

The Law of Love

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Date: 22 January 2023

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[0 : 0 0] My name's Matthew Capone, and I'm the pastor here at Cheyenne Mountain Presbyterian Church, and it's my joy to bring God's Word to you today. A special welcome if you're new or visiting with us.

We're glad that you're here, and we're glad that you're here not because we're trying to fill seats, but because we're following Jesus together as one community, and as we follow Jesus together, we've become convinced there's no one so good, they don't need God's grace, and no one so bad they can't have it, which is why we come back week after week to hear what God has to say to us in His Word.

We're continuing our series in the Gospel of Mark. You'll remember that the Gospels tell the story of Jesus and His life and His death and His resurrection. We're in the middle of Jesus' Passion Week as He makes His way to the cross, and we're ending a series of three questions that Jesus encounters from the religious leaders.

You'll remember a couple weeks ago when Drew preached, they asked Him this difficult question about paying taxes to Caesar, and then last week they asked this challenging question about marriage, and now we come up to the third and final question of this series.

By the way, Jesus is going to get His chance next week to turn the tables. He decides it's time for Him to ask a question, but this final question asks about the law, and we find out that the sum of the law is love.

[1 : 1 9] I'm a big John Newton fan, the man who wrote Amazing Grace, and at one point commenting on, I believe, the 23rd Psalm, he said this contains an ocean of theology in a thimble.

And we might say the same thing about this passage this morning, that it contains an ocean of theology in a thimble. As we read it, we might see ourselves understand how far we fall short of God's standard, because it's one thing to love your neighbor.

Maybe we can manage that. It's quite another thing to love your neighbor as yourself. And if we're honest, we really love ourselves a lot.

I put a lot of thought into what's good for me. I'm an expert on things that I like, things that bring me pleasure and satisfaction. And so this passage here includes more than really we can ponder in one morning.

And so I say what I say sometimes, which is that we're going to look at something. I'm going to say something, but not everything. There is too much depth in what Jesus teaches here for us to grasp all of it together.

[2 : 2 7] Instead, we're going to try to grasp a piece of it. I'm going to lay out two principles for us this morning. The first principle is this, the law is love. And the second principle, the law measures by love.

The first principle, the law is love. The second principle, the law measures by love. And so it's with that that we turn now to God's word. I invite you to turn with me in your Bible or on your phone or in your worship guide.

We're in Mark chapter 12. Remember where you turn, no matter where you turn, this is God's word. And God tells us that his word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path, which means that he hasn't left us to stumble alone in the dark, but instead he's given us his word to show us the way to go.

And so that's why we read now, starting at verse 28. And one of the scribes came up and heard them disputing with one another. And seeing that he answered them well, asked him, which commandment is the most important of all?

Jesus answered, the most important is, hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, with all your mind and with all your strength.

[3 : 40] The second is this, you shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these. Verse 32, and the scribe said to him, you are right, teacher.

You have truly said that he is one and there is no other besides him. And to love him with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the strength and to love one's neighbor as oneself is much more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.

And when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, you are not far from the kingdom of God. And after that, no one dared to ask him any more questions.

I invite you to pray with me as we come to this portion of God's word. Our Father in heaven, we praise you again that you do give us your word and that you show us that the purpose and the goal of your word is love.

And we thank you that we see that love most of all in your son and our savior, our Lord Jesus. And we ask this morning that you would help us to see him. You'd help us to see him in his beauty and his love and his glory and his power and his authority and his holiness.

[4 : 58] That you would help us to understand your word, that you would speak clearly to our minds and to our hearts. And that you would grow us, that we would look more and more like Jesus, the one who loves perfectly.

We ask all these things in the mighty name of Jesus Christ. Amen. So I mentioned before, we're in this series of confrontations in which the religious leaders try to trick or trap Jesus with hard questions.

We've come to the third of three of these questions. We had the question about paying taxes to Caesar. We had the question about marriage in heaven. And now we find ourselves with the Pharisees again, looking with a question about the law.

Now, things change a little bit here. We've noticed before, we're just told about groups that come to speak with Jesus. We saw first the Pharisees and the Herodians come to trap Jesus. Next, the Sadducees come to trap Jesus.

And here things change at least a little bit. We have not a group, but an individual. Now, the passage where this appears in the Gospel of Matthew actually tells us that this man is a Pharisee.

[6 : 08] And things seem, though, for him to be different at first. However, Matthew tells us that he is similar to the others in that he is trying to test Jesus. In other words, he's doing what the others have done, which is that they're not necessarily asking sincere questions or seeking understanding, but instead they want to lay a trap.

Now, I think from what we see in this man later in the passage, he has some teachability, some openness. We find that he asks this question because he's so impressed with what he's seen from Jesus so far.

And he asks this question that you would expect a good lawyer to ask. Verse 28, he says, look, there's many laws. Which is the most important law?

If there's two laws that come into conflict, what law is going to win? If there's a Supreme Court justice and they're laying down an opinion, what are they going to say is the most important precedent here?

What are our first principles when we look at the Old Testament law? What is it that matters more than anything else? And Jesus here surprises him with his answer.

[7 : 17] Notice verse 28, he asks for a singular commandment. He asks for one. And Jesus flips things as he always does in verses 29 through 31, giving him not one commandment, but two.

And so this is a buy one, get one free situation for this questioner. He gives him two commandments, both coming from the Old Testament. First of all, he says you need to love the Lord your God with everything in you.

And there he's quoting from what we've already read this morning. Brit read it out for us, Deuteronomy 6, as our Old Testament reading. But Jesus doesn't leave it there. You would think that would be a great answer, right?

Just to say loving God is the height of the law. But Jesus then proceeds to quote from the book of Leviticus chapter 19, which lays out this next portion, that you love your neighbor.

And not just that you love your neighbor, but that you love your neighbor as yourself. Now, one commentator has pointed out that other rabbis have given these types of answers before.

[8 : 18] What makes Jesus' answer so revolutionary is that he doesn't give just one, but two. He takes these two things and links them together in a way that no one has before. Yes, someone could say loving God's the most important.

Another person could say loving neighbor is the most important. And Jesus says, look, these two are intimately connected. And they're connected by this fact that the law is fundamentally about love.

There is an internal logic to the way God's law works. This man is asking Jesus for a commandment. Jesus gives him more than a commandment.

He gives him a principle. The first principle of the law, the way that we think about God's commands, the way that we operate and live in this world, the foundation for all of it is love.

And so this Pharisee gets much more than he asks for. And that leads us to the first principle that I was going to tell you we were going to talk about, which is that the law is love.

[9 : 24] I want you to think about it this way. When I lived in Virginia many years ago, I was teaching at the time. One of my housemates was getting a master's in psychology.

And so he liked to refer to himself as a psych master. And he taught me that there are two types of people. There's been studies in psychology about this. Two types of people when it comes to making decisions.

There are maximizers and there are satisficers. Maximizers are people who want the absolute best thing possible.

And so they're just going to keep searching until they find the best. Satisficers just want good enough. They find something they like. They buy it. They go with it. They move on. And so his classic example was this.

If you're in the car and you're flipping through radio stations, a maximizer, if they come to a song they like, what they think is, that's a great song. I like it. But what if there's a better song?

[10 : 21] And so they keep scrolling because they want to make sure they get the best song possible. A satisfier, though, they hear the song and they think, that's a song I like. Why would I keep looking? Right?

I can listen to this when I don't need to waste my time continuing to search. What Jesus is telling us here is that Christianity is a maximizer, not a satisfier.

Christianity is a maximizer, not a satisfier. You want to experience the best things possible. Do you want to have the most love possible?

Do you want your life to be filled and characterized and saturated by love? If yes, the answer is this, keeping God's law.

Following the law is the way to love. Following the law is the way to love God and show honor for him, but following the law is also the way to love one another.

[11 : 29] All of the law is about loving God and loving others. That's where everything points. Every law you can find in the Old Testament, you can draw a straight line to either loving God or loving your neighbor.

And in fact, the same thing is just true of human culture in general. One man has laid out the principle that the law reflects the heart or the values of the lawgiver. That there's no arbitrary principle behind a law.

A law always reflects something that someone loves and they values. So you can think about it this way. Even as you go about your life today, if you are going through a neighborhood, there's probably a speed limit, right?

And that speed limit is not arbitrary. The speed limit is saying that we have a heart that loves life. Protecting kids in the street is more important than your convenience.

Protecting an elderly man who's walking across the street to check his mail at the mailbox, that is more important than saving time. And so that law, that speed limit, it's reflecting a value of the culture.

[12 : 41] It's reflecting a heart. Look, we care about people and we love them. Therefore, we're not going to speed through the neighborhood. Some people congratulate themselves on being rule breakers.

Somehow they think they're smarter and better than the way the world is set up. I have news for you. You're not a free thinker. You just lack love. Okay?

Maybe efficiency is way too important to you. Maybe you love yourself more than others. Now, that's just one example. We could pick a mundane, a boring one from the Old Testament.

Deuteronomy chapter 22 gives this law that you might find random, which says that around the roof of a building, you must install a parapet. Which is a fancy way of saying there needs to be railing around the roof.

Okay? Why is there need to be railing around the roof? Same principle as the speed limit. We value life so much. We're going to take these proactive steps to make sure no one would ever die falling off our roof.

[13 : 41] Okay? So there's a law. You think it's arbitrary. Maybe the Pharisees and the Sadducees are arguing about it. And Jesus comes to outline the principle, the heart behind the law, to say all of it is about love. All of it is to reflect the values of God's heart behind the law.

By the way, it's been pointed out the modern equivalent of parapets on your roof is the requirement to put a fence around your swimming pool. You don't want a young child who doesn't know what they're doing to stumble in and suddenly drown.

And so this is just the way that laws and rules work in the world. We talked about in Sunday school during December that the Christian sexual ethic is also this expression of love for ourselves and for others.

I quoted this man named Glenn Harrison last week who points out that commitment and passion are always meant to go together. It's by tying commitment and passion together that we show love for ourselves and we show love for others.

Anything less is less than love. God loves you so much that he gives you the law.

[14 : 50] The law is for your protection, for your flourishing, for your life. And so there's an implicit criticism here that Jesus gives of the previous two groups.

Previous two passages, paying taxes to Caesar, marriage in heaven. The questioners are interested in technical legal arguments. They are not interested in love.

And Jesus is saying, look, you have all these great, interesting, technical questions. You know what really matters? Loving God, loving others. That is what is behind all of God's laws.

Perhaps you're tempted to think that God's laws, the way he's designed the world and instructed us to live in it, are kind of arbitrary and random.

That somehow they're a representation, a reflection of an outdated culture that no longer applies today. And this passage is telling us something very different.

[15 : 54] If we're tempted to chafe against God's laws and his commandments, it's telling us to trust him. God's purposes are love.

His intention is love. His heart is love. And so we trust him and we follow him, knowing he has shown us the right way to go.

That's why I say when we open up the scriptures that it is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. God has not left us to stumble alone in the dark, but instead he's shown us the way to go.

We might see short-term pleasure. God sees long-term consequences, long-term love. And so when we come against a law that we find confusing, we can ask ourselves, what's the principle of love that's behind this?

Why is it that God gave this law? Because we know that love is the heart. God wants us to experience more love than we can on our own.

[17 : 01] More love than we know how to navigate by ourselves. Now that's principle one, that the law is love. I told you we'd have a second principle, that the law measures us by our love.

I mentioned before that this is the first time that these two commands were linked together and seen as a pair, two sides of the same coin. In other words, there's an unbreakable link between our love for God and our love for others.

Remember, verse 31, Jesus says, the second is this. This Pharisee didn't ask for two commandments. He asked for one. And Jesus says, look, these two go together.

They're a package deal. You ask for one commandment. I'll give you two because it's not a commandment I'm interested in. It's a principle. And that principle flows out.

If you love God, you will love others. There's a logic to it. There's a flow to it. And this gets at the metric of our spirituality.

[18 : 07] How is it that we measure whether we are growing as Christians, whether we are mature in Christ, whether it is that we actually love God and the things that he loves.

It is very tempting in the church to measure our spiritual maturity by spiritual activities. That somehow the more Bible studies I'm involved in, the more verses that I know, the more knowledge I've accumulated, that's a clear indication of my growth in love for God.

And don't hear what I'm not saying. Yes, you should be in worship. That's one of the greatest avenues that God's given to shape us and form us in our loves. Yes, we need to know God's word so that it can guide us.

Yes, we need to be studying it with other Christians. And it is possible to be involved in religious events and rituals and miss the point.

It is possible to be involved in many activities and have little love for others. And so the metric is, in fact, both. Not that we give up on loving God.

[19 : 17] There's a real love of God that happens in this place as we worship together. And that our love, our metric, is not just that, but the fruit of the Spirit. Our metric is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

And what does Paul go on to say in that same verse in Galatians? He says, against such things, there is no law. Because that is the expression of the law.

That's the way we live out what God has given us. Neighbor love is what should be flowing out of our love for God.

No neighbor love, no love for God reveals that something is off. And so there's two mistakes that we can make here. There's the mistake of trying to love God without loving others.

That's the mistake that often religious people fall into. It is possible to be in too many Bible studies.

[20 : 24] I've told you before, that's all practice, no game. There's an irony, a tragedy, if we were to spend so much time studying this verse that no time was left over to go and love the real people in our lives.

We study God's Word, we know God's Word, so that it can then flow out in the way our lives operate. We want there to be a balance, a mirroring, that what we know of God plays out in our lives, that we're not so consumed with one thing that we miss the point.

We're not the team that always practices and never plays. Then there's also the other mistake, which is to try to love others without loving God.

That's a mistake that secular people often make. Because outside of God's law, we have a limited view of what's good for you and good for others. If the law is love, if God's guidance is there to make sure we walk in paths that are filled with blessing and flourishing, if we don't know those paths, we can't truly or fully love others.

Instead, we're fumbling around in the dark with no lamp to our feet and no light to our path. And so the point again is this, that our love for God and our love for others, they must go together.

[21 : 50] Our love for God flows out into love for others. And so we can reverse engineer this. The fruit reveals the health of the process. If I look at my grass during the summer and I see it's brown, I know there's something wrong, right?

If I look at my life and I see I have no love for neighbor, no matter how spiritually active I am in rituals and activities, I also know something is wrong.

The law measures by love. If we can't love others, there's something that's off. There's something that's not true about our love for God.

Jesus is saying here, we can't separate these two. We can't pry them apart. They must always go together. Our vertical love always comes out in horizontal love.

Our love for God always pours out in love for others. This man is impressed by what Jesus has to say here.

[23 : 04] Verse 32, you are right, teacher. He's excited. Jesus did not disappoint. Jesus clearly answered the first two questions.

He's clearly answered the third. And Jesus also has an affirmation for this man. Verse 34, he says, you are not far from the kingdom of God.

The question is, why is it that this man's not far? He doesn't tell him he's in the kingdom. Doesn't say you're exactly where you need to be, but he says you're not far away. Why is it that this man is so close? How is it that he's able to approach in this way?

There's a lot of different suggestions about what it means for this man to be close to the kingdom. I think the most helpful one is this. Jesus has laid out an impossible standard.

An impossible standard. He says, you need to love God with everything you are. All of your being needs to be pointed in love to God. And if we're honest with ourselves, we know how far away from that we are.

[24 : 10] On top of that, he then says, you need to love your neighbor. And not just that you need to love your neighbor, but you have to love your neighbor as much as you love yourself. And so if you were tempted for a moment to think, yeah, I can do that.

I'm a good person. I love my neighbor. Jesus then delivers the kicker punch there, the sucker punch to say, yeah, not just love your neighbor, love your neighbor as much as yourself. Plan for your neighbor's good as much as you plan for your own good.

And so if this man fully understands what Jesus is saying, then he understands the totality of what Jesus is asking for. He understands how demanding and how impossible it is to truly love God with our whole selves and to love our neighbor as ourselves.

And so he has to understand then that he falls short of what Jesus is calling for. He is close to the kingdom in the sense that he is one step away from recognizing his great need.

Remember, I've told you over and over that need is the price of admission. What could show you your need more than this requirement? What could reveal your need more than Jesus' command?

[25 : 34] That also helps us understand the rest of verse 34, which tells us this, after that, no one dared to ask him any more questions.

Why? Because it wasn't fun anymore. It's one thing to ask a technical question about paying taxes to Caesar.

It's one thing to ask a theoretical question about marriage in heaven. It's quite another for Jesus to look at you and say, have you loved God with your entire self?

And have you loved your neighbor as yourself? Because that's what the law you claim to love demands from you. And that's why the conversation is over.

This game has lost its appeal. It shows for us, too, reminds us of what's true for the next step this man would have to make to not just be near the kingdom, but in the kingdom.

[26 : 39] And it's this. We know that we fail to love God with our whole selves. And we know that we fail to love our neighbors as ourselves.

And if we know both of those things, then we know our desperate need for God's grace. We know how much we need the gospel. That's why this man is one step away.

We know that we don't need Jesus just as a great teacher. We don't need him simply as someone who will untangle the knots of the law for us. We need him as someone who will cover our failure to keep the law.

We need him as someone who will cover up our failure to love. Because if the law is more than keeping a list of rules, if the law is love, then it is more than we can handle alone.

We need Jesus' forgiveness. We need him to cover our gap. That's why we look to him in his death and his resurrection as he dies. And he takes the punishment that we deserve for not keeping the love of the law.

[27 : 52] And he lives the perfect life, the life that's characterized by complete and total love of God and neighbor. Even more than that, or in addition to that, I'll say not more than that, we need Jesus' power and example.

Jesus' power comes, and his example comes from the fact that Jesus loved his neighbor more than himself. We see that most of all in the fact that he was willing to lay down his life to do what Philippians 2 talks about, to give up the glory and honor and privilege that he was due.

John summarizes this for us in 1 John 4, verse 19, when he says, we love because he first loved us.

And there's the secret. Our love of our neighbor flows out of our love of God. Where does our love of God come from? Our love of God flows out of God's love for us.

And so that's why we can sing together, my Jesus, I love thee. I know thou art mine. Let's pray.

[29 : 07] Our Father in heaven, we thank you that you're a God of love, that you've filled this world with love, and even more than that, you have showed us how to be maximizers of love.

We ask that you would change us, you'd transform us, that we would look more and more like Jesus, that your love for us would result in us being the new creations that you speak about, that our love for you would flow out into love for others and for this world.

We ask these things in the mighty name of Jesus Christ. Amen. Amen.