



FAMILY LIFE BAPTIST CHURCH

“The Last Year of the Life of Christ, Part 46”

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Matthew 22:34-40, Mark 12:28-34

When the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, they called a meeting. One of them, an expert among the teachers of the law, had witnessed these encounters and knew Jesus had answered well. So he came up to Jesus and tested Him with this question: “Teacher, what is the greatest of all the commandments? Which is the first commandment of all?”

Jesus answered, **“The first of all the commandments is this: ‘Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is one Lord, and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. The second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ The whole law and all the prophets depend on these two commandments. There is no commandment greater than these two.”**

Thank you very much for coming to hear the message for today. Before we begin our next lesson, let us reiterate our reason for attending Church.

We attend Church to obtain the mind of Christ, meaning, to have the Bible illuminated in our minds so that we can clearly understand the principles that Jesus taught and base our daily personal decisions on those principles.

We come to Church because we want to be obedient to the Bible, which is the doctrine of Jesus Christ, in an informed, insightful and intelligent manner.

I always start out with the reason that we come to church for the benefit of the children. When I was a kid, I went to the Methodist church, at which we had communion on the first Sunday. Every first Sunday before communion, we went through the Methodist church communion ritual. Part of the ritual was to recite the first ten verses of the 53rd chapter of Isaiah. So, once a month, for about eight years, or about 96 times, I read those ten verses. I never studied those verses, but I can still recite them, forty-three years later. This concept for learning is called “spaced repetition”, and it is how people learn things that they remember for long period of time. So, if these children keep coming they will know why they should go to church for the rest of their lives.

When I preach, I try to use meticulous grammar and intellectual language, although I may occasionally throw in a colloquialism for effect. Adults find this boring, because meticulous grammar is not used in everyday speech, and adults are generally no longer working on their vocabulary. Adults have learned the words that they use in daily language and having to listen to language other than that of the common man and having to look up words with which they are not familiar is, to adults, an annoying waste of time.



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But this is not true of older children and adolescents. They are developing their speech patterns and habits, and when they hear words that they can't understand, good parents will make them look the words up and find out that which the words mean. And finding the meaning of words opens up minds. Every new word is a new thought for a child, and every trip to the dictionary makes the child smarter. Meticulous grammar and intellectual language is an antidote to text messaging, and may serve your child well when he or she actually has to speak to an authority figure rather than texting them. So, I apologize to the adults in the crowd in advance, because you may find my grammar and vocabulary annoying, but please sacrifice for the benefit of the children.

In our last lesson, we discussed the questioning of Jesus by the Sadducees, a Jewish sect that believed that we cease to live after our physical earthly death, that our existence on earth from birth to physical death is the sum total of our lives. The Sadducees developed a clever conundrum that they often used to "prove" their idea. Their argument was that in the afterlife, any widow or widower that married after their first spouse died would have two legal spouses, and having two spouses at the same time is inconsistent with God's law. This led the Sadducees to the conclusion that God would not create an afterlife in which someone could have two spouses.

When the Sadducees brought their argument to Jesus, Jesus answered that there is no problem of having two spouses in heaven simultaneously because the institution of marriage does not exist in heaven. The purpose of marriage is to provide man with the emotional comfort of a spouse, but in heaven man will not need a spouse, as God Himself will supply all of our needs, including our emotional needs. Since there is no marriage in heaven, the Sadducees argument that there can be no resurrection because of marital relationships that are contrary to God's law falls flat. Jesus also pointed out that, in the Law of Moses, Moses calls God "the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob." Neither Abraham, Isaac nor Jacob were alive on earth when Moses spoke of them. Since God is not the God of the dead, but of the living, this reference in the Scripture by Moses proved the existence of the afterlife, showing that everyone that has ever lived is still alive either on earth or somewhere else in God's kingdom, either heaven, or the alternative. Jesus' argument won the day with the crowd, and put the Sadducees to shame.

The Pharisees heard that Jesus embarrassed the Sadducees by providing an argument for the existence of an afterlife which the Sadducees could not refute, and it was an argument with which the Pharisees agreed. In our text for today, **Matthew 22:34-36**, the Bible says:

When the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, they called a meeting. One of them, an expert among the teachers of the law, had witnessed these encounters and knew Jesus had answered well.



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So he came up to Jesus and tested Him with this question: “Teacher, what is the greatest of all the commandments? Which is the first commandment of all?”

The Pharisee’s question has a different focus than that of the Sadducees. The Sadducees sought to prove Jesus’ teaching incorrect, but the Pharisee did not. Since Jesus answered the Sadducees’ question in a way that the Pharisee appreciated, the Pharisee wanted to know the extent to which Jesus’ theology overlapped with his own. Jesus obliged the Pharisee with an answer in **Mark 12:29-31**:

Jesus answered, **“The first of all the commandments is this: ‘Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is one Lord, and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’**

Since the Pharisee asked Jesus which commandment was greatest, the implication is that there are some commandments that are greater than others. But **James 2:10-11** says:

10 For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all.

11 For [God] who said, “Do not commit adultery,” also said, “Do not murder.” Now if you do not commit adultery, but you do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law.

According to James, if you fail to follow even one of God’s laws, you become a sinner, regardless of how important or trivial you may consider the law to be. A murderer’s crime is not mitigated because he is faithful to his wife, and an adulterer is not considered faithful because he has not killed anybody. Whatever law you transgress, meaning break, makes you a lawbreaker, a transgressor of the law. But, since breaking any law makes you a lawbreaker, how can any one law be “greater” than any other?

Well, when Jesus and the Pharisee speak of the “greatest” commandment, they do not mean the commandment that is the most important commandment to follow. The “greatest” commandment is actually the commandment that is the most comprehensive, meaning that all of the other commandments are encompassed in this one commandment. This commandment is the point; all of the other commandments are just details.

Now that we know that this commandment encompasses all of the other commandments, let us look, for a moment, at this greatest of the commandments itself, the commandment to love God.

In my opinion, our love for God has two attributes, and the first and most important attribute of our love for Him is faithfulness. The prerequisite for any loving relationship is commitment. Jesus gave us His commitment as He spoke to His apostle after His resurrection in **Matthew 28:18-20**:

18 And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been



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given to Me in heaven and on earth.

19 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

20 teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Amen.

Amen means, “Let it be so”.

The relationship that God desires to have with man is one in which we have a mutual commitment to neither leave nor or forsake one another. God loves us, and will provide for all of our needs, but God is not neurotic, meaning that God is not compulsive, obsessed or anxious about us. God loves us, but His love is healthy. He commands us to love Him in return. God wants us, but only on mutually satisfactory terms. God requires us to maintain our allegiance to Him in the same way that He maintains His allegiance to us. That is the definition of the attribute of faithfulness in love.

The second attribute of love for God is obedience to Him. Jesus tells us in **John 14:15-17:**

15 “If you love Me, keep My commandments.

16 And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever—

17 the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you.

Jesus tells us that if we keep His commandments, He will send us the Spirit of truth as a helper. What does the Spirit of truth have to do with our keeping the commandments of Jesus Christ?

Well, we can understand this more clearly if we go back to the original transgression, the first time that mankind disobeyed God. **Genesis 3:1-5** reads: **1 Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, “Has God indeed said, ‘You shall not eat of every tree of the garden’?”**

2 And the woman said to the serpent, “We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden;

3 but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, ‘You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.’ ”

4 Then the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die.

5 For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”

In verse five of Genesis 3, the woman is given information that directly contradicts the information that she has received from God. The woman stands between two opinions, and she has to pick one. What process does she use to make her decision? **Genesis 3:6** tells us:

6 So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was



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pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate.

The woman saw that the fruit of the tree had positive attributes. It was pleasant to the eye, but, as we have since found out, that which is pleasant to the eye is not necessarily good for us. To a man, the pleasing form of an available woman might inspire extremely pleasurable thoughts, but her good looks do not justify acting out on certain thoughts that he might have. This is true because the outcome to which our actions may lead us may not actually be pleasurable. Although the tree looked and seemed good, eating the fruit of the tree proved to be disastrous rather than positive. God warned the woman that the fruit of the tree was poison, and the knowledge of good and evil led the man and woman into making unwise decisions. The man and woman decided to cover up and hide after eating the fruit, and the ease with which God discovered them and their sin shows us that this decision not particularly wise.

Suppose that the woman had called upon the Spirit of truth after she heard the opinion of the serpent. The Spirit, leading her to the truth, would have informed her that the serpent's opinion was both false and dangerous to her. The Spirit would have warned the woman that the serpent did not have her best interests at heart, and was really trying to use her to bring death into the world. God and His Son Jesus Christ both have our best interests at heart. They instruct us to obey them because our immaturity and our lack of long-range perspective blind us to that which is best for us when we see something that appears attractive to us.

The details of this episode are in the Scriptures as a warning to us. God gives us leaders and advisers, including parents, pastors, and even the Spirit of truth Himself to keep us from making bad, meaning disobedient, decisions. Parents, pastors and the Spirit of truth have the responsibility to teach us to stick to the commandments of God although we may find that the commandments do not provide for our immediate gratification. God has so designed the world so that we often have to give up that which we want immediately in order to get that which we want most of all.

So the attributes of love for God are faithfulness and obedience. For us to love God with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength means that we will be faithful to obey that which God tells in His commandments with all of our being. When some folk sin against us, they may say, "Charge it to my head, but not my heart", trying to make the point that they don't have anything against us personally, but that their sin against us is just an error. But Jesus does not give us that option. He instructs us, in **Mark 12:29-31**:

Jesus answered, "The first of all the commandments is this: 'Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is one Lord, and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.'



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Loving God, that is, faithfully obeying Him, means that we will also keep the commandments to not murder and not commit adultery, and all of the other commandments in the law as well. So hopefully, we can all understand why the commandment to love God is the greatest, meaning the most comprehensive, of all of the commandments. But Jesus does not end His answer with the greatest commandment. He continues, in **Matthew 22:39**:

39 And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'

Our relationship with God is clear. We are always in the follower position. God is the author of the book of principles that we should use to determine our actions. God knows everything, influences everything that we do, and knows the way that any action that we take will turn out, so He always knows the right thing to do. It logically follows that we should always obey God's commandments.

But, our relationships with other people are different than our relationship with God. In those relationships, we may be in the leadership position or we may be the follower. We may be equals, with no designated leader. No person knows everything, and, unlike God, we often do not know the outcome that the actions that we take will cause. All of us make errors, so any instruction that we give may or may not help the person to whom we give the instruction. The instructions that we give are usually based upon our personal opinions and experiences, and just because I had a certain outcome from an experience does not mean that you will have the same outcome when you have the same experience.

Love for God is a combination of faithfulness and obedience. Our love for one another still requires faithfulness, but our love for one another does not exactly require obedience, since the people that we are called upon to love are not as all knowing as God. Jesus clarifies what is required for love for one another as He gives us what used to be called the Golden Rule, in **Matthew 7:12**:

12 Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.

Jesus instructs us that we should treat other people the way that we want to be treated. His focus is on the prevalent attitude of hypocritical condemnation of one another. We can go back to the first episode of sin to understand that of which Jesus speaks, in **Genesis 3:8-11**:

8 And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.

9 Then the LORD God called to Adam and said to him, "Where are you?"

10 So he said, "I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself."

11 And He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you that you should not eat?"

Now, the proper answer to the question is yes. Adam did eat the fruit of



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the forbidden tree. However, Adam decided that, in addition to admitting his fault, it would better for him if he had someone to throw under the bus. He said, in **Genesis 3:12**

12 Then the man said, “The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate.

Here is the first recorded case of hypocritical condemnation. Hypocritical condemnation says, ‘Yes, I sinned, but my sin is someone else’s fault. They are the one who should be condemned rather than me. I would not have done it had it not been for them.’ Adam condemns both the woman for giving him the fruit and condemns God for giving him the woman.

This episode is the beginning of marital strife. The woman made a bad decision which tempted her husband to sin. Rather than resist the temptation, the husband committed the sin, but then tried to justify his disobedience by blaming his wife for tempting him. But, as I have already noted, no one person knows everything, and everyone makes errors. That is the human condition. When faced with problems, we can either condemn one another or we can support one another, even sacrificially if necessary. That is our choice as marital partners, and fellow human beings, and as citizens of God’s kingdom. The greatest commandment leads us to take responsibility for that which we do, and to not blame others for the consequences of our own actions.

Adam was talking to God, who is a more than competent investigator. It would not have taken God very long to figure out that the woman was a co-conspirator with Adam in taking the fruit of the forbidden tree. But this example is given to show our tendency for trying to deflect the consequences of our own actions at the expense of someone else. Jesus explains this sin in his sermon, beginning with **Matthew 7:1-5**:

1 “Judge not, that you be not judged.

2 For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you.

3 And why do you look at the speck in your brother’s eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye?

4 Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me remove the speck from your eye’; and look, a plank is in your own eye?

5 Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.

Jesus continues, in **Luke 6:36-37**:

36 Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful.

37 “Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven.

Adam sinned. He may have sinned as a response to his wife’s sin, but his wife did not cause him to sin. Adam may have been able to escape some of his punishment had he taken responsibility for his sin himself, and not tried to



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implicate his wife and his Creator in his sin. **1Peter 4:8** tells us:

8 And above all things have fervent love for one another, for “love will cover a multitude of sins.”

Proverbs 10:12 says:

12 Hatred stirs up strife, But love covers all sins.

Loving others, rather than condemning them, covers their sins. Covering sins does not mean hiding sins, but taking on the penalty of the sins rather than shifting the blame to someone else. **1John 1:7** tells us:

7 But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.

God tells us, in **John 3:16-17**

16 For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

17 For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.

Here is love, and the execution of the greatest commandment. God's love for us weak creatures is sacrificial. God's Son had no sin for which to die, and was deserving of the place of one who was perfect. But Jesus became a man, and increased His stature above perfection by not just obeying the law perfectly, but by sacrificing Himself for mankind. To sacrifice for someone else rather than to place blame on them is the true meaning of the Golden Rule, **Matthew 7:12**:

12 Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.

Jesus concluded His answer to the Pharisee in **Matthew 22:40** and **Mark 12:31**:

The whole law and all the prophets depend on these two commandments. There is no commandment greater than these two.”

The Pharisee responded with the summary, in **Mark 12:32-33**:

“Teacher, You have spoken the truth,” replied the expert on the law.

“There is only one God, and to love Him with all your heart and understanding and strength—and to love your neighbor as much as you do yourself—is worth more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices.”

And Jesus responded with approval, in **Mark 12:34**:

When Jesus saw that he gave a wise answer, He said to him, “You aren't far from the kingdom of God.”

So how should we then live?

Let us be faithful to God and to one another, and let us obey God and sacrifice for one another, as **Romans 13:8-14** instructs us:

8 Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law.

9 For the commandments, “You shall not commit adultery,” “You shall not



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murder,” “You shall not steal,” “You shall not bear false witness,” “You shall not covet,” and if there is any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying, namely, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

10 Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

11 And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed.

12 The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light.

13 Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy.

14 But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.

To love one another is to emulate the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and give ourselves for one another. This is the fulfillment of the greatest commandment in the law. Jesus tells us, in **John 13:34-35**:

34 **A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another.**

35 **By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”**

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