

## Matthew 22:34-40 A Question about the Great Commandment

Introduction: In our text last Sunday the Sadducees asked Jesus about the resurrection. They intended to make it look ridiculous to believe in a resurrection. Instead Jesus made it look ridiculous not to believe in one.

### I. The Pharisees again.

- A. Most of the Pharisees were not present when Jesus put the Sadducees to silence but they soon heard about it, verse 34.
  - 1. It tickled them that Jesus had embarrassed the Sadducees on the question of the resurrection.
- B. They must have had mixed emotions about it.
  - 1. They hated Jesus and hated to see Him gain popularity with the crowds.
- C. They called a special meeting and decided to make another attempt themselves at tricking Jesus.
  - 1. They had just the right man for the job, verse 35.
  - 2. He was a lawyer. (A scribe, one who specialized in copying, studying and teaching the Law.)
  - 3. He was one of the most knowledgeable men in Israel regarding the Law.
  - 4. He had a question they were all sure would work.

### II. The question.

- A. The Scripture says that the question was a trap, verse 35.
- B. The question was: Which commandment is the great commandment in the Law? (Great in the sense of greatest, verse 36.)
- C. Now that seems innocent enough.
  - 1. It is hard to spot a trap in that even though we are told that there is one.
  - 2. It would be virtually impossible for an unsuspecting victim to spot it.
- D. Part of the trap was this:
  - 1. There were 613 commandments in the Law. (248 positive and 365 negative.)
  - 2. There was no way Jesus could please everybody with His answer. (He was bound to displease large numbers of people.)
- E. Part of the trap was this:
  - 1. The Law was built on the premise that there is but one God.
  - 2. But they knew that Jesus claimed to be the Son of God.
  - 3. They hoped to twist His answer and make it appear that He claimed to be another God, a second God.
  - 4. Thus they would charge Him with a religious crime and have Him arrested.

### III. Jesus' answer to the question.

- A. Jesus easily avoided the trap, verse 37.
  - 1. He quoted from Deuteronomy 6:5.
  - 2. This commandment did not prescribe a certain deed to do nor forbid that a certain deed be done.
  - 3. It required a certain attitude.
  - 4. It requires an attitude of love for God.
  - 5. It requires a supreme love for God. (All the heart, the soul, and the mind.)
  - 6. It requires that one put the will of God above his own personal pleasure, wealth, well being, and safety.

- B. Jesus said “This is the first and great commandment, verse 38.  
(Not first one given, but first in rank and importance.)
- C. Jesus answered their question in such a way that no Jew could criticize.  
(Even the lawyer who quizzed commended Him on His answer, Mark 12:32).

IV. A second commandment in rank,

- A. Jesus had already answered the question, but He continues.
- B. He said that a second was next to the first in rank, verse 39.  
(“Thy shalt love thy neighbor as thyself,” Leviticus 19:18b).
- C. Nobody has to be commanded to love himself.  
(This is not against the will of God; it is as it should be.)
- D. But it is not God's will that we love self more than God or more than others.
  - 1. We are to love God above all.
  - 2. We are to love others equally as much as self.
  - 3. That means we are to consider the feelings, pleasure, advancement, wealth, and well being of others equally as important as our own.
  - 4. One cannot love God and fail to love others.
  - 5. The love for others is the natural result of loving God.
- E. On these two commandments hang all the law, verse 40.  
(All of God's will for man in Judaism and Christianity.)
- F. By giving this second commandment Jesus effectively tied the hands and stopped the mouths of the Pharisees so that they, at least at this time, could not lift one finger against Him nor say one word against. (To do so would reveal their hatred for Him which was in contradiction to this commandment.)

V. Some lessons for us from the two commandments.

- A. We cannot have this kind of love without the new birth. (Every man needs to be born again.)
- B. If one truly loves himself, he does not seek merely temporary wealth and pleasure.
  - 1. If he allows himself to go to hell that is not love for self.
  - 2. If he really loves himself he will get saved.
  - 3. Then he will seek to please God by loving God as he should and by loving others as he should.
- C. Because of the flesh nature he needs the help of God every day.  
(With the help of God the child of God can grow in grace.)