

The Greatest Commandment

*"Master, which is the great commandment in the law? 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. **This is the first and great commandment.** And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."* —Jesus Christ as quoted in Mathew 22:36

The purpose of this commentary is not to anger you, although I am sure some of you will get angry. I have contended for quite some time that one of the greatest dangers of Christianity comes not from what the Bible teaches, but rather from what we believe and the Bible doesn't actually teach.

So many Christians simply talk in platitudes...repeating a meaningless statement that they heard their pastor, or some other well meaning friend repeat to them. You know how they go...*Christians shouldn't judge...we are all God's children...God helps those who help themselves...love the sinner and hate the sinner...those non-Biblical statements that makes us feel so loving and caring to repeat.*

I am sorry to break the news to you, but so much of what Christians believe simply is not true. Is it any wonder we are so ineffectual in sharing the Truth of the *Gospel of the Kingdom* with others?

The Bible repeatedly warns us about "another Gospel" and those who would come in His name proclaiming it. The lack of Biblical knowledge of professing Christians borders on the scandalous. We have permitted pop culture to dictate how "Christians" are to behave.

I am sick and tired of having non-believers lecture me on how a Christian is supposed to act. You see, that is part of the problem. We are not to "act" like a Christian...we are to BE

Christian. My Christianity is not an act.

So I would like to take this opportunity to point out another fallacy that the culture has taught us. LOVE THY NEIGHBOR is not the first and greatest commandment. In fact, it is merely a mirror reflection of the first. In this age of “new math” we have juxtaposed the numbers and now live a Christianity where the numbers have been inverted.

Open up any package and turn to the instructions and you will find a list of steps required in order to properly assemble what is inside. The “instructions” will tell you to do step 1...then step 2...then step 3. You will never properly assemble the package if you get the steps out of order.

Keeping that in mind it might be necessary for us to spell out what Jesus taught in Mathew 22:36.

- Step 1. Love God with all of your heart, all of your soul, and all of your mind.
- Step 2 Love your neighbor as yourself.

Doing step number 1 FIRST is required before you can successfully complete step number 2. But unfortunately, American Christianity has reversed the instructions and today we are being taught that step number 2 comes before step number 1. You cannot love your neighbor until you first love the Lord.

“What is the point you are trying to make, Coach?” I hear you asking. Well, it is actually quite simple. Are you to love your neighbor MORE than you love the Lord? Doesn’t the command mention “ALL of your heart, ALL of your soul, and ALL of your mind?” How much is left for others if ALL of your love is given to the Lord?

Here is the rub. We Christians love to tell people about the love of God while at the same time refusing to do the very things that He commanded us to do. In John 14:15 Jesus was

quoted as having said "If you love me you will keep my commands." Later in John 14:23 he repeats "Anyone who loves me will obey my teachings."

Is it possible to love Jesus by ignoring his teachings? Can you love him by loving what he hates? Didn't He warn us that we could not follow Him if we loved others MORE than Him?

"If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple." Luke 14:26.

Was Jesus bi-polar? Was He confused? In one statement He tells us to love our neighbor while in another instance He tells us to HATE our parents? Was He teaching situational ethics?

No my friends, He was simply reinforcing the Truth that it is wrong to love ANYTHING above Him. Loving HIM is the first and greatest commandment.

Let me cut to the quick. Acceptance of a person engaging in sin is NOT LOVING THE LORD. If our expression of the Lord is demonstrated in honoring and keeping HIS commands is it possible for us to show love to HIM when we show love and acceptance to those who DENY His commands?

The two commands are inextricably linked. You cannot love your neighbor until you have complete devotion to God. We are teaching a Gospel today that elevates relationships with others above our fealty to Christ and His commands.

That does not mean that we are not to love "neighbors" who are engaging in sin, but that we are required to hold an allegiance to God and His standards above ANY relationship with another human being.

To openly express love to a “neighbor” engaged in sinful behavior without giving the Truth of what God says about the behavior is “loving your neighbor” more than loving God. It may make you feel more Christian, but it is denying the One who demands total and complete allegiance to Him.

American Christians have lost their salt because we have refused to say the hard things to those who are violating the laws of God. God calls homosexuality an abomination. The Bible teaches that abortion is murder and that God HATES hands that shed innocent blood.

As much as I wish it wasn't so, those hands are connected to a person's body. Is it possible to hate the hands without hating the body the hands are connected to? Is it possible to be “friends” with a sodomite while refusing to tell them what God says about their behavior? Does “friendship evangelism” demand we accept what God abhors?

I know...I know...who am I to judge? Perhaps I am off base but I am simply the one asking the question. It is not a question of who you will LOVE...but what you will TOLERATE.

Love your neighbor as yourself? Maybe that is the problem. Perhaps we love ourselves too much. We have elevated the approval of our fellow man above our obedience to Christ.

Today we are taught to love sinners more than we hate sin. We will never get the second command correct until we come under obedience to the first.

God is love. Jesus is the Truth. Speaking the Truth IS Love.

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