

Study Notes: Mark 12:28-34
February 15, 2026: “The Greatest Commandment”
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One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, “Of all the commandments, which is the most important?”

- Beginning in Mark 12:13, Jesus was asked a series of questions, which were an attempt by the Pharisees and Sadducees to trap Jesus in His words. After several questions, Jesus was approached by an unidentified teacher of the law, who was impressed with Jesus’ answers and skill in debate.
- This man asked for Jesus’ opinion on which of the 613 commandments from the Law of Moses was most important. The question that the man asked was a common question among rabbis, as The Expositor’s Bible Commentary notes, “Attempts were made to differentiate between the ‘heavy,’ or ‘great,’ and the ‘light,’ or ‘little,’ commandments (TDNT 4:535–36). Some rabbis also made attempts to formulate great principles from which the rest of the law could be deduced.”

“The most important one,” answered Jesus, “is this: ‘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 mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.”

- Jesus answered this man’s question by quoting two commandments from the Law. The first comes from Deuteronomy 6:4 and was known as the Shema. This commandment is about love for God, and how that love must flow from every part of our being. The second comes from Leviticus 19:18. It is certainly not as well known as the Shema. Jesus made the connection that love for others naturally flows out of our love for God.
- The Expositor’s Bible Commentary explains, “Jesus brought Leviticus 19:18 together with Deuteronomy 6:5 to show that love of neighbor is a natural and logical outgrowth of love for God. These two commandments belong together; they cannot be separated. The Ten Commandments themselves can be divided into two ‘tables’ of commands (Ex 20:1–17; Dt 5:6–21): those related to God (1–4) and those related to fellow human beings (5–10; cf. Mk 10:19). The former are foundational for the latter. Thus although the teacher of the law had asked for the one most important commandment, Jesus gave him two.”

“Well said, teacher,” the man replied. “You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him. To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices.” When Jesus saw that he had answered wisely, he said to him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” And from then on no one dared ask him any more questions.

- Though the story of Jesus being asked about the greatest commandment appears in other Gospels, only Mark records this man’s response.

- About the response and the interaction Jesus had with the man, the Expositor's Bible Commentary notes, "The reply of the teacher of the law shows that what Jesus said was getting through to him and elicits Jesus' response that he was close to the kingdom of God — a statement no doubt meant to stimulate and challenge him to further thoughtful reflection and decisive action."
- After Jesus so forcefully and correctly answered this question, Mark tells us that no one asked Jesus any more questions. This indicates that the plot of the religious leaders to trap Jesus in His words failed, and foreshadows a new tactic to come.