



First Baptist Church Selmer

COMMANDED! • MERCY, NOT SACRIFICE •

MARK 12:32-33; JOHN 15:12-13; MATTHEW 9:9-13 • 8/24/2025

MAIN POINT

A genuine love for God and others doesn't require a believer to think less of himself but rather to think of himself less.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

Have you ever had to give up something to follow Jesus?

Do you think the more we sacrifice, the higher the likelihood we will be able to get into heaven?

Why is it important that we understand that eternal life is not something we earn?

Every week, most churches around the globe gather together on Sunday mornings. There is a time of fellowship, Bible study, prayer, monetary giving, worship, preaching, and a time of response. If not careful, many Christians will use their faithfulness and attendance to these as a means to "sure up" their entrance into God's Kingdom.

All of these are vitally important in the life of a believer, but none of them will guarantee an eternity in the Kingdom. Is it possible to attend church, participate, serve, and try to live a moral life, yet still miss out on eternity? Absolutely. And honestly, if the justification of our faith is placed on anything other than the finished work of Jesus and His substitutionary death on the cross, we should have great concern about our so-called faith.

Our lesson today will look at the scribe's response to the Great Commandments given by Jesus. We will see a superficial response to the commands, but one with eternal consequences.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ MARK 12:32-33

32 "And the scribe said to him, "You are right, Teacher. You have truly said that he is one, and there is no other besides him. 33 And to love him with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as oneself, is much more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices." (ESV)

What did the scribe communicate to Jesus in verse 32?

How funny is it to think that the scribe was giving Jesus confirmation on whether His answers were right or wrong?

Do you think Jesus needed the scribes' confirmation of the truth?

The scribe was well-versed in Scripture. It would require an intensive Bible study to look back at the conditions and details of the scribes' extensive knowledge of the Scriptures. One example is the statement, *"there is no other besides him."* If you remember back to the lesson about the Greatest Commandment, there was a daily prayer recited by the most pious Jews called the Shemah. One part of the prayer stated, *"the Lord is one,"* but that is not the full prayer. Another part of the prayer was brought to the conversation by the scribe. The scribe's statement proves to the crowd and Jesus that he knew and had a head knowledge of the Scriptures.

The scribe not only added a second phrase from the Shemah but spoke, as Jesus did, from the Old Testament. Verse 33 confirms his knowledge of the OT passage, Hosea 6:6, *"For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings."*

If everything could be summed up in these two commandments, and Scripture teaches us that love is greater than sacrifice and burnt offerings, and the scribe knew all this, what else could be missing? The scribe knew the words of Scripture but was blinded to the Living Word standing directly before him.

Without knowing it, the scribe was speaking correctly about the things of God, but was still missing the greater point, genuine love for God through His Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus would teach His disciples later about the truth and reality of what genuine love looked like.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JOHN 15:12-13.

12 "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. 13 Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends." (ESV)

How did Jesus show His love for His disciples?

Why would self-sacrifice be the greatest demonstration of love for a friend?

Does self-sacrifice necessarily entail one's death, or can we "lay down our lives" in other ways, too? If so, what are some of those ways?

We gain influence in sharing the gospel with friends because we make it our aim to live like Jesus *"at all times."* Jesus commands us to love one another, and that involves a self-sacrificial kind of love—laying down one's life for the sake of the other. It is doubtful we will be called upon to die for a friend, but we can sacrifice for our friends in all sorts of ways—preferences, time, money, forgiveness, etc. If we give of ourselves sacrificially in a friendship, we are demonstrating the greatest kind of love, and this will mean we have earned the right to be heard when sharing the gospel, because the necessary "wounds" that will follow will be in the context of a friendship characterized by great love.

We look again at another passage in regards to genuine love for God, evidenced in how we love others.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ MATTHEW 9:9-13.

9 "As Jesus passed on from there, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, "Follow me." And he rose and followed him.

10 And as Jesus reclined at the table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and were reclining with Jesus and his disciples. 11 And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" 12 But when he heard it, he said, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. 13 Go and

learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.' For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners." (ESV)

Who are some types of people who would be labeled as “sinners” in our day?

Why did Jesus welcome and spend time with people who were considered “lower” on society’s scale?

Jesus willingly and graciously spent time with the outcasts of His own society—those labeled tax collectors and sinners. What’s more, Jesus was derided for these associations when Pharisees would call Him *“a friend of tax collectors and sinners”* (Matt. 11:19). Yet, Jesus was pleased to be ridiculed in this way because it was part of His mission. He intentionally sought relationships with sinners to show them mercy, to give them Himself. If we are to live like Jesus *“at all times,”* then we will follow in His pattern here. We must be intentional about our relationships for the sake of sharing the gospel. Genuine, faithful love toward others points people to Jesus Christ.

What efforts are you making to love the “unlovable”?

How is your love for others greater than any offering or sacrifice you could make to God?

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

What are some ways we can demonstrate our love for our friends “at all times”?

How can we begin to show love to the outcasts of our local community and society as a whole?

Are there specific situations that God has laid on your heart for sharing the gospel with a friend or acquaintance? How can we encourage and pray for one another to show love in sacrificial ways?

PRAYER

Father, we pray You would renew in us our joy and gratitude for the friendship that is ours in Jesus. We also pray for the strength and boldness of Your Holy Spirit to be intentional in

our relationships—to give ourselves to others as Jesus did, and to share the good news of Christ’s finished work on the cross.

COMMENTARY

| JOHN 15:12-13

The “*commands*” to be obeyed (15:10) are reduced in this verse to a single command. We are to love each other and to do it in the way and to the degree that Jesus loves, namely, as I have loved you. Jesus’ love for His followers sets the standard for His followers’ love for one another and furnishes the motivation for practicing mutual love. Having set His love as the standard for the disciples’ mutual love, Jesus described the highest manifestation of love. Willingness to lay down one’s life for others is the supreme test of love. Jesus’ saying no doubt referred primarily to His death as proof of His love for the disciples (“*as I have loved you,*” v. 12). Having mentioned “friends” as the ones for whom love prompts the giving of oneself, Jesus gave the qualification for people being His friends. The “if” clause in verse 14—you are my friends if—identifies the singular requirement for being His friend: doing “*what I command.*”

| MATTHEW 9:9-13

9:9. Again, Matthew showed Jesus violating a cultural taboo by associating with a tax collector. The Roman Empire’s practice was to recruit tax collectors from among the people they had conquered. These natives worked for the hated oppressor. This made them traitors and outcasts among their countrymen. But it was common practice for tax collectors to demand more from their countrymen than was actually due in order to line their own pockets. If the people refused to pay, the tax collector had the threat of the Roman military to back him up. Tax collectors, in general, were known for their greed and lack of conscience, so they were thought of as the lowest form of humanity.

Not only did Jesus speak to such a vile sinner, but he invited Matthew, a tax collector, to become one of his closest followers. Implied here is the ultimate in forgiveness and unconditional acceptance. Matthew’s conscience must have been in torment for him to accept the Master’s invitation to spiritual cleansing and restoration, giving up the wealth and privilege of his position. Again, the Messiah-King manifested the compelling authority of his word—turning the worst of sinners into disciples.

This brief passage is Matthew's only mention of himself. Naturally, he should hold up—as an exhibit in his case for the identity of Jesus as Messiah—the key turning point of his own life. Matthew placed this account at the heart of Matthew 8-10, possibly as the crowning miracle authenticating the authority of the Messiah-King. This passage also links directly with 9:1-8, because it demonstrates the king's authority to forgive sins.

9:10-11. Jesus proceeded to violate the cultural standards of acceptable behavior even further by visiting Matthew's home and by eating with him and many of his tax collector friends as well as many other sinners. Eating together was the deepest form of social intimacy. Normally, no *"sinner"* was welcome at a righteous man's table, and no *"righteous"* man would consider eating at a sinner's table. Jesus had no such misgivings; he displayed his unconditional acceptance and impartiality by participating in this meal.

The Pharisees did not address Jesus directly. Perhaps they were trying to use the disciples' limited understanding to drive a wedge between them and Jesus. Their use of the title teacher may have been sarcastic. It was generally assumed that such a righteous man as a Jewish teacher would refrain from associating with society's undesirables. Their question was mocking and critical.

9:12-13. When he became aware of the question, Jesus rose to confront the hypocrites and their self-righteousness with righteous indignation. Jesus portrayed himself here, in the context of so many healing miracles, as a doctor for the human spirit. He defended his lack of association with the Pharisees (the healthy) by alluding to the fact that they saw no need for spiritual healing in themselves. He was not implying that the Pharisees were righteous, but only that they saw themselves that way, and so were not open to receiving his healing (forgiveness). It is safe to read some irony into Jesus' use of the word healthy in referring to the Pharisees.

Jesus also defended his association with the tax collectors and sinners by their own self-awareness regarding their spiritual illness (sin) and their hunger for his healing (forgiveness).

Also implied in Jesus' words was an affirmation of the basic equality of all people, a truth the Pharisees failed to grasp. This basic lack of understanding is why they needed to go and learn the lesson of Hosea 6:6. This Old Testament passage does not belittle sacrifice, but it elevates right treatment of others above it. By quoting the Old Testament, which the Pharisees knew well, Jesus shamed his opponents by confronting their misunderstanding of the spirit of the Lord's Word. The word sacrifice here represents all the religious motions and rituals the Pharisees observed that were meaningless and empty. But

accompanied by a heart after God, particularly a heart of mercy and compassion, righteous deeds take on positive significance before God (Matt. 6:1-18).

Compassion or mercy is an attitude toward a need that is compelled to take action to meet that need. A compassionate and merciful heart finds it impossible to remain neutral when it sees a need of any kind.

Jesus was not blind to the faults of the sinners with whom he dined, but his mercy caused him to withhold judgment. The Pharisees had no right to exercise judgment, since they were just as sinful themselves. They should have been the first to withhold judgment and accept the other sinners. But in their pride, they were unmerciful, demonstrating they had no grasp of Jesus' statements in 6:14-15.

Finally, Jesus clarified his "*physician*" analogy by saying, for I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners. Again, we can read some sarcasm and irony into his use of the word righteous when referring to the Pharisees. They were not truly righteous, but they saw themselves as such. Thus, they were not willing to accept his forgiveness and respond to his call. The sinners, on the other hand, were aware of their sin (Matt. 5:3, "*poor in spirit*") and hungered for forgiveness. They responded to his call to true discipleship. Jesus' disciples were not perfect, but they accepted his forgiveness with humility and moved on toward maturity.