

The Great Commandment.  
Mark 12:28-34.  
Sunday Morning, August 31, 2008.

I. The Lawyer.

- A. He was an expert in matters concerning the law of God, or the OT Scriptures. He would have been a Pharisee.
- B. He had stood back in the crowd and observed how the Lord had silenced the Herodians; his fellow Pharisees and also the Sadducees.
- C. He had been favorably impressed by the Lord's wisdom for the text says that he perceived that the Lord had answered His opponents well. Vs. 28.
- D. All indications are therefore that this man was an honest hearted and fair-minded individual who held no animosity against the Lord.
- E. All the more is this impression strengthened by the Lord saying to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." Vs.34.
- F. When Matthew therefore says that the lawyer came "testing Him," we ought not to understand that as an attempt to trip Him up or to cause His downfall. Rather He was further testing the Lord's wisdom.
- G. This lawyer represents a part of the godly remnant that remained even among the leaders of Israel (Nicodemus), and this man may well have belonged to the many religious leaders that joined the Christian Church after Pentecost. Acts 6:7.

II. The nature of the question.

"Which is the first, or foremost commandment of all?"

- A. The nature of this question was not, "Which of the 613 OT commandments is the most important?" (248 positive, things commanded, and 365 negative, things forbidden.)
- B. Rather it centered on a matter which was the subject of considerable debate among the law experts, and about which there was no agreement.
- C. The question was regarding the nature of a basic religious principle which was the  
fountainhead from which all 613 OT commands flowed, and in which principle they were all tied together.
- D. In the realm of physics the equivalence would be Einstein's attempted theory of everything, in which he sought to unify, and relate to each other, all the known forms of energy and forces in the universe. Einstein was in the end unable to formulate such a theory, nor has it been done since. By his own admittance, this theory was his ultimate quest. He worked on it since he was in his twenties.
- E. In this question and in the Lord's answer we have the unifying principle; the spiritual theory of everything; from which the whole of Scripture flows, and what the whole of Scripture is all about.
- F. As the "Theory of everything" is among the most difficult and elusive concepts of Physics, so this question was among the most perplexing among spiritual things. No wonder the lawyer shouts with delight "Well said!" Or we may substitute: "Right!" "Excellent!" Or "Beautiful!"

### III. The nature of the Lord's answer.

The Lord's Theory of everything.

- A. "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one." Deut. 6:4,5.
  - 1. This statement was recited morning and evening by every devout Jew in Israel, and it is done among devout Jews to this very day.
  - 2. It constituted a great national protest against the polytheism (many gods) of the heathen nations, and also against the pantheism (everything is made of spirit and matter, and God is the spiritual essence of everything) of heathen philosophy.
  - 3. It confesses one living and personal God; One Jehovah; One Self-existing One; One great "I Am." One who is the fountainhead of everything, yet He Himself exists independently from the creation.
- B. "And you shall love the Lord your God..." Deut. 6:4,5.

One affection governs our bond and union with the true and living God, love.

  - 1. Not fear; though proper in its place, it is too distant and limited.
  - 2. Not hope or joy or trust, though all proper in their place, they have man's own well being as their objective and are therefore self-serving be it in a proper way.
  - 3. Rather love, which as the bond of perfectness has all the other affections built into it. It spontaneously seeks to please its object, and it is the wellspring of voluntary obedience.
- C. "...With all your heart, ... soul, .... Mind, ... and strength."
  - 1. Heart. Sincerity, true-heartedness vs. hypocritical or divided affection.
  - 2. Soul. Our emotional nature; putting warmth and feeling into our affection.
  - 3. Mind. Intelligent heart commitment vs. blind devotion.
  - 4. Strength. With energy; with intensity; with resolve and purpose.
- D. "And the second, like it, you shall love your neighbor as yourself" Lev. 19:18.
  - 1. Like it. The same kind of affection (heart, soul, mind, strength).
  - 2. As yourself. The measure (how much and how far do I go? As much and as far as you want others to help you in similar circumstances.) 2 Cor. 8:13-15.

### IV. Concluding remarks.

- A. The Lawyer: "...more than all the whole burnt offerings and sacrifices."
  - 1. More than all outward religious observances. An inward reality.
  - 2. The essence of true religion.
- B. The Lord. "You are not far from the kingdom of God."

The essence of the kingdom had come into view; the lawyer understood it. Now he had to learn the way to enter the kingdom.

  - 1. He had to learn about the wretchedness of his own condition.

That he could never learn to love like that; God nor neighbor.
  - 2. He had to learn about the forgiveness that is offered us through the death of the Lord, and of our acceptance with God.
  - 3. He had to learn about the Holy Spirit coming alongside us; helping us; making us new creatures in Christ, and pouring His love into our souls; enabling us to learn to love after this manner.