

The Essentials of Disciple-Making
Session Four: Living a Gospel Lifestyle
Commentary

Matthew 22:34-40

22:34–36. The Pharisees had regrouped after Jesus turned their first trap against them in 22:15–22. Seeing the same thing happen to the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together, seeking power and courage in numbers. The one expert in the law whom they chose to ask the testing question must have approached Jesus with some trepidation. For the third time in three challenges, the questioner addressed Jesus as Teacher.

This time the question was simple but profound: Which is the greatest commandment in the Law? Matthew used the simple adjective “great” (megas), but it carried superlative force (“greatest”) in this context. The question demonstrated the way the religious leaders looked at the law. In their tradition, they had reduced the law to 365 negative and 248 positive commandments. They spent much time trying to prioritize these innumerable technicalities. They thought they could trap the Lord of the law.

22:37–38. Jesus drew his answer from the most memorized and recited passage in all the Jewish Scriptures: Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength” (Deut. 6:4–5).

Jesus quoted the Septuagint almost verbatim, but he substituted mind (dianoia) for the similar sounding “might” (dunamos). We are to take this list as an emphatic way of saying, “Love God with everything you are in every way possible.” But it was not without significance that our Lord deliberately substituted “mind” here rather than some other term. Christians need to take a lesson from this. We should learn to think critically and biblically.

Jesus emphasized his answer by identifying this commandment as the first and greatest commandment. This commandment was greatest because of the statement in Deuteronomy 6:4 which preceded it: “Yahweh is your God, Yahweh alone” (paraphrased). To honor Yahweh as the one true God is to love him exclusively, from among all others who claim to be gods. 22:39. But Jesus went beyond the critics question and added a second command, which is like (homoios, “resembling”) the first, this time drawing from Leviticus 19:18 (cf. Matt. 19:19): love your neighbor as yourself. This commandment and the first complement each other, so Jesus mentioned them together. They are not to be separated. It is impossible to love God without loving people, for his law and heart’s desire is to love others. The measure by which we know if we are truly loving people is if we love them as much as we love ourselves (cf. Eph. 5:28–31). 22:40. Finally, Jesus defended his choice of these two commandments by observing that all the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments (or “depends” on them). Every Old Testament commandment and teaching fulfilled the commands to love God and to love people.¹

¹ Stuart K. Weber, *Matthew*, ed. Max Anders (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000).

Romans 12:1-2

12:1–2 Paul commonly used the indicative mode of speech to make statements about what God has done for us before using the imperative mode to outline our proper response (e.g., Therefore ... I urge you). The order of presentation is doctrine first, and then duty. Our true worship entails offering our bodies as a living sacrifice, which means dedication of the total person to living for God's honor. Christians are to be different from non-Christian society. We should experience a progressive transformation of life by the renewing of our mind. The mind is changed by prayer, by reading and reflection on God's Word, by worship, and by meditation on God's acts as the Holy Spirit works in us.²

² *CSB Study Bible*, ed. Edward Blum and Trevin Wax (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017).