

THE SHEMA

MARK 12:28-34; DEUTERONOMY 6:4-9

Mark 12:28 And one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, and perceiving that he had answered them well, asked him, Which is the first commandment of all?

29 And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord: 30 And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment.

31 And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these.

32 And the scribe said unto him, Well, Master, thou hast said the truth: for there is one God; and there is none other but he: 33 And to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love his neighbour as himself, is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.

34 And when Jesus saw that he answered discreetly, he said unto him, Thou art not far from the kingdom of God. And no man after that durst ask him any question.

Deuteronomy 6:4 Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD:

5 And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.

6 And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: 7 And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.

8 And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes.

9 And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates.

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Introduction

I believe that humans love to hear themselves talk. They also like to ask questions. I have found that in certain settings, some people like to ask questions in order to show how educated they are. The unanswered question is music to their ears.

In our passage today, we find a very learned, religious lawyer confronting Jesus with a major question. His request is not whimsical or meaningless. This question is often asked by scribes, confounding both students and Rabbi's. Of course, Jesus did not flinch or duck the question...he replied in such a way that the scribe received new meaning and a deeper understanding of God.

Mark 12:28 And one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, and perceiving that he had answered them well, asked him, Which is the first commandment of all?

The religious leaders tried to catch Jesus saying anything that would condemn him. First they sent Pharisees and Herodians (Mark 12:13-17). Then the Sadducees gave it the old college try (Mark 12:18-27). They all left the audience of Jesus stinging from the truth He taught.

Now we come to an educated, approachable scribe, who upon hearing the wisdom of this young Rabbi, is curious to ask Jesus a question with personal meaning to him. "Which is the first commandment of all?" While on the surface this may seem like a simple question with a simple answer, however, for the scribe, at this time, the teaching of the Jews had 613 individual commands from the Law. Think on that for a minute. 613 individual commands in the Law and this scribe wanted to know which of the 613 was the most important. Of the 613, 365 were considered "negative" and while 248 were "positive." Some of the Laws were considered "light," meaning that they made less of a demand, while others were observed as "heavy", meaning that if a person broke it, it would be met with severe consequences.

This is not a question to attempt to catch Jesus in some error. This learned scholar and teacher understood, that for the Jew, Salvation was found in the observance and keeping of all these 613 laws. This unnamed scribe wanted to put them in order, beginning with the most important of all the Law's first.

Mark's Gospel presents the scribes as teachers of the people who have religious authority, especially over matters of law interpretation, observance and purity. They are associated with the more wealthy members of society and with the Jewish leadership. Scribes are portrayed as teachers of the people, although the teaching of Jesus is more astonishing to the crowds as it has greater authority than the teaching of the scribes (Mark 1:22).¹

The Lord our God is one Lord

29 And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord: 30 And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment.

31 And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these.

In answer to the scribe's question, Jesus quotes the Law back to him. In the fifth book of the Law, Deuteronomy, is found the "Shema". The Shema is a call to prayer for the descendants of Jacob, recited

¹ Peter Tan-Gatue. (2012, 2013, 2014, 2015). Scribe. In J. D. Barry, D. Bomar, D. R. Brown, R. Klippenstein, D. Mangum, C. Sinclair Wolcott, ... W. Widder (Eds.), *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

daily at the morning and evening services. It expresses the Jewish people's ardent faith in and love of God. For the Jew, this prayer is as important as the "Lord's Prayer" or the Apostles Creed is to Christians today.

Deuteronomy 6:4 Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD: 5 And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.

Twice Jesus used the term "...this is the first commandment." At the beginning of his answer and at the end of verse 30.

When God handed down His Law to Moses, the LORD gave 10 Commandments on which all other laws would be derived. The first is:

Exodus 20:3 Thou shalt have no other gods before me.

The scribe would know these verses by heart. It would be like John 3:16 to us today. We have heard the verse so often, that it is impressed upon our hearts and minds.

This portion of Deuteronomy is called the Shema, meaning to "hear intelligently and with understanding." For example, when you begin to pray, what are your first words in the prayer?

"Our Father." "Heavenly Father." "Lord." For the descendants of Abraham it is "Hear, O Israel; the LORD our God is one LORD." Shema, Israel, Jehovah, Elohim is Jehovah alone."

However, when Jesus is speaking to the scribe, it is speaking in Greek. "Listen Israel! Kurios our Theos, Kurios is one." In the New Testament, Kurios is used for the title of Jesus in most places. Theos is the one true God. Interesting.

Love Others As Thyself

31 And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these.

However, Jesus does not stop with His answer. He gives the scribe something to chew on...something new.

The second part of Jesus answer is taken from the book of Leviticus:

Leviticus 19:18 Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I am the LORD.

Leviticus 19:34 But the stranger that dwelleth with you shall be unto you as one born among you, and thou shalt love him as thyself; for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.

There is no room in Christianity to abhor others in such a way that you would not want to present to them a way of salvation. The Jews hated the Samaritans and they hated the Jews. The Gospel is given to all men, therefore, we are to share the plan of Salvation to all people. I love that I am saved and will spend eternity with God. However, if I hated people so much that I would not present to them a way out of hell, then I am not following the commandment of Jesus and God.

Let us look at these verses of Deuteronomy 6 within the context:

Deuteronomy 6:1 Now these are the commandments, the statutes, and the judgments, which the LORD your God commanded to teach you, that ye might do them in the land whither ye go to possess it: 2 That thou mightest fear the LORD thy God, to keep all his statutes

and his commandments, which I command thee, thou, and thy son, and thy son's son, all the days of thy life; and that thy days may be prolonged. 3 Hear therefore, O Israel, and observe to do it; that it may be well with thee, and that ye may increase mightily, as the LORD God of thy fathers hath promised thee, in the land that floweth with milk and honey. 4 Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD: 5 And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. 6 And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: 7 And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. 8 And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. 9 And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates.

It is quite evident that the main focus in the worship of God is Obedience.

Look at this passage:

- To love God is to obey His commandments and statutes “all the days of thy life” (Deut. 6:2).
- To love God means you will teach these commandments to your children and grandchildren (Deut. 6:2), when you sit, walk, lie down, and rise up (Deut. 6:7)
- Later Moses speaks of remembering He is the God “who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the place of slavery” (Deut. 6:12).
- To love God supremely means you shall “not follow other gods, the gods of the peoples around you, for the Lord your God [*Yahweh* your *Elohim*], who is among you, is a jealous God” (Deut. 6:14–15).

32 And the scribe said unto him, Well, Master, thou hast said the truth: for there is one God; and there is none other but he: 33 And to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love his neighbour as himself, is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.

The scribe “got it” that day. The truth and insight that Jesus gave to those passages of the Law were fresh and alive to him. He understood that the sacrificial system was flawed, if it did not include these two commandments. The “light came on” in this scribe's life that day.

Look at his words:

...there is one God; and there is none other but he.

We are to love him with all our devotion and love.

...love him with all understanding, soul and strength

...love our neighbors as ourselves.

He finishes up with what true religion is...it is a matter of the heart and not the outward sacrifices and rituals. I wonder if the words of the prophet Samuel came to his mind.

1 Samuel 15:22 “And Samuel said, Hath the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams.”

Conclusion

I am so happy that Mark tells us of Jesus response to the scribe's declaration.

34 And when Jesus saw that he answered discreetly, he said unto him, Thou art not far from the kingdom of God. And no man after that durst ask him any question.

“Thou art not far from the kingdom of God.” He is not telling him that he has to try harder or to continue trying to keep all 613 Laws. What Jesus was telling him is that his thought processes are open to the Gospel...entering the kingdom of God is not a matter of doing, it is a matter of believing in the heart.

Drawing near to the Messiah is not found in a list of “do’s and don’t’s” it is found in matters of the heart.

No amount of sacrifices can take the place of a relationship with God.

He is God, and there is no other.