

**MINISTRY BY MAIL**  
**Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship**  
[www.lutheranlccf.org](http://www.lutheranlccf.org)  
**Second Sunday After Trinity, June 18, 2023**

✠ ✠ ✠

(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 251, 250:1, 295, 289, 51.

Lessons: Exodus 32:1-14, 1 Timothy 6:6-10, Matthew 22:34-40.

Sermon Text: Mark 12:28-34.

Sermon by Pastor M. H. Eibs.

Fellow Redeemed in Christ our Lord:

When the apostle Paul addressed the meeting of the Areopagus at Athens, he said: *“Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious.”* Acts 17:22 Did that mean that those men of Athens were saved, that they knew the truth of God’s salvation in Christ? No, indeed not! Their religion consisted of worshiping idols. Their interest in what Paul had preached was to satisfy their curiosity. They told him: *“May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? You are bringing some strange ideas to our ears, and we want to know what they mean.”* (All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas.)” (Acts 17:19–21)

So, people can be religious in that sense that they want their curiosity satisfied, or they want certain questions answered that have to do with some religious matter. But they don’t concern themselves with their sins and need of a Savior from sin. That was the case with the Pharisees in Jesus’ day. They were religious in the sense that they were extremely concerned with questions of the Law, but did not concern themselves with a Savior to save them from their transgressions of the Law. In those days the Jewish rabbis divided the Law into 613 commandments, 248 of these being positive laws, in accordance with the number of parts of the human body, and 365 negative laws, corresponding to the number of days in a year. They also made up rules regarding the relative importance of all these laws.

Thus they came to Jesus with the question which we want to consider as our theme:

**“OF ALL THE COMMANDMENTS, WHICH IS THE MOST IMPORTANT?”**

We consider:

- 1 Jesus’ answer to the question; and,**
- 2 Jesus’ words to the questioner.**

Our text tells us: *“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?’”* The various religious parties of the Jews, Pharisees, Sadducees, chief priests, and teachers of the Law, also called scribes, often asked questions of Jesus. Just prior to the time our text speaks of, they asked: *“By what authority are you doing these things?”* (Mark 11:28) This was after Jesus had cleansed the temple. Again they came to Jesus asking: *“Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not? Should we pay or shouldn’t we?”* (Mark 12:14–15) Again they asked about seven brothers who had died after being married one after the other to the same woman. They wanted to know: *“At the resurrection whose wife will she be, since the seven were married to her?”* (Mark 12:23) In each case Jesus had given a good answer to these questions. The teachers of the law noticed how the Pharisees and Sadducees had received good answers, and so they had a question for Jesus. They were competing with the Pharisees and Sadducees to see who could ask a question of Jesus that would trick him into making a mistake. Then they could have something to accuse him of. They felt that the question concerning the law would be too difficult for Jesus to answer.

But no question is too difficult for the Lord, and Jesus gave an answer that only he with his divine wisdom could give. *“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’ answer to the teachers of the Law was taken from the Book of Deuteronomy and the Book of Leviticus. Thus Jesus referred these teachers of the Law to the Word of God, and ignored all their man-made rules and the foolishness of dividing the Law into 613 commandments.

Let us learn what is taught in what Jesus recited from the Old Testament Scriptures. The first thing is that there is only one God. There is only one absolute Lord God, and that one true God has revealed himself in the Scriptures as the Triune God, one God in three persons. This teaching must be maintained today over against the idea of polytheism, the idea that there are many different Gods, as the heathen believe. This teaching also must be our answer to those who teach universalism, that there is salvation also for those who believe in other gods. Isaiah records God’s words; **“I, even I, am the Lord, and apart from me there is no savior.”** Isaiah 43:11 (NIV) This same one true God says: **“I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more.”** Isaiah 43:25 (NIV) In Jesus, the second person of the Trinity, there is salvation alone. Peter preached: **“Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.”** Acts 4:12 (NIV)

The next thing that Jesus teaches in his answer to the question of the scribes is that the holy God demands perfection. He who is without sin demands that we love him with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. This love is not a mere liking of God or affection for him. This is a love which involves our knowledge and intelligence. It is a love which turns to the Lord with all our being and serves him in wholehearted devotion without exception. This is a love in thought, word, and deed. This is a love which can only flow from faith in Jesus. If we do not know Jesus as our only Savior and trust in him as our only Savior from sin, there is no way that we can love God as he demands, and even as a fruit of faith our love will be far from perfect.

The same demand of perfection is in the second part of the great commandment: **“Love your neighbor as yourself.”** This demand is found in the Book of Leviticus which says: **“Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord.”** Leviticus 19:18 (NIV) Paul also quotes this in the Book of Romans, and adds the emphasis that love is the fulfilling of the Law. Paul quoted some of the commandments, and then said that whatever other commandment there may be, they all are summed up in this: **“Love your neighbor as yourself.”** He adds: **“Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.”** Romans 13:9.10 (NIV) This love for our neighbor flows from our love for the Lord. No one can truly love his fellowman, if he does not first as a believer in Christ love the Lord.

Again we emphasize that the love Jesus speaks of is perfect love, a perfect love of God and a perfect love of our neighbor. The holy God cannot allow any imperfections. He says: **“Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”** Matthew 5:48 (NIV) We are not perfect in keeping these demands, and so we do not fulfill the Law of God. John writes: **“This is love for God: to obey his commands.”** I John 5:3 (NIV) We are a long ways from obeying all his commands perfectly. We, in other words, are sinners. We urgently need a Savior from sin, lest we be lost in hell. How comforting, then, to hear from the Gospel: **“He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities .... and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.”** Isaiah 53:5.6 (NIV) This we are to believe, for this is our only hope of salvation.

We want to consider also Jesus’ words to the man who asked the question of him.

2

The man first responded to Jesus’ answer. **“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.’”** What the teacher of the law said to Jesus shows that he had given deep thought to the matter and understood what kind of love in keeping God’s commandments Jesus was speaking of. He realized that showing such love in keeping the commandments of God is more important than simply offering up sacrifices on an altar. Going through mere outward formalities in ceremonious worship is not a fulfilling of God’s demands of the Law.

Our text tells us: **“When Jesus saw that he had answered wisely, he said to him, ‘You are not far from the kingdom of God.’”** Jesus did not say that the man now was saved simply because he understood the

correctness of Jesus' answer to this question of which commandment was most important. But this was the first faint indication that this man was being influenced by the Word of Jesus.

More than once scoffers and unbelieving skeptics have been convinced of the divine truth when they hear Jesus' Word. We have heard of those who doubted Jesus' resurrection, but when they studied the Scriptures and came under the influence of the Savior's Word and the Holy Spirit's power, they came to faith in Jesus and were convinced of Jesus' physical resurrection from the dead. So also it was when Paul proclaimed Jesus' resurrection at the meeting of the Areopagus in Athens. ***"A few men became followers of Paul and believed. Among them was Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus, also a woman named Damaris, and a number of others."*** Acts 17:34 (NIV)

Let us not underestimate the power of Jesus' Word. It can by the working of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of the hearers create faith. Paul writes: ***"Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ."*** Romans 10:17 (NIV) Who can forget the great miracle on Pentecost when Peter preached the Gospel of Christ! ***"Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day."*** Acts 2:41 (NIV) Who can forget the wonderful conversion of the jailer at Philippi! He was an unbeliever who in time of great stress was ready to take his own life. But when he and his family came under the influence of Jesus' Word through the preaching of Paul and Silas, we are told that ***"he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God—he and his whole family."*** (Acts 16:34)

After Jesus' answer was given to the teacher of the Law, our text tells us: ***"From then on no one dared ask him any more questions."*** Jesus always had the perfect answer no matter how hard the religious leaders of the Jews tried to trick him. We certainly do not want to challenge Jesus with tricky questions. But if we want divine knowledge and then study the Bible, we will get much more than something to satisfy our curiosity. We will learn the truth of salvation. The Holy Spirit will strengthen our faith in Jesus. And with the conviction born of faith we will also be able to testify:

"Thy Word is everlasting truth;  
How pure is every page!  
That holy Book shall guide our youth  
And well support our age." Amen.  
(The Lutheran Hymnal 286:5)

(Revised from a Ministry By Mail sermon for October 15, 1989)