

Mark 12:28–34 and God-centered Living

Prayer

Introductory Questions

- Explain the concept of *love for another*. “Love for another is _____.”
- What does it mean *to love God* as compared to loving a family member or friend?
- What does it mean *to love your neighbor*? To love your neighbor *as yourself*?

Introduction

In Mark 12:28–34, Jesus identified the most important commands in the Mosaic law: (1) love the Lord your God (referring to God the Father) with (or from) all your heart, soul, mind, and strength and (2) love your neighbor as yourself.

These verses are part of a larger section of Mark (11:27–12:44) that records Jesus’s conflicts with the religious leaders. They attempted to undermine Jesus’s authority, which reflected their lack of faith in him. They had neither the insight nor the humility to see Jesus for who he is—the Son of God (1:1,11). Through Jesus’s teaching and direct dialogues with the religious leaders, he demonstrated his superior wisdom and established himself as the authoritative interpreter of the Old Testament. Jesus is also the one to whom the Old Testament pointed, which they should have accepted. Mark 12:28–34 records Jesus’s interaction with a scribe who, unlike most of the religious leaders, showed himself to be both humble and, in Jesus’s words, “not far from the kingdom of God” (v. 34) (Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, 349).

We organize our passage into four sections: (1) The Setting of Jesus’s Teaching (v. 28), (2) The Most Important Command (vv. 29–30), (3) The Second Command (v. 31), and (4) The Response to Jesus’s Teaching (vv. 32–34). We conclude this lesson by providing examples of God-centered living.

1. The Setting of Jesus’s Teaching: The Most Important Question

One of the scribes approached. When he heard them debating and saw that Jesus answered them well, he asked him, “Which command is the most important of all?” (Mark 12:28)

A scribe approached Jesus and asked him which command in the Mosaic law is the most important—the one that stands above the others and with the greatest significance. “The scribes concerned themselves with proper exposition of the law and earned a reputation as experts in its interpretation...rabbinic tradition counted 613 commandments in the Torah [the Mosaic law], 365 prohibitions, and 248 positive commands” (Edwards, 370). Of all God’s commands in the law, the scribe wanted to know what was central for all humanity.

- Why did so many of the religious leaders fail to see Jesus for who he is?
- How can we know which teachings from God (from both the Old Testament and the New Testament) are most important? Provide examples.

2. The Most Important Command: Love the Lord Your God

- “29 Jesus answered, “The most important is “Listen, Israel! The Lord our God, the Lord is one. 30 Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.”” (Mark 12:29–30)
- “1 This is the command—the statutes and ordinances—the LORD your God has commanded me to teach you, so that you may follow them in the land you are about to enter and possess. 2 Do this so that you may fear the LORD your God all the days of your life by keeping all his statutes and commands I am giving you, your son, and your grandson, and so that you may have a long life. 3 Listen, Israel, and be careful to follow them, so that you may prosper and multiply greatly, because the LORD, the God of your ancestors, has promised you a land flowing with milk and honey. 4 Listen, Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. 5 Love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. 6 These words that I am giving you today are to be in your heart. 7 Repeat them to your children. Talk about them when you sit in your house and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. 8 Bind them as a sign on your hand and let them be a symbol on your forehead. 9 Write them on the doorposts of your house and on your city gates.” (Deut. 6:1–9)

Jesus began by citing the great Jewish confession known as the *Shema* (in Hebrew: “hear”) from Deuteronomy 6:4: “Listen, Israel! The Lord our God, the Lord is one” (Mark 12:29). The Lord is the one and only God (Isa. 44:8). Jesus then clarified that we must love God with every part of our being—with (or from) all our heart, soul, mind, and strength (Mark 12:30). Love for God means directing our highest affection and commitment to him above all others. We express our love for him through worship, submission, and everything else we do (Ps. 5:11; 1 John 5:3). Deuteronomy 6:1–9, part of which Jesus cites, clarifies how God expected his people to express love for him.

- How does Deuteronomy 6:1–9 shape your understanding of loving God?
- What does it mean to love God with every part of your being? What are the biggest threats in your life to loving God in these ways?

3. The Second Command: Love Your Neighbor as Yourself

- [Jesus said] “The second is, “Love your neighbor as yourself.” There is no other command greater than these.” (Mark 12:31)
- “9 When you reap the harvest of your land, you are not to reap to the very edge of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. 10 Do not strip your vineyard bare or gather its fallen grapes. Leave them for the poor and the resident alien; I am the LORD your God. 11 Do not steal. Do not act deceptively or lie to one another. 12 Do not swear falsely by my name, profaning the name of your God; I am the LORD. 13 Do not oppress your neighbor or rob him. The wages due a hired worker must not remain with you until morning. 14 Do not curse the deaf or put a stumbling block in front of the blind, but you are to fear your God; I am the LORD. 15 Do not act unjustly when deciding a case. Do not be partial to the poor or give preference to the rich; judge your neighbor fairly. 16 Do not go about spreading slander among your people; do not jeopardize your neighbor’s life; I am the LORD. 17 Do not harbor hatred against your brother. Rebuke your neighbor directly, and you will not incur guilt because of him. 18 Do not take revenge or bear a grudge against members of your community, but love your neighbor as yourself; I am the LORD.” (Lev. 19:9–18)

Jesus’s second command is that we must seek our neighbors’ good, just as we seek our own good. Jesus taught that our “neighbors” are those within our immediate sphere of influence, and he calls us *to take actions like a loving neighbor* (Luke 10:30–37). In this way, he wants us *to be loving neighbors for the sake of* our neighbors. Leviticus 19:9–18, part of which Jesus cites, clarifies many of the ways that God expected his people to love their neighbors.

- How does Leviticus 19:9–18 shape your understanding of loving your neighbor?
- Imagine you are a non-Christian who wanted to know the truth about God and his ways. How specifically would you want your Christian neighbors to show you love?

4. The Response to Jesus’s Teaching: “Not Far” from Entering the Kingdom

32 Then the scribe said to him, “You are right, teacher. You have correctly said that he is one, and there is no one else except him. 33 And to love him with all your heart, with all your understanding, and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself, is far more important than all the burnt offerings and sacrifices.” 34 When Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” And no one dared to question him any longer. (Mark 12:32–34)

The scribe affirmed Jesus’s answer—and added that loving God and our neighbors as ourselves is ultimately more important than burnt offerings and sacrifices (vv. 32–33). He understood that external acts of devotion *without love for God* were meaningless. Jesus discerned the man’s wisdom, and Jesus told him he was not far from entering the kingdom of God (v. 34; cf. 9:47; 10:15, 23–25).

- Why is loving God and loving our neighbors ultimately more important than external acts of obedience? How can we avoid religious hypocrisy (where we focus on projecting a godly heart but lack love for and obedience to God)?
- As you consider your non-Christian family members, friends, and neighbors, what obstacles interfere with them entering the kingdom of God? How can you help them overcome those obstacles?

Sound Doctrine: God-centered Living

Below are seven ways the Bible calls us to center our lives on God the Father:

1. **We trust in God.** Not only are we saved by trusting in God and his Son, but we also trust in God and his promises every moment of our lives (Rom. 4:23–25; Heb. 11:6).
2. **We love God and obey his commands.** To love God involves both devotion and affection for him, and it expresses itself primarily in doing what he says in light of his revealed will in the Bible (1 John 2:5; 5:3).
3. **We pray to God.** Jesus taught us to pray to God the Father, which we do through Jesus and by the Spirit (Matt. 6:9–13; cf. Rom. 8:15; Eph. 2:18).
4. **We imitate God.** God’s will for us is that we become conformed to his image (Eph. 5:1; cf. Rom. 8:29). For example, we seek to be holy because he is holy (1 Pet. 1:15–16).
5. **We witness to and for God.** We witness to God, in part, by proclaiming his greatness for all who will listen—stretching from our family members to all the nations (Ps. 67).
6. **We worship God.** Worshipping God means that we desire, enjoy, and value him above all earthly things—experiencing and expressing his supreme worth in our thoughts, words, and deeds (Rev. 4:8–11; 5:13–14).
7. **We love and obey Jesus.** We must never separate loving and obeying God the Father from loving and obeying his Son. One of the best ways to glorify God is to listen to his Son and to do all that Jesus says (Matt. 17:5).

- What comments and questions do you have about this lesson?
- What is one thing you can do in response to this lesson?

Prayer