

The Question About the Great Commandment

by S. Lewis Johnson

S. Lewis Johnson explores the Great Commandment, emphasizing the importance of loving God and neighbor as central to Christian ethics and understanding of God's nature.

Duration: 58:33

Scripture: Leviticus 19:18, Deuteronomy 6:4-5, Matthew 6:33, Matthew 22:37-40, Luke 10:25

Topics: "Commandments"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the impossibility of completely obeying the law and loving God and man. He mentions how even the disciples and their fathers were unable to bear the yoke of the law. The speaker also expresses his dislike for the idea of complete dedication, as he believes no one has ever achieved it. He highlights the significance of the cross and the importance of recognizing one's own sin. The sermon concludes by emphasizing the central role of love in the relationship with God and in fellowship with others.

Transcript

Tonight we're continuing our series of studies on the Suffering Servant, the Old Testament, and the Doctrine of the Atonement. You have probably noticed that so far we have not said anything specifically about the Doctrine of the Atonement. That will come up as we continue our series of studies and reach the appropriate passages where it will be helpful for us to pause and deal a little with some of the theology of the questions that arise out of our text.

But we are trying to handle the Suffering Servant and the use of the Old Testament. And again tonight we have a passage in which our Lord handles the scriptures, and I hope that as we look at these passages we shall not only learn what they say, but also learn something about how to read the Old Testament for ourselves. Now the subject for tonight is the question about the Great Commandment.

It is the famous day of questions in our Lord's ministry. And it has to do with those last few days that he spent upon the earth. He spars with three groups, the secularists, or the Herodians, in Mark chapter 12, verse 13 through verse 17, and they ask the question about tribute to Caesar.

And he answers with his famous word, Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's. And then he wrestles with the rationalists in verses 18 through 27. And they come to him and ask him the question about Moses and the brother who died and left his wife for about six other

men.

Now tonight we are looking at the encounter that our Lord had with the ritualists, or the scribes. Since the first two groups have been routed, the ritualists step up to take their cuts now as our Lord pitches the word of God. The interview with the scribes raises the question of ethics, or norms of behavior.

And in the New Testament, I must confess I am inclined to think of Philippians chapter 4 and verse 8, when I think of ethics, where Paul utters a text that has tremendous bearing upon that subject. He says, Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, if there be any virtue or excellence, and if there be any praise, think on these things. That's one of Paul's great ethical texts.

Now let's see what our Lord has to say to the ritualists, or the scribes, who come to him. The request that the scribe makes is found in verse 28, and our outline tonight is very simple. Roman 1, the request of the scribe.

The scribe approaches our Lord and he asks him, Which is the first commandment of all? In the Gospel of Matthew, he asks the question, Which is the great commandment? Now this is a very, very natural question for the scribe to ask, for the rabbis in their study of the Mosaic law and the Old Testament scriptures arrived at 613 commandments. These 613 commandments were designed to summarize the teaching of the Old Testament. I think if I had been listening to rabbis who told me that there were 613 commandments in the scriptures that I must obey, I'm quite sure that I would have wanted to ask the question, Which is the chief commandment? Or what is the great commandment? Or at least, what are the most important commandments? 613.

Three hundred and sixty-five of them were negative. Two hundred and forty-eight were positive. The great Rabbi Hillel, the elder, has for many centuries exercised a powerful influence on traditional Judaism, and a story is told in rabbinic tradition of a heathen who once came to him and said, I want you to teach me the law standing on one foot.

And what he meant by that, of course, was he wanted Hillel to tell him what is the essence of the Jewish religion. Knowing that he couldn't stand on one foot for so long, he would have to put the teaching of the law in a very few words. The answer that Hillel is supposed to have given to him is, Do not do to your fellow that which is hateful to you.

This is the whole law. The rest is its interpretation. It's interesting in analyzing that statement to notice that there is not one word about faith in God or man's relationship to God.

And it is in evidence of the decline of rabbinic Judaism that a statement like this could have influence in Judaism. We're going to see that the scribe was not like Rabbi Hillel. He was a person who had a great deal of spiritual understanding, and he came out of, it appears at least, a sincere desire to know which is the chief commandment that our Lord would give.

What was his analysis of the Old Testament? Our Lord's reply is in the form of two citations from the Old Testament, which set forth two commandments. And the first is the commandment from Deuteronomy chapter 6, verse 4 and verse 5. And there is no need for us to turn back to Deuteronomy chapter 6, verses 4 and 5, for it is cited here by our Lord in verse 29 and verse 30. And Jesus answered him, The first of all

the commandments is, Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord, 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. And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these.

Matthew adds, On these hang all the law and the prophets. Now the first commandment is a combination of two texts. The first text in verse 29, Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord.

Now this is one of the most famous texts in the Old Testament, and it is particularly famous for Jews because this is the famous Shema Yisrael. Now Shema Yisrael is the name of the Hebrew of the first two words, Hear, O Israel, Shema Yisrael. And it is called Shema Yisrael and known for that because it is something of the creed of Judaism.

You'll notice at first glance that it appears to be one of the simplest and one of the profoundest of all of the monotheistic creeds. It expresses the monotheism of Judaism, and since it is one of their sterling texts, it's no wonder that the Jewish men schooled in this text should have difficulty with Christianity, which posits a trinity. Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord.

I think I can understand why a Jewish person would have some question about Christianity. I think I can understand how Mohammedan would have some question about Christianity. For Christians say that there is one God who subsists in three persons.

And we admit, of course, that that is a mystery that we cannot fully comprehend. But in the study of the Scriptures, this is the conclusion to which Christians have come, that there is one God who subsists in three persons. One in essence, three in personality.

So, hear O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord is a stumbling block for a man who seeks to move from Judaism into Christianity. Now, it is not an unsurpassable stumbling block because, as we know from the New Testament teaching, some of the outstanding Jewish leaders of the time of our Lord came over into Christianity without any problems over this text, finally. They may have had some originally.

So far as we know, the greatest teacher in Judaism at the time of our Lord was a man by the name of Nicodemus, for our Lord calls him the teacher in Israel in John chapter 3. And if we read the Gospel of John correctly in the light of the testimony that he gave in the burial of our Lord, it is evident that he passed from unbelief into belief through the ministry of our Lord, perhaps his ministry in dying. We know too that Joseph of Arimathea was a member of the council, a very wealthy man, undoubtedly an influential man, and he moved out of Judaism into Christianity, came from what from the calling out often, no doubt, of hear O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord into the Christian faith and believed that there is one God who subsists in three persons because they prayed to the Father in the name of the Son in the power of the Holy Spirit. And there were, of course, many others, not the least of whom is the Apostle Paul.

But I think we can see that it would be a problem for a man who believed in monotheism and who believed this text to be a creed about God to be told that God is one in essence but subsists in three persons. There is an interesting fact about this text, however, that I don't think we can be completely dogmatic about, but I am not so certain that there is not some hint in the text itself that there is a plurality in the Godhead that Israel proclaims in the use of this text. Let me point you to this fact.

This text reads, The Lord our God is one Lord. Now in Hebrew there are two words for one. One of them is the word Yahiv.

Yahiv is a word that refers to absolute unity. That should be a yo that I made it too big. Yahiv.

Perhaps you'll be confused. Now I know it's all clear as day to you. And I'll spell that out for you.

Y-C-H-I-D. That is a word which in Hebrew refers to absolute unity. For example, it is the word that is used of the only son of Abraham, Isaac, in Genesis chapter twenty-two.

Abraham, take Isaac, your son, your only son. That is a term then that refers to absolute unity. There is another word translated one in the Old Testament.

It is the term Echad. Or, let's spell it out, Echad. Echad refers to compound unity.

That is a unity of more than one element. It is for example used in the text in Genesis chapter two and verse twenty-four where we read about the man and the woman and his wife, the man and his wife. They too shall be one flesh.

Not Yahiv, absolute unity. Echad, relative unity. I mean compound unity.

There is relative unity in the family thereafter once they have been married. But this is compound unity. That is the unity of two in one.

Now, the interesting thing, if this is true to the Old Testament language, and I think it is so far as I know, then what we have is in this very text, Hear O Israel, the Lord our God is Jehovah a unity or Jehovah one, we have an acknowledgment of the fact that the Lord is a compound unity. That is, a unity which would satisfy the Christian requirements, one in essence but three in personality. And when we remember too that the word for God in the Old Testament is a word that is often in the plural, and in this case is in the plural, to give you the literal rendering of that text, which may be so literal as to be a little warped, but nevertheless to give you the thought of it, Israel may well be saying, Hear O Israel, the Lord or Jehovah or Yahweh our God is Yahweh, a compound unity.

So at least the text, Deuteronomy chapter six and verse four is not a text that is opposed to the doctrine of the Trinity at all. But even if that is not in it, all it says is what every Christian would agree is the teaching of the Bible, and that is that God is a unity. The Trinity is a unity.

The three persons subsist in one essence. So there is one God, not three gods. Christianity does not believe in tri-theism.

They believe that their God is a Trinity. And there is all the world of difference between Trinity, a Trinity, and tri-theism, or monotheism and tri-theism. Now this is the first text that our Lord cites.

We could render this passage, by the way, in two different ways. We could render it Yahweh our God is one single Yahweh. And if that is the rendering, then of course what the Old Testament is saying is that Jehovah is not the kind of God that they have in Tyre, composed of the gods are bales of Tyre, who can be divided up into different gods.

The unity would be stressed by that rendering. Jehovah our God is one single Jehovah. Or it could be rendered Jehovah is our God, Jehovah alone.

And in that case his exclusive position would be stressed, or his absolute sovereignty. I rather like that second because I think that is what is stressed in the context, the absolute sovereignty of Jehovah. But at the same time his unity is affirmed as well.

Well now let me make just a couple of observations based on this first text that our Lord cites, Deuteronomy 6, 4, leaving out verse 5 for just a moment. Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord, or Yahweh is our God, Yahweh alone. I want you to notice, first of all, just as an observation, that the foundation of all human duty rests upon the self-existent unique revealed God.

Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord, and thou shalt love the Lord thy God. In other words, this exhortation, the command, the responsibility that rests upon man is grounded upon the fact that Jehovah is one Jehovah. Now the term Jehovah, as I've said to you many times, and others have no doubt taught you also, the term Jehovah comes from the verb to be, hayah, so that the word for God, Jehovah, is really something like he is.

That's his name. And I commented, I think, the other night that when young people put on their bumper stickers, Jesus is, they are confessing the self-existence of our Lord Jesus Christ, though I'm sure that 99.9% of them do not realize what they're doing theologically. But fortunately, in this case, they are led by a right kind of spirit to right doctrine in spite of themselves.

Jesus is, and of course that is true, he is the self-existent Jehovah. He possesses, in his divine essence, self-existence. There never was a time when our Lord Jesus Christ did not exist.

He is the self-existent God. So the foundation of all of our relationship to God rests upon this self-existence of the essence of the Trinity. All of the infinities that we proclaim about God are really modes of this one absolute infinity.

He is the infinite God. He is the self-existent God. So when we talk about his power, and we say he is eternally powerful, we are merely saying something that pertains to his essence.

If we say he is infinitely wise, we usually say he is omniscient. We are simply affirming something about his eternal, self-existent nature as the self-existent God. If we say he is loving, or good, or just, or holy, all of these attributes are infinite attributes, but they are simply modes of the one absolute infinity, the being of God.

Every relationship that man has with God begins with this relationship to the being of God, the self-existent being. He is the only person in the universe who exists of himself. Every other person is a derived being.

You are derived. The angels are derived. Michael is derived.

But the Son, the Spirit, and the Father are underrived. When your children say, where did God come from? Well, he did not come from anything. He always is.

He always was. He always shall be. He is the self-existent God.

All our relationships to God begin with this fact. This is why when the Ten Commandments are given, remember Moses is given the word, I am the Lord thy God, and thou shalt have no other gods before me. I am the self-existent God.

And in the light of that, the placing of anyone else upon the pedestal of Godhood is a denial of my self-existence. This, of course, is why we can never represent God by anything, not even that picture that you have in your room of the Lord Jesus Christ. Because you see, our Lord is also an incorruptible person.

You cannot effectively represent him by any kind of picture. Now you can run through my house and you will not find any picture of Jesus Christ. Because our Lord is a self-existent person.

True, his humanity had a beginning. His humanity began in the manger in Bethlehem. But when I think of the Lord, I do not think simply of a human person.

He was that, but he was a human, a person who had human nature. He was that, of course, but he is a divine person. This is why idolatry is wrong.

This is why images are wrong. This is why it is idolatry to put images in the church. This is why it is wrong to bow down before them.

This is why Luther got so excited and upset over the images that existed in the church in his day. This is why he became so disturbed over the fact that enough pieces of the wood of the cross were scattered around the cathedrals of Europe to plant a forest the size of the Black Forest, perhaps in Germany. So the self-existent God, this is an important doctrine.

In the New Testament it is put very simply. Little children, keep yourselves from what? Idols. Right.

Now as a corollary of the self-existent God, the Lord, as he says, the Lord, our God, is one Lord. As a corollary, of course, he is sovereign. If there is only one, and he is a God, and he is Jehovah, he is the he is, he is sovereign.

And the following command confirms that. He is the one whom we are to obey. One of the great preachers of Germany today is Helmut Thielicke, and he is on the faculty of the University of Hamburg in Germany.

Professor Thielicke has written, whenever God the Creator is deposed as the absolute and sovereign Lord of the world and our life, the gods take over. I think that is true. If he is not the God of our lives and the sovereign Lord of our lives, then the gods have taken over.

Now it may be in the form of lust, it may be in the form of pride, it may be in the form of materialism, it may be in the form of ambition, it may be in the form of a countless, countless ways. But nevertheless, if he is not sovereign, then the gods have taken over in our lives and we have become idolaters, in fact. Paul calls covetousness idolatry.

And in that sense, we are guilty. The second commandment that our Lord cites is found in verse 31. And the second is like, namely this, thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.

Now these two texts apparently were put together by other people besides our Lord, because remember when the lawyer, let's turn over to Luke chapter 10, when the lawyer came to the Lord Jesus and asked him about eternal life, these two texts were put together in that context. It's in Luke chapter 10 and verse 25, and behold, now some of you are searching around for the Gospel of Luke, it's page 1088, in case you're still looking. It's Matthew, Mark, Luke, remember.

And behold, I'm just kidding you. Some of you are looking at me a little strange, but you haven't been here long. And behold, a certain lawyer stood up and tempted him saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit

eternal life? Now when you come to the Lord Jesus Christ and say, what shall I do to inherit eternal life, I'm not surprised to read his answer.

Because you see, when a person comes to our Lord and asks what shall I do to inherit eternal life, the first thing he needs to know is that he cannot get to heaven on the basis of doing. He is asking what great thing can I do? That is evident from the tense of the verb in the original text. What great magnificent work of benevolence or religion may I do that would qualify me for eternal life? So our Lord said, since I'm going to supply what is in his mind, since you are coming on the works basis, why then what's written in the law, how do you read it? And he answering said, thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, with all thy strength, with all thy mind, and thy neighbor as thyself.

He has put the two together too. And he said unto him, thou hast answered right, this do, and thou shalt live. But there is a tremendous difference between the do that the lawyer asked and the do that our Lord replied.

Because the one is, what great thing shall I do? The tense is aorist, looking at the act as an event, whereas in our Lord's reply the tense is present and refers to continuous action. This be doing or this keep on doing, and thou shalt live. In other words, since you've come to me on the basis of works, I'm going to tell you how to get to heaven on the basis of works.

You know how you get to heaven on the basis of works? Well, you keep the law perfectly from the time you first draw a breath as a human being until the time you draw your last breath. And if you've kept the law perfectly from the time you've drawn your first breath to the time you've drawn your last breath, then you may qualify for heaven on the basis of works. This do and thou shalt live.

Now this man, of course, desired to justify himself. That's what we read. He willing to justify himself said unto Jesus, and who is my neighbor? Now here's a man who then was looking for a way to heaven on the basis of works, and our Lord had to point out to him that if you're going to heaven on the basis of works, you can never be sure until you have breathed your last breath, and then you must never have done anything displeasing to the Lord by thought, by word, by deed.

In other words, it is totally impossible. Nobody can get to heaven on the basis of works. And that man, if the Holy Spirit had been working in irresistible grace in his heart, he would have cried out, Oh Lord, no one can keep the law perfectly.

Then our Lord would have said, you're not far from the kingdom of heaven now. Well now I want you to notice a couple of observations as a result of putting of these texts together. Deuteronomy 6, 4 and 5, Hear O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord, and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.

Now notice the relationship that exists between these two texts. In the first text, I'll conclude those texts as if they were one, Deuteronomy 6, 4 and 5. In the first, it is the relationship to God that is significant. Hear O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord, and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, with all thy mind.

In the second text, it is the relationship toward man that is predominant. Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. In the first text, it is godliness that is stressed, and in the next, it is goodness that is stressed.

Or, it is godliness toward God, or the relationship toward God. It is goodness or the relationship toward man. In the one text, it is the relationship upward that is predominant.

In the other text, it is the relationship outward that is predominant. Now this is no accident on our Lord's part, and the order of these two is of the greatest significance. It is totally impossible for any man to ever live outwardly correctly in a way that pleases God if he is not, first of all, related toward God correctly and pleasing to him vertically.

In other words, the horizontal relationship toward men is impossible if the vertical relationship toward God is in any way out of kilter. That is what Paul said in Romans chapter 1, verse 18. And I heard Mr. McRae say a few Sundays ago, the wrath of God has been revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.

That is exactly what Paul is saying. The wrath of God is revealed upon ungodliness and unrighteousness. These are the two aspects of the relationship to God and man.

Ungodliness is one, unrighteousness is the other. And of course, if we are to do toward men the things that we should do, we must settle that other relationship first. Many years ago, the relationship toward God was stressed in the Christian profession around the world.

Great stress was laid upon the right relationship to God in the professing Christian churches. And as a result, the professing Christian churches were healthy. Why, in those days most of the Baptist churches were Christian churches and most of the Presbyterian churches were Christian churches.

And there weren't any independent churches to speak of around because they weren't needed in those days. Most of the great denominations were sound. But in those days, stress was laid upon the vertical relationship toward God.

But then rationalism and liberalism and other forms of liberalism and modernism came into the Christian church. And as a result, the faith began to be watered down and watered down until finally ministers in the pulpit were not, did not very often speak about the cross of Jesus Christ. They talked very little about the atonement through the blood.

I like to hear the word blood every now and then, you know. They didn't talk about the atonement through the blood. They didn't talk about the deity of Jesus Christ.

They didn't talk about the sinfulness of man. After all, they had to leave the congregation with some shreds of respectability. And so they didn't talk about these things.

They didn't talk about the bodily resurrection. They didn't talk about the second coming. And the poor people who came into the church who stopped studying their Bible listened to what the ministers were saying and pretty soon they didn't have any faith either.

And then in order to preach, since the vertical relationship did not exist, great stress was laid on the horizontal relationship. And so we were told that ethics is the heart of the Christian faith. And the doctrines of the word of God were simply do unto others as you would have them do unto you and so on.

And even Rabbi Hillel's summary of Judaism would have been a very nice kind of a text to see in the Protestant churches. Now you can see that all of that is contrary to what our Lord is saying here and all of

it is contrary to the Bible. I think of course the climax of all of this was reached not too long ago with Joseph Fletcher's Situation Ethics, which in effect says, we want to avoid the extremes of legalism, and you should understand something like that, the extremes of legalism parenthesis, evangelical Christianity, and antinomianism, no Christianity at all.

And we affirm that there is only one norm or standard of Christian life and that is the norm or standard of love. We must not have any rules and regulations, but we must have one rule and regulation. Now you'll always discover that the unbelievers are very irrational.

They will tell us that we must do away with rules, thereby making a new rule for us. But it's their rule this time, you see. And anyway, their rule is one absolute rule and that is that love is the one rule.

He has his presuppositions, but he doesn't like to tell you what they are. They are the presuppositions of pragmatism, that which has practically wrecked Western civilization. John Dewey, James, and others of that irrationalist type of philosophy been responsible for a great deal of the harm in our educational institutions from our universities on down to our grammar schools.

Their presuppositions are pragmatism, relativism, only one absolute, positivism, we decide on our values and everything is arrived at by virtue of decision, and personalism. Only persons really are valuable, things are not valuable, except insofar as they relate to persons. And the result is situation ethics.

And situation ethics is a kind of ethics that is constructed by the use of bizarre examples. You know, like one famous one that Joseph Fletcher used was an example something like this. A woman was held prisoner by one of the forces in the last war.

The only way in which she could get release would be by virtue of pregnancy, and on the basis of that she could get a release in order to take care of her children back home. And so she had one of her guards impregnate her so that thereby she would qualify for release so she could go home. Now was that a good thing? Now Joseph Fletcher gives that example in his book.

He doesn't actually say it's good, but he says so many other things that are good that it's evident he thinks that is good. He wants simply to ask you to make that decision for him there. But that is the kind of thing that is situation ethics.

It is good because it is based on love. It is, of course, a thorough denial of Scripture. It is a ruling out of the possibility that God may work her release in his own way apart from these rules, and so on.

So you see the idea that the relationships that we have are altogether man-made is thoroughly contrary to the teaching of the Word of God. Martin Lloyd-Jones is perhaps the greatest preacher that Britain has had in the last thirty or forty years. Martin Lloyd-Jones in one of his books on the Epistle to the Romans comments on the fact that there was a meeting in Glasgow some years ago in which the Lord Provost of Glasgow came to address a conference, and it was a conference of preachers, and so he made a typical statement.

He said, now all of you men are very learned theologians. I am not. I'm just a plain man.

I'm a man of affairs, and I do not understand your theology and all these things. Indeed, I'm not interested in your theology, and I believe you people are wasting a lot of time over your theology. He went on, what I want to know is this, how can I love my neighbor? That is what we want to know from you.

We're not interested in your great theology. I want to know, and the common man wants to know, how can I love my neighbor? Now that man in that comment revealed his total ignorance of the scriptural teaching, and if you felt deep down in your heart some sympathy with what he was saying, you are totally out of sympathy with the teaching of the Word of God. For the teaching of the Word of God is that you cannot possibly love your neighbor unless you first of all have a right relationship to God through theology.

So it is of the greatest significance that we recognize that the relationship vertically is the important relationship, and it is the only means whereby a relationship horizontally may be attained. Now I know you're thinking that I'm stepping on your toes or saying a lot of things I shouldn't say, or maybe you're just thinking I'm preaching. Well that's all right.

This is exactly, I am sure, what our Lord is saying. Exactly. Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord, and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, with all thy mind, and then thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.

That's the first observation out of those texts arranged so closely together that has come home to me. The second, of course, is that the heart of genuine spiritual life is love of God and man, not pleasure. Fellowship with God is the aim of human life.

Why even the scribe who was not a Christian man, and so far as we know did not become a Christian man, he saw that love was more than ritual. In his reply he makes that comment. The completeness of the answer of our Lord is stressed in Matthew 22, 40 when he says, on these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

In other words, the relationship to God, out of which flows the relationship to man, is a relationship of love and the heart of genuine spiritual living is love expressed in fellowship with God and fellowship out of that fellowship with God with man. In other words, the greatest, the aim in life is not human happiness in the sense of pleasure. The aim in life is happiness in the sense of fellowship with God.

We are bombarded with all kinds of unscriptural propaganda on the television screen. I must confess I'm speaking with a little bit of anger. My TV is broken.

I'm not going to cry. But when I turn my TV on, I hear commercials like the Geritol commercial. And you know the climax goes something like this, if you have your health, you have just about everything.

Now how ridiculous can something be? And that sounds so good, doesn't it? First two or three times I heard that. I said, that sounds real good. I sure am glad I have my health.

But if you have your health, my dear friend, you don't have everything. Fellowship with God is everything. Health is unimportant in the light of that.

It's not the relationship with man or with the body that is significant. It's the relationship with God. There is true happiness.

Now one other thing. I want you to notice how you should study the Bible. The possibility of the fulfillment of all of this rests in the covenant love of election and the cross.

And I know what you're saying. Now Dr. Johnson, you said you're only going to talk about election three or four times. Well I've already used about three of my four.

I have given myself one or two other occasions. I didn't realize how often it is found in some of these texts. But I want you to notice, I want you to notice that when our Lord cites this commandment, he says, the Lord our God is one Lord.

Did you notice that expression? Hear O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord. Now wait a minute. How did Israel have the right to call God their God? Well the only reason that they have the right to call God their God is because their God Jehovah has what? Elected them.

That's what. He chose Abraham. That's what the scriptures say.

He chose Abraham and his seed. And so he is the Lord our God. And it is evident in this text that the possibility of the fulfillment of this tremendous obligation to love God and love man rests upon a prior relationship to God.

The relationship of election. Now that election works itself out in its fundamental foundations to the cross of Jesus Christ where the blood was shed, laying the foundations by which God may righteously elect Israel, elect Abraham and elect his seed in him. So implicit here, explicit is the doctrine of election and implicit is ultimately the cross of our Lord Jesus when the seed shall die for the whole of the seed of Abraham.

Now all that's right in the text. You see in the final analysis, the mightiest sanctions are not the commands of the Old Testament. Now the Bible is without rival when it speaks in the language of command because the Bible speaks of eternity.

The Bible speaks of conscience. The Bible directs its words to the conscience. The power of the Holy Spirit brings the Word of God home to the heart of men.

And men tremble as the Word of God speaks to them because the Bible is powerful. But the mightiest sanctions are not legal motives. The reason men obey is not because they are hit over the head with the hammer of the demands of the law.

The reason men obey is related to the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. And I must confess, the cross is a place around which I love to linger in my thought because most of my theology arises out of reflection around the cross of Jesus Christ. It's not because I read my title to everlasting life and the blood was shed there, than the blood that was shed there.

It is because there I see the greatness of God. If you think that in the Old Testament the thou shalt not, thou shalt not, thou shalt not, thou shalt not kill, thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not this, thou shalt not that. If you think that that reveals the sin of man, and it does, you have come part of the way along the road of harmartiology or the doctrine of sin.

But you never understand sin until you stand before the cross of Jesus Christ and look up at the sinless Son of God, the second person of the blessed Trinity, shedding His blood for the sins of sinners. Never do you understand what sin is in the sight of God until you see that. And also, never do you understand the holiness of God, the fact that He must be right and that truth must prevail until you also see the Son there.

For He cannot bypass one sin of the sinners. Every sin must be paid for. That's why the Son must die.

And so when I look at the cross, I see how important it is that God be right, that He be holy and demonstrated holy. And also, I see how important it is that I see my sin, because that's what brought it about. So the sanctions of thou shalt not, they're not the things that move men to obey.

They merely tell us that there's no hope. It is the blood of the cross that creates motivation, salvation, which comes out of love for what has been done for me. It's all in the text.

Now then, I must hasten on. I had a good time tonight. Verse 32, the response of the scribe.

Now the scribe is not like some Presbyterians in a fashionable church. They were described by someone who knew them as all vogue on the outside and a little vague on the inside. He was a man who knew something about theology, though he was not a Christian.

We read, Well, Master, hast thou said the truth? For there is one God, and there is none other but he. 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 neighbor as himself. And here he adds something of his own, which is true.

It is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices. In other words, this person was not a little vague on the inside. He understood the responsibility that man has to God, and he answers sensibly, as our Lord in a moment will say, discreetly.

That word means sensibly. He's answered sensibly, and he's comprehended that the ritual life is not enough. And so our Lord then replies finally in verse 34.

He says, noting that he's answered discreetly, Thou art not far from the kingdom of God. Why did he say that? Why I think that he said he was not far from the kingdom of God, because if he just came to realize his sin, he might then slip right into that kingdom, for everybody in there knows that they are sinners. That's one of the great characteristics of the children of God.

They know they are sinners. The Bible says all God's children are taught of God. And this is the first lesson they learn, that we are sinners.

Have you learned the first lesson? You learn the first lesson. That's it. Lesson number one is sin.

S-I-N. Sin. Now, I have to close.

Six minutes. Four conclusions. First, the real demands of the law now become evident.

A complete love of God and a complete love of man. It's no wonder that Peter, when the Jerusalem conference was held, spoke about the yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear. No one can bear that yoke.

Nobody can obey the law in themselves completely. Completely love God, completely love man. No, that's impossible.

In fact, you know, this is just a little foible of my own. I don't even like to hear Christians talk about complete dedication, total dedication. I've never seen a totally dedicated man.

Maybe one will arise out of this congregation, but I've never seen one. I'd like to see him. I'd like to touch him.

I'd like to stick around him for a long time. Totally dedicated man. I think that is a denial of theology to affirm such.

Now, it is possible for a man to be in fellowship with God. Don't misunderstand me. But a totally dedicated man, I've yet to see one.

And of course, naturally you want to ask his friends and particularly his wife. I'm sure that even his children could probably tell you a few things about him too that would deny his so-called profession. Second lesson, you're all laughing because you know how true it is.

Second, again as a corollary, we now see the depth of human need, at least in part. Who can say that he's loved God and man perfectly? Why, who does not plead an answer to that? A fervent and agonizing guilty. By the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified.

We're dead all over. Not just partially dead, we're dead. And when a man is dead in his spirit, he is dead all over.

His feet are dead, his hands are dead, his eyes are dead, his ears are dead. And the scriptures say that we are dead in trespasses and sin. So we're dead all over and we need to double work.

And when we think of the cross, there we finally see and shudder at sin for its own sake and reverence right for itself, as I said a minute ago. There we really see the depth of human need. J. C. Rowell, one of the great commentators on the Gospels has said, the man who has the clearest view of the moral law will always be the man who has the highest sense of the value of Christ's atoning blood.

And that leads to the highest of morality. Talk they of morals. Oh, bleeding lamb, the best morality is love of thee.

And third, I think we can see in the case of the scribe how far we can go in the truth and still be lost. He knows the word of God. He's able to cite texts like a member of the Navigators.

And not only can he cite texts, not only does he know them and cite them, but he expounds them. And he applies the text too. He says, well, this text is great.

I realize it's great. God is one. We should love the Lord.

We should love our neighbors as ourselves. And furthermore, he says, to do these things is more than burnt offerings and sacrifices. In other words, the Old Testament sacrifices are not the end in the revelation of God.

There is something beyond that. They look to the obedience that the bringing of the offerings suggests. In other words, he has a great deal of what we've been talking about, notitia.

What does it mean? Knowledge. The trouble is, he does not yet have, so far as I can tell, a census and fiducia trust. And furthermore, the object of faith is still not plain or clear to him.

So while he's got a lot of things, he doesn't have enough. It isn't enough to know about Jesus Christ. It isn't enough to know that Jesus Christ died.

It isn't enough to know that Christianity is true. The question is, is it true for you? And has Jesus Christ died for you? And have you committed yourself to him? In other words, you know some things and you have ascended to them, but have you trusted in them? That's the essence of faith. And finally, we learn in our Lord's last words to the scribes that, that scribe, that ultimately we in our judgment of him are judged by him.

Now Matthew tells us something Mark doesn't tell us. He said the scribe came to our Lord and asked him, what's the great commandment of God, tempting him. The word really means to test with a view to proving him wrong.

That's why he came. He came to test our Lord. And to our horror and to our terror, the one who came to test our Lord leaves our Lord found wanting by him.

You see, every time you come to our Lord Jesus Christ and you ask him questions, like this man asked him questions, you really don't test our Lord. You test yourself. You reveal what's in your own heart in your reaction to him.

Now a lot of you in this room know that my wife is a painter. And I told my friend she's dragged me all over Europe to art galleries. I've been to art galleries in Paris.

I've been to art galleries all over Switzerland. I've been to art galleries in Germany, in Holland, various other places, art galleries in the British Isles. And I've gone in and I've seen some of the great pictures that people travel hundreds of miles to see and study and ponder.

And I've sat before the black watch and I've looked at it and I don't see anything. I say, I don't see anything. And I stand before the others and I don't see anything.

And I tell her that too. I said, I don't see anything so great about this. I look up at what Michelangelo did and I said, I just don't see anything great about it at all.

I would not like that in my living room. I wouldn't like that in my church. But you see, I am not really revealing anything about the art of those great painters.

I'm revealing how little I know about art. I'm not judging them. They're judging me.

And so when a man stands before the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, stands before the greatness of the love of God, looks at the revelation of God and Holy Scripture and say, I don't see anything to it. It doesn't mean a thing to me. He's not judging Christ.

Christ is judging him. Now we know what's in his heart, not in our Lord's. And my dear friend, when you stand before the word of God and before the presence of Jesus Christ, you never judge them.

They judge you. You know, I'm not surprised at all to read the last words of this passage. From that time on, they durst ask him no questions at all.

They ask him no questions. Let's close in prayer. Father, we are grateful for Holy Scripture.

And we pray, Lord, that we shall never judge it. May it judge us. May Jesus Christ, of whom it speaks, be our daily judge for his glory and for thy glory, for Jesus' sake.

Amen.

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