

THE NECESSITY OF LOVE Sunday School- April 18, 2010

Unifying Topic: **CONNECTING IN COMMUNITY**

Lesson Text

I. Jesus Is Questioned (Matthew 22:34-36)

III. The Greatest Commandments (Matthew 22:37-38)

III. The Second Greatest Commandment (Matthew 22:39-40)

The Main Thought: Jesus saith unto him, Thou shalt love the lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. (Mathew 22:37,KJV).

Unifying Principle: People search for guidance in learning how to express their love in positive ways. Is there a answer to their search? Jesus' answer is to "love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind" (Matt.22:37, NIV) and "love your neighbor as yourself" (v.38, NIV)

Lesson Aim: To help students appreciate Jesus' teaching about love for God and others.

Life aim: To teach how Jesus wants us to love God with everything we have—heart, mind, soul, strength—and to love each other as we love ourselves.

22:34 But when the Pharisees had heard that he had put the Sadducees to silence, they were gathered together.

22:35 Then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked him a question, tempting him, and saying,

22:36 Master, which is the great commandment in the law?

22:37 Jesus saith unto him, Thou shalt love the lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.

22:38 This is the first and great commandment.

22:39 And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

22:40 On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

HISTORY:

Introduction:

1. In the temple during His final week prior to His crucifixion, Jesus was questioned by various religious groups...
 - a. The Pharisees and Herodians sought to entangle Him with a question about paying taxes - **Mt 22:15-22**
 - b. The Sadducees tried to trip Him on the subject of the resurrection - **Mt 22:23-33**
-- His answers caused people to marvel and be astonished - **Mt 22:22,33**
2. The Pharisees tried once again, this time sending one of their lawyers...
 - a. Testing Him as to which is the great commandment in the law - **Mt 22:34-36**
 - b. Jesus replied by offering two great commandments
 - 1) The first pertained to loving God - **Mt 22:37-38**
 - 2) The second pertained to loving one's neighbor - **Mt 22:39**
-- Upon these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets- **Mt 22:40**
3. While we no longer live under the Old Law, these "**Two Great Commandments**" are still very important to the Christian...
 - a. For they certainly have their counterpart in the New Covenant
 - b. And keeping the commandments of God is just as important now as it was under the Old Covenant - **1Co 7:19; 1Jn 5:3**

Matthew 22:15-22 GOVERNMENT AND GOD

This is the second challenge or attack by the leaders, against Jesus. The ruling body of the Jews, Sanhedrin, held an official meeting. They plotted how they might deal with this man who was claiming to be the Messiah. They feared Christ, for He was gathering the loyalty of the people so strongly around Him. Their plot was to ask Him a question about a person's citizenship.* The question was to "*entangle him in his talk*" (v15); that is, it was supposed to be impossible for Jesus to answer without discrediting Himself either with the people or with the Roman authorities. If He discredited Himself with the people, they would react and desert Him; if He discredited Himself with the Romans, they would arrest Him. The Pharisees "*took council*" with the Herodians.

NOTE:

*Two false **concepts of citizenship** are seen in the Pharisees and Herodians. The Pharisees were a religious group

who opposed the Roman occupation of Palestine. The Herodians were not a Jewish political party who supported Herod Antipas and the politics instituted by Rome. Picture the scene and how strange it was.

- 1) The Pharisees held that religion was dominant over government, and they despised Roman authority and taxation.
- 2) The Herodians held that government was dominant over religion; consequently, they would agree that taxes must be paid to Ceasar rather than to God.

The Herodians and the Pharisees were bitter enemies. To find them together was strange indeed, but their hatred of Jesus brought them together against One whom they considered a common enemy.

The world's concept of citizenship is still the same as it was in Christ's day, despite His teaching. The two groups come together and question Jesus: "*Teacher, we know how honest you are. You teach about the way of God regardless of the consequences. You are impartial and don't play favorites. Now tell us what you think about this: Is it right to pay taxes to the Roman government or not?*" **22:16-17.** Calling Jesus Master, as if He were their Master! Those who hold false concepts tend to lean to:

1. **Selfish ambitions** often lead to compromise and intrigue. Nothing could be more surprising as to see the Pharisees and the Herodians working together. They feared the loss of their position, influence, power, wealth, and security. A man who lives for this world will become a bedfellow with almost anyone to protect his security. The primary plotters were religious leaders the, "*Then went the Pharisees, and took counsel...*" **22:15.** They were not only willing to plot evil; they were trying to cause Christ Himself to be put to death. Selfish ambition can, and too often does, penetrate the very heart of those who are called to serve. The halls of government and the sanctity of religion are not exempt.
2. **Deceptions** usually lead to flattery and destruction. The deception is seen in two facts:
 - 1) It is seen in that the Pharisees themselves did not go to Jesus. They sent "their disciples with the Herodians." The disciples were learners or students who would actually be seeking the answer to such a question themselves. The Herodians were along to give the appearance that the disciples had asked them first, but the disciples were not satisfied with their answer. Thus, Jesus would think the question was the legitimate question of a student, never suspecting a plot to entrap Him.
 - 2) This kind of deception is really low and is seen in the words of flattery which were used in approaching Jesus. However it was true that:
 - i. He was Master: rabbi, a teacher and even more.
 - ii. He was true / truthful: a teacher from God
 - iii. He did teach the way of God.
 - iv. He did not care what men said about Him.
 - v. He did not regard man's person or favoritism.

The problem was that they didn't mean what they were professing, not in their hearts. What they were confessing about Him was coming from an evil motive.

3. **Closed-mindedness and obstinate unbelief** which lead to rejection of the truth and self-condemnation. The question was simple, however, the answer was ever simpler. They were steeped (soaked) in obstinate (stubborn) unbelief. Thus they rejected the truth; and as a result, they condemned themselves. Obstinate unbelief, pride, and haughtiness will cause a person to be condemned by the Lord.

They thought that whatever answer Jesus gave, they had Him cornered. If He said "*Yes, you should pay taxes to the Roman government,*" they could call Him a collaborator for siding with the hated occupiers of their land. If He said "*You should not pay taxes to the Romans,*" Jesus would immediately be arrested for sedition (treason or being a troublemaker). Christ is the Messiah, the Son of God Himself; therefore, He saw through their plot, their trap; their selfish ambition, their deception, and their closed-mindedness and obstinate unbelief. He saw through their wickedness and called them "*hypocrites*" **22:18.**

- They were pretending to be something they were not.
- They were pretending to seek the truth when they were not really after the truth.
- They were pretending to honor Him when they really did not.

Jesus used the occasion to teach the truth about citizenship, a truth which was both astounding and earth-shaking to the people of that day—earth-shaking because the Jews believed that the loyalty of a citizen belonged only to God, and the rest of the world believed that loyalty belonged to the ruling monarch of their territory. Jesus asked for a Roman coin (**22:19**), "*Whose head is this on the coinage?*" **22:20.** Obviously it was the emperor's. So He gave them the answer that silenced them. It is an answer that is very important for us every day of our lives. "*Give to the*

emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's" 22:21. His reply reveals that we have responsibilities to both God and country.

- There are things that we must render to Caesar (country/government).
- There are things that we must render to God. Also:
 - He forced the Pharisees to admit that some things belonged to an earthly power.
 - He revealed that there is a double citizenship. They are citizens of heaven, yes, but they are also citizens of this world. They have an obligation to the government. Therefore, believers are to pay their due share.
 - Jesus declares unequivocally to the Herodians that there is a spiritual world. God is; God exists, and there are some things which belong to God.
 - Jesus reveals that we are beings of God as well as of this world, spiritual as well as physical beings.

Christ astounded the world of His day by declaring there was an earthly, physical citizenship to which some things are to be given; and there was a spiritual, heavenly citizenship to which some things are to be given. And, *"When they heard these words, they were amazed; and they left him and went away" 22:22.*

Matthew 22:23-33 The Resurrection Denied, Yet Proven

It was still *"the same day"*, the Lord's last week and they are still challenging His authority, saying *"...there is no resurrection..." 22:23.* By calling Jesus *"Master"*, they were speaking in a very condescending and flattering way (*22:24*). The Sadducees smugly stepped in to try after the Pharisees and Herodians failed to trap Him. These Sadducees watched as Jesus rode into the city and the people threw palm branches and garments at His feet. And when the people hailed Him as the Son of David, Messiah, Savior, and King, they feared He would lead the nation into starting a riot that the Romans would have to stop. They asked Jesus the same question they no doubt had asked the Pharisees on numerous occasions. Now we see the Sadducees entering this conflict trying to discredit Jesus by asking about marriage and resurrection, *"...whose wife will she be in the resurrection? For she was the wife of all seven of them!" 22:28.*

The Sadducees were the liberal theologians of that day. They denied the resurrection of the body after death, as well as many other basic biblical doctrines. Luke tells us in the book of Acts, *Acts 23:8 "For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, nor an angel, nor a spirit, but the Pharisees acknowledge them all."* Their leading argument:

1. They used Moses' law, the Levirate Law, as the basis of their arguments (Deut.25:5-6). When a husband died without a son, the levirate law said that his brother was to marry his wife, and bear a son. By law, the son was considered the first-born son of the deceased brother. This assured two things:
 - a. That the family name continued.
 - b. That the property holdings were kept in the family. This was a law that had been given to help preserve and to enlarge the nation of Israel (Ruth 4:5).
2. The Sadducees then suggested a logical situation that could have arisen. *"There were with us seven brethren."* The first brother married, but they died before bearing children. Each of the other brothers obeyed the law, but each died before bearing a child. Finally, the woman died also.

The logical question was now asked, *"whose wife shall she be in eternity?"* Whether they were theologically conservative or liberal, Jesus said they were cut from the same cloth. When He denounced the Sadducees' and Pharisees' respective teachings, He considered them to be one and the same: sinful and hypocritical (Matt. 16:6-12). *"Jesus answered and said unto them, ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God."* As this point is closed, a picture of what the scripture says about the natural man is clearly seen, *"But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" 1Corth. 15:12.*

1. *"You do not know the scriptures" 22:29.* There are reasons why a person may not know the scriptures.
 - a. He simply has not studied the scriptures.
 - b. He does not believe the scriptures; rejects the word of God.
 - c. He does not take the scriptures for what they say. He spiritualizes or allegorizes them.
2. *"You do not know the power of God" 22:29.* There are reasons why a person does not know the power of God.
 - a. He is ignorant of God; knows nothing.
 - b. He does not believe in God or His power.
 - c. He believes, but his belief is weak.

While the idea of a spiritual world is perplexing to the natural man, there is another world, there is a spirit, and there is to be a resurrection. *"For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are like the angels of God in heaven" 22:30.* Jesus is saying that the resurrection exceeded earthly relationship; that future life

and relationships shall exceed earthly relationships—even the bond of marital relationships; also that the future life and relationships shall be equal to that experienced by the angels of God. He has just admitted the existence of angels, refuting the disbelief of the liberal minded Sadducees. The verse does not say believers are angels, but says they are like angels. The Sadducees did not know the scripture or the power of God. They could not even conceive what Jesus was saying.

Then proceeding to the real issue, the question of whether the dead are raised. *"But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living" 22:31-32.* ¹In His reply, Jesus not only affirmed resurrection but also the continuance of personal identity, in that Abraham would be Abraham, Isaac would be Isaac, and Jacob would be Jacob, an identity related to the resurrection of their bodies. God's relationships are active relationships not inactive. God says, *"I am the God of..."* not *"I was the God of..."* His relationships with His people are continuous. Since He was their God, they were alive, living in God's presence and living in relationship to Him, perfect and eternal. The Sadducees could not attack this statement of Christ without being in the position of attacking Abraham, Isaac, or Jacob. They were neatly trapped in their own hypocrisy. By this interchange with the Sadducees, Christ placed the Sadducees in direct conflict with the Scriptures, and again His questioners had nothing to say. The multitude listening was astonished at the ease with which His teaching disposed of these difficult questions **22:33**. The resurrection causes astonishment.

LESSON:

Matthew 22:34-36 Jesus Is Questioned

22:34 But when the Pharisees had heard that he had put the Sadducees to silence, they were gathered together. Jesus had just met his third group of challengers, the Sadducees. He had silenced and they were in retreat. We are in the final week of Jesus' life before the crucifixion. The Pharisees, the strict religionist of that day, heard about Jesus conquering His challengers again (the Sadducees). The Pharisees try once again to test Him, *"...they gathered together."* The word *"they"* seems to indicate that the Pharisees and Sadducees met together in council to determine the next step to take, for the purpose of trying their hand at putting Jesus into a precarious position. In their minds, His threat to their security had increased. All three attempts [Chief Priests and the Elders (21:23); Pharisees and the Herodians (22:15); Sadducees (22:23)] to discredit Jesus had failed. This was the last attempt of the religious leaders at questioning Jesus.

22:35 Then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked him a question, tempting him, and saying,— They took a different approach this time. Over the last few hours they challenged Jesus as a body of questioners, now they chose from among their body one who was most brilliant and versed in the law. They sent a lawyer (22:35) tempting to trap Jesus in a question of theological law. The *"lawyer"* (legal expert) that asked the question was an expert in the Mosaic Law. He and his colleagues often debated which commandment was the greatest. To Jesus he addressed this same question.

22:36 Master, which is the great commandment in the law?— *"Master"* (teacher of the law), was a term the Jewish leaders used in the hopes of flattering Jesus and getting Him off His guard.

POINT:

Through the years Jewish teachers had set up six hundred commandments. No one could keep them all, so the question was often asked and discussed: Which commandment or commandments must be absolutely obeyed? Which ones are important and which ones are not? If a person keeps the greatest of the precepts, can he be excused for his failure to keep others? Some believed that it had to do with circumcision, others with sacrifices, and still others with the Sabbath. The Pharisees were trying to turn the people against Jesus.

All of God's laws are equally important. We may think that if we keep the greater laws, we do not have to pay much attention to the lesser. We may think that if we break the lesser laws we can be excused. Such thinking is false. "For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all" James 2:10. Just because we may deny the importance of some laws does not make them unimportant. They still condemn us.

Some quick facts before we get to the Greatest Commandment. The **Law** referred to four different writings to the Jews:

¹ <http://bible.org/seriespage/chapter-22-jesus'-controversy-jewish-rulers>
<http://www.pitwm.net/pitwm-sundayschool.html>

1. It referred to *the Ten Commandments*.
2. It referred to *the first five books* of the Bible, the Pentateuch.
3. It referred to *the law and the prophets*, all the scripture of the Old Testament.
4. It is referred to *the oral or the Scribal Law*.

A **Commandment** in the scriptural sense was the law, ordinance, and charge given by God for guidance and getting along with one another. God's law given in the Old Testament, was not enough for the Jews. They reasoned that if the law was really God's Word, then it must include...therefore, they took the great principles of the law and reduced them to thousands upon thousands of rules and regulations. These rules and regulations became the oral or Scribal Law. It is important to go to **Matthew 5:17** "*Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill.*" Continue to read verses 18-20. One thing to know: A person must know that Jesus came to **fulfill the law**.

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Christ The Fulfillment:

- **The law** was the ideal, the words that told man what he was to do. **But Christ fulfilled** and completed the law by giving man more than just mere words to describe how He wants man to live. He gave man the Life, the Person who perfectly pictures and demonstrates the law before the world's very eyes. Jesus Christ is the Picture, the living Example, the Representative Man, the Pattern, the Demonstration of life as it is to be lived.
- **The law** was only words and rules. **But Christ fulfilled** and completed the law by being the Spirit and Life. He was able to put spirit and life to the words and rules of the law. He was able to live the life described by the words and rules. He was able to inject both the idea and the power to behave into a person's mind and life. It is now His life that sets the standard and the rule for the believer. It is His Spirit and life that gives the believer power to obey.
- **The law** stated only the rule and the principle of behavior. It didn't explain the rule nor the spirit behind the rule. **But Christ fulfilled** and completed the law by Him explaining the rule and the spirit behind the rule. He interpreted the law. He gave the law its real and full meaning.
- **The law** demanded perfect righteousness and perfect life. Man failed at certain points. **But Christ fulfilled** and completed the law by keeping the law in every detail, securing the perfect righteousness demanded by the law. He fulfilled all requirements, all types, and all the ceremonies of the law—perfectly. As such He became the Perfect Man, the Ideal Man, the Representative Man for all men. As the Ideal Man, He simply embraced all men, He embodied the righteousness that man must now have.
- **The law** demanded punishment for disobedience. **But Christ fulfilled** and completed the law. In fact, He went to the farthest point possible—He paid the maximum price and showed the ultimate love. He bore the punishment of the law for every man's disobedience. He took the punishment of the law upon Himself. He also frees all men from the penalty of the law and makes them sons of God.

The NIRV explains the meaning of fulfill in these words, "*I have come to give full meaning to what is written*" and the CEV reads, "*I did not come to do away with them, but to give their full meaning.*" Jesus is saying He was not destroying the law or the prophets. As God's Son, He came to fulfill the law and His teaching was just as binding as the Old Testament Law. If there is no law, there can be no crime. If it is a crime then there has to be a law. It is not a difficult concept to grasp. As just demonstrated, the same applies to God's Word and His law. Now, continuing with the main lesson.

Matthew 22:37-38 The Greatest Commandments

22:37 Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. Jesus' answer is far more than a clever summary of all the commandments. He did the opposite of what the Pharisees expected Him to do: He quoted Moses directly from the Pentateuch (Deut. 6:5). *"Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord, thy God..."*

- First, love God! This is a personal relationship, not a distant relationship. Loving God is alive and active
- Love God with all your being. Christ breaks our being into three parts; the heart, the soul, and the mind.
 - A loving relationship involves commitment and loyalty, heart, soul, mind.
 - A loving relationship involves trust and respect for the person loved; it's loving the person just for who they are. We love God because of who He is: Creator, Sustainer, Savior, Redeemer, Lord, King, with our heart, soul, and mind!
 - A loving relationship involves the giving and surrendering of oneself to the other, heart, soul, and mind, not to take and conquer.
 - A loving relationship involves knowing and sharing, heart, soul, and mind.

...with all thy heart,— **Heart**: the seat of man's affection and will (devotion). The heart causes us to give either good things or bad things. We are to focus and attach our heart, our will, and devotion to God.

...and with all thy soul,— **Soul**: is the life of a man, the consciousness, the breath, the essence, the being of a man. We are to love God with all the breath and consciousness, all the life and awareness we have.

...and with all thy mind. **Mind**: the seat of reasoning and understanding, God has given us, where man thinks, reasons, and understands. Christ says our minds and thoughts are to be centered upon God; love God with our entire mind.

So what does it mean to love God with our heart, soul, and mind? Everything we do, say, think, or ask needs to be in line with what God has commanded us through His Word. That means we need to be avoiding sin at all costs. *"For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight" Eph. 1:4 NIV*. The heart must be united to love God, in opposition to a divided heart. And *"whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men" Col 3:23 NIV*. Whether we're at our job, helping others, or doing something for ourselves, we should do it to the best of our ability, like we are doing it for God Himself.

22:38 This is the first and great commandment. — And where does that commandment come from? It comes from God. So, to be the greatest commandment comes from a place of love. It doesn't matter how we feel. It comes from a place of choosing to obey God. To make something great means that a good result has already been prepared from the heart of God. This is the first and the greatest commandment that we would ever have to live by.

Love is Keeping and Obeying His Commands:— *"For this is the love of God, that we keep (obey) his commands..." 1 John 5:3*. ²When we do the things God has told us to do, we are showing Him we love Him. And why should we do what God tells us? Because when we are saved, we *"are free from the power of sin and have become slaves of God..." Romans 6:22 NLT*. God is our master and we are His servants. We were *"bought with a price, therefore, honor God with your body" 1 Cor. 6:20 NIV*. As the Father first loved us and showed His love first, this should be our first and the greatest commandment of all that we tell and show to others.

Love is Telling Others:

You can show total love for God by telling others about Him and about how much He loves us. *"Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends" John 15:13 NIV*. 2000 years ago, God committed the Greatest love act ever. *"For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him, should not perish, but have everlasting life" John 3:16*. The Son went to the cross and gave His life. But that's not how the story ends. Three days later He rose again. That's Love!!!

Matthew 22:39-40 The Second Greatest Commandment

22:39 And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. —

Love is Spending Time:

When we love someone, we want to spend time with them. In fact, it would be hard to love someone that you never talk to! If we are going to love God with all our heart, soul, and mind, then we have to be talking to Him through prayer. We also spend time with God by reading our bible.

² <http://www.growingdaily.org/archives>

<http://www.pitwm.net/pitwm-sundayschool.html>

POINT:

Imagine you are driving in your car and it is completely dark outside. Now, think about what it would be like to drive without your headlights on. You couldn't – at least not for long. You wouldn't see turns ahead, you wouldn't see animals, or shredded tires, or any other obstacle in the road, and it would be very hard to even drive in a straight line! A car's headlights are completely useless if they are turned off! It is the same with the Word of God. God has given us this light for our path, but it's useless if we don't read it and know what it says. We see that the Bible helps us to know what is right and wrong. Therefore all the powers of the soul must be engaged for Him, and carried out toward Him.

Loving God is the first and greatest commandment. The love of God must be first before anything else can be claimed, even before the second—love thy neighbor. However, the second is like unto the first. If you can't love the neighbor, you do not love God. Many of us have tried it, and the Spirit of God convicts us and lets us know that our love walk is not where it's suppose to be. Jesus was calling for "*agape*" love, a sustained and conscious choice to graciously serve God, neighbor, and self, and expecting nothing in return.

The lawyer had not asked for the second greatest commandment, only the first; see the cleverness of Jesus? If Jesus is going to touch you, He's going to touch you all the way. If He's going to enlighten you, it will not be with a flicker, but with a lamp to your feet and a light to your pathway, for you to truly get it! Praise God! Professed love without demonstration is empty, therefore:

1. The command is to love ones neighbor as oneself. It is not an option. When a man really sees the love of God for himself, he cannot help but love God and share the love of God with his neighbors. It is the love of Christ for us, His death and sacrifice that compels us to go and love all men everywhere. Yes, that's our neighbor—all men everywhere; no matter their status, their condition, or their circumstance.
2. We are to love ourselves. This is not self-love, where you want all attention centered on you. This is a godly love for self that stirs a strong self-image, confidence, and assurance. It's a love that even helps in preventing some illnesses such as ulcers, tension, and high blood pressure, where you want the best for yourself. The godly love comes from knowing three things:
 - 1) That one is actually the creation of God; the highest creation possible.
 - 2) That one is actually the object of God's love; the most supreme love possible.
 - 3) That one is actually the trustee of God's gifts; the greatest gifts possible.
 - a. The traits of godly love of self:
 - i. Esteeming others better than self.
 - ii. Looks on the things of others.
 - iii. Walks humbly before others.

22:40 On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets. Jesus uniquely joined Deuteronomy 6:4 and Leviticus 19:18 into one universal commandment; neither love of God nor love of neighbor can be separated from each other. The "*law and the prophets*" refers to the Old Testament. The entire Old Testament hangs or hinges* on these two basic, interconnected commandments. What good is knowing the contents of the Old Testament without living out the Great Commandment? Jesus says that love includes and embraces **all** the commandments.

NOTE:

**Hinge*—a basic metaphor is about a hinge: A door cannot open without two hinges on it. Only when there are two hinges can a door swing in and out. To love the Lord our God and to love our neighbor are the two necessary hinges on which the whole Bible swings. Without the hinges, the Bible/the door is relatively useless. The Bible becomes effective in a person's life only when the two hinges are in working order. The sum and substance of all that God has said and done is love

SUMMARY:

The Pharisees plotted against Jesus again. ³Their query had to do with which of the many commandments in the Law

³ <http://www.theafricanamericanlectionary.org/PopupLectionaryReading.asp?LRID=117>

<http://www.pitwm.net/pitwm-sundayschool.html>

of Moses was the greatest. These religious scholars were accustomed to categorizing the Mosaic laws in a manner that would enable them to privilege the more important or "*greater*" laws, and regard as secondary those of lesser importance. The Pharisees sought to engage Jesus in one of their many legal disputes with hopes of getting him to deny or usurp the authority of Moses. Doing so, would enable them to discredit Jesus in the eyes of the people. This lawyer they sent was a Pharisee by sect and when it came to their observance of the law, the Pharisees were an extremely proud and meticulous people that made sure they avoided the possibility of violating even one of them. They not only knew the Ten Commandments but they also knew all the laws in the Pentateuch which was a total of 613 by traditional count.

Contrary to their expectations, Jesus roots his response within the Mosaic legal tradition by subordinating the entire framework of the Law to two related commandments. The first commandment comes from the Shema, the Jewish confession of faith found in Deuteronomy 6:5, and emphasizes the responsibility of God's people to love God with their entire being. The second commandment is a quote from Leviticus 19:18, and emphasizes the responsibility of God's people to show their love of God by loving their neighbor. All of the other ceremonial and moral laws are met through the application of these two commandments. Love, not meticulous ritual observances, becomes the guiding principle for evaluating the spiritual life. Instead, the principle here is that God's Law is the law of Love. They are inseparable.

The Pharisees and other religious leaders did not comprehend this simple but profound teaching of Jesus. The Pharisees, however, had lost sight of what was really important, which was loving God with all their heart, soul and mind. Without that love for God, the external observance of the Commandments becomes worthless, empty and legalistic. The word "*agapao*" describes a love that is based on the "will", not on the emotions. It's making a choice of placing "*value*" on something. It's choosing to treasure something. When you have a garage sale, you make choices as to how much you are going to sell things. To have agape toward someone is to choose to place a high value on them. John 3:16 NKJV, "*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.*" This doesn't mean that there are no emotions involved. It just means that the love flows from the choice I make, not the feelings I feel.

APPLICATION:

We can choose to love God and demonstrate our love toward Him by keeping His commands and above all else loving others, or we can choose to pretend to love Him and though we experience His great love each and every day, never truly love Him in return. Of course the former is the preferred, God wants us to love Him, but He will not force us to. His love is vast, far beyond our understanding; He simply will never stop loving us. His love is eternal and even hell will not separate man from God's love (Romans 8:35, 38-39).

Those who are in hell will ever be aware of God's love for them. Their worse torment is not in the flames, brimstone or worms, it is in the knowledge that they had the opportunity to love God back, but instead chose to go their own way and define love instead of letting Divine Love define them. "*God is love and whoever does not love, does not know God*" 1 John 4:8. This is why Jesus gave the illustration of those who will say to Him in "that day", "Lord did we not prophesy in your name and cast out demons in your name..." then the Lord will declare to them, "*Depart from me for I never knew you.*" The Kingdom of heaven is exclusive to those who do the will of the Father (Matthew 7:21-23). Those who know God, know His love and will through His love secure for themselves an eternal future where they will dwell in His love for eternity. So then, there are two classes of people in the world and thereby two ends, those who have knowledge of His love, and those who demonstrate His love.

So, loving God and loving your neighbor are the epitome of living according to the Bible. If you study the Bible, yet hate people, you're wasting your time. Where do you stand? Can you develop a language of love in your daily behavior?