

Connecting in Community

Key Verse: *“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.”*
—Matthew 22:37

Selected Scripture:
Matthew 5:17-20;
22:34-40

JESUS, BORN A JEW AND

under the Law Covenant, knew it was imperative that he keep every facet of that arrangement during his earthly ministry. He states, “Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.” (Matt.

5:17,18) In the next verse, Jesus says that one who teaches the Law’s commandments, but does not abide by their own teaching, is considered “least” in God’s sight as far as the kingdom of heaven is concerned.

The scribes and Pharisees of our Lord’s day fit the description of those who taught many things from the Law, but did not keep those very teachings themselves. Based on this, Jesus makes a bold statement, “Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.” (vs. 20) Two important points are made here. First, the scribes and Pharisees, as a group

did not meet the divine qualifications for entrance into the kingdom of heaven. Second, in order for any to enter that spiritual kingdom, they must exceed the righteousness of these Jewish leaders. Jesus could make these bold statements because he could read the hearts of the scribes and Pharisees and see their hypocrisy.

The lesson for us is the importance of, as expressed in the familiar phrase, “practicing what we preach.” We are not to just preach the Word, or only give outward evidence of righteousness, but most importantly we must have a heart and mind fully in tune with God, his will, character, and his purposes. For, if the heart and mind are in proper harmony with God, the fruits of words and actions will follow in due course.

In another encounter with the Pharisees, Jesus was asked by them, “Which is the great commandment of the law?” (Matt. 22:36) Jesus’ answer is provided in our Key Verse and is actually in two parts: first, supreme love for God; and second, love for one’s neighbor. He further states that “On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.” (vs. 40) Although the Pharisees had tried to stumble Jesus, his response left them no choice but to grudgingly acknowledge his wisdom.

The entire Law of Moses was summed up in two important principles. The first principle was that of their relationship to God. The second dealt with their relationship to their fellow man. All of the ordinances, ceremonies, and features of Israel’s Law dealt in some way with one or the other of these two principles. Even the Ten Commandments could be divided in such a manner. (See Exod. 20:1-17) The first four commandments related to their responsibilities toward God, the last six with their responsibilities toward one another. How appropriate it was for Jesus to sum up God’s Law with only two commandments. We continue to live under these same commandments of Jesus, and must have them fully developed in our hearts and minds. ■