

Two Great Commandments

Key Verse: *“One of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, and perceiving that he had answered them well, asked him, Which is the first commandment of all?”*
—**Mark 12:28**

Selected Scripture:
Mark 12:28-34

Leading up to today’s lesson, Jesus was confronted in the Temple court by the chief priests and elders, who questioned by what authority he was preaching. (Mark 11:27,28) In response, Jesus gave them the parable of the wicked husbandmen, in which wicked caretakers killed the landowner’s son. Through the parable, Jesus clearly identified the Jewish religious leaders as the ones who would kill God’s Son, in order to keep their power and authority over the people.

Jesus responded, as recorded in the Matthew account, “The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.”—Matt. 21:43

Angered by this, the Pharisees and other leaders of the Jews attempted to entrap Jesus with various questions. The Pharisees asked if it is lawful to pay tribute to Caesar, to which the Master answered, “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.” (Mark 12:13-17) The Sadducees then asked Jesus which of seven brothers who had married the same woman would be her husband in his kingdom. Because of their

disbelief in the resurrection of the dead, Jesus answered, saying, “Do ye not therefore err, because ye know not the scriptures, neither the power of God?”—vs. 24

Impressed by Jesus’ answers, a “scribe” asked the question recorded in our Key Verse, perhaps in all sincerity. “Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord: And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment.” (Mark 12:29,30) How wonderfully comprehensive is this statement Jesus made, quoted directly from Deuteronomy 6:4,5.

Jesus went beyond the question of the scribe, declaring that a Second Commandment stands related to the First, namely, “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.” (Mark 12:31) Here again, Jesus quoted from the Old Testament. (Lev. 19:18) How much is stated in very few words. The Bible reveals a God of mercy, compassion, and love, as manifested by his provisions for the welfare of his creatures. God’s Word also admonishes his creatures to love in return, presenting a high standard of dealing with our Creator as well as our fellow man.

This Law of God has yet to be understood in its fullest sense. A limited approach to this standard might be found in the writings of Confucius, to the effect that one should not do to others what he would not have others do to him. What a contrast, though, we see when comparing this to the Scriptures! One is merely a negative statement; the other is a positive one: “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.”

How beautiful the world would be if people were able and willing to live up to these two grand laws. Each one would love the Heavenly Father with all his heart and soul. All would love their neighbors as themselves, seeking to serve them as they might have opportunity. Thank God, this is what we are assured the world will yet be, when the Messianic kingdom is established. ■