen to these words from 1 John 4:9-11, **"This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another."**

It is also in Jesus, the Son of David, that we find forgiveness for all those times when we have failed to love God with all our heart, soul, and mind. And it is in the Son of David that we find forgiveness for all those times we have failed to love our neighbor as ourselves. God looks at us, the guilty, and because of Christ declares us “Not guilty!” That’s why Jesus died! Peter writes, **“For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God” (1 Peter 3:18).**

Thank God, **the Gospel > the Law!** When we feel the guilt of our sins, don’t look to God’s Law or even to His “Greatest Commandment” for our comfort. Or when we are tempted by our “inner self-righteous Pharisee” to try and gain our peace or acceptance with God by trying to keep the Law remember: Jesus > the Law. Jesus > sin. Jesus > our guilt and our shame. Jesus > death and even hell itself.

God’s Law and His **Greatest Commandment** show us our sins and show us our great need for a Savior. Look instead to Jesus, the Son of God and Son of Man. He is that Savior! He kept God’s “Greatest Commandment” for us and took away our sins on His cross. That’s the Good News, the Gospel! Rejoice in the fact that although God has given us the “Greatest Commandment” He has also given us the greater Gospel! Amen.