



Not All Commands are Created Equal

Mark 12:28-34

October 14, 2018

Not all commands are created equal. Some really are more important than others. The most important command in the whole Bible is to love God. Though Jesus didn't state it this way, that necessarily means some commands are less important. They are not unimportant but are less important. When we think of specific examples, this attractive passage may become uncomfortable. For example, the teacher of the law said loving God is more important than burnt offering and sacrifice, and Jesus affirmed his answer (v. 34). A close parallel for us is that loving God is more important than "not giving up meeting together" (Hebrews 10:25). I realize that if we love God, we will meet together and do all the things God told us. Jesus said if we love him, we will keep his commandments (John 14:15). And Paul said love is the essence of the law because it will lead us to keep all the other commandments (Romans 13:8-10; Galatians 5:14). All that is true, but it does not appear to be Jesus' point here. When the teacher of the law said love is more important than burnt offerings and sacrifices, Jesus did not respond with, "Yeah, but if you love God, you'll offer sacrifices too." Instead, he simply affirmed the man.

So, one test of whether we truly believe that loving God is the most important commandment is whether we can say it is more important than any other specific commandment without adding a disclaimer. Feeling obligated to add a disclaimer essentially makes all the commands equal. True, if you or others are using the most important command to avoid following one of the other commands, a disclaimer is probably needed. But if you always have to add the disclaimer, you may not really believe loving God is most important. Another test of whether we believe loving God is most important is whether we prayed about our love for God this week.

Even though the teacher only asked Jesus about the most important command, Jesus gave a second: love your neighbor as yourself. You cannot separate love for God from love for people. John makes the connection unmistakably clear (1 John 3:10, 17; 4:20-21). John would say that if we love God but avoid people who annoy us, we are liars and the truth is not in us. He'd say if we don't invest in a church because we don't want to have to deal with certain people, we're liars. He'd say that if we will only be in an R&B group or small group if all the people are cool, we are liars. (If this offends you, talk to John.) We may love better if we remember that some people are:

EGR: extra grace required (and also that I am someone else's EGR)

RUDE:

FATY:

PIGS:

HUFF:

HOITY-TOITY:

MORON:

ETC.

As we ponder these great commands, we need to be careful not to be deceived into thinking God is pleased once we understand and accept that these are the two greatest commands. We please God only when we actually love Him and love people. Though many think otherwise, I'm convinced love is an emotion. Yes, it leads to actions of obedience (John 14:15). But doing actions without having the love doesn't constitute love and is actually worthless (cf. 1 Corinthians 13:1-3). So, to fulfill the greatest commands, we should grow authentic feelings of love for God and people, and then make sure we express it with appropriate actions and obedience. How do we grow more love for God? Here are some things that will help, but only if we actually do them, steadily, over time: 1) realize that our love (v. 30) is based on his qualities (v. 29) and so mediate on his good characteristics, including his uniqueness (v. 29; cf. v. 32), 2) meditate especially on his love (1 John 4:19); 3) participate in an interactive relationship with God patterned to some degree after a human love relationship (Hosea 1-3), including spending time together and communicating openly, 4) pray that God would help you grasp his love and grow love in your heart (Ephesians 1:15-17; 3:17-19) and 5) cooperate with the Spirit's desire to produce love in you (Galatians 5:16-18, 22-26).

