



First Baptist Church Selmer

COMMANDED! • WHAT'S YOUR HEART'S MOTIVE? • MARK 12:28-34 • 8/3/2025

MAIN POINT

The heart's motive of a genuine believer is to follow freely in obedience to Christ's commands.

INTRODUCTION

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

What is your favorite (past or present) crime and/or legal drama TV show?

Why do most people enjoy the act of rendering justice for "the crimes that one has committed"?

Why is it important to figure out the motive?

Very rarely do people make decisions without a motive. Whether it is trying to piece together evidence for a crime committed or making a major career change in your personal life, most often, there is a motive behind the decision. The heart can be a tricky thing that can lead us both to make wise and unwise decisions in our lives.

As we look over the next month at the Great Commandments, we will first look at the motive of those who asked Jesus to proclaim which commandment was the greatest. As humans, even if we ask the right questions, our heart's motive behind our questioning should be evaluated to determine its source.

As Christians, one of the goals of our lives is to grow in Christlikeness, a journey we will be on for the rest of our lives. As we learn to be like Jesus, we must stop and evaluate our heart's motives for following Jesus. Do we follow for what we can get from Him, or from a pure heart of worship for who He is?

We are going to start this week with the conversation between Jesus and the questioning scribe. Each week this month, we will break down different pieces of the encounter as we see the full scope of Jesus' response to him.

UNDERSTANDING

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

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ MARK 12:28-31.

28 "And one of the scribes came up and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, asked him, "Which commandment is the most important of all?" 29 Jesus answered, "The most important is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. 30 And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' 31 The second is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these." (ESV)

Jesus' teaching on the Great Commandments can be seen in three different Gospel accounts (Matthew 22, Mark 12, Luke 10). Each account builds a little more context of the conversation and Jesus' response. Jesus gave the Great Commandments in response to a question raised by a religious leader about identifying the most important command from the entirety of the Torah. Although the leader asked to know the single most important command, Jesus gave it to him in two parts: love God and love your neighbor as yourself.

What do you think was the scribe's motive behind his question?

Do you believe it was out of pure concern or from a selfish motive?

It is unclear from the statement alone in verse 28 exactly what the scribe's motive was in asking Jesus to rank God's commandments. The scribe would have been well aware of the Ten Commandments, but also of the 613 other commandments that were found in the Torah. Perhaps the scribe felt there were too many, or some were personally too difficult to follow, but the Gospel of Matthew tells us that he wanted to test Jesus and hear His response.

Let's look further into the context of the passage to better analyze the scribe's heart's motives behind the question.

Take a look at Mark 12:38-40. What does Jesus' warning tell us about the scribes?

Do you believe the scribe's original questioning was done from a sincere heart to understand or a more sinister motive?

Jesus warns those in attendance to *"Beware of the scribes."* The questioning scribe in these verses may not have even understood his own heart's motivations, but his actions revealed a more sinister motive than he might have realized. The scribe had very little intention of obeying the Great Commandment, but cared more to give off the appearance publicly that he was deeply religious.

Describe what it looks like in your life to love God the way Jesus stated in verses 29-30.

What are some of the things that make it challenging to love God and others in our culture today?

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ MARK 12:32-34.

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." 34 And when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." And after that no one dared to ask him any more questions."
(ESV)

What surprises you most about the scribe's answer to Jesus?

**What did Jesus mean that the scribe was *"not far off from the kingdom of God"*?
What else was missing?**

Loving God with everything in our beings is a challenge for us because of 1) our sinful nature, 2) the fallen world in which we live, and 3) because of a great enemy that seeks our destruction. We live in a world that tempts us to love it and everything it offers, including money, security, power, acceptance, and so on. All of these temptations lure us away from God, and we end up loving Him halfheartedly. However, Jesus makes it clear that we should love God more than anything else in the world. Out of that love grows a love for others that leads them to Christ and changes our world for the better.

Why do you believe Jesus' answer to the scribe silenced the others from asking questions to Him?

What do you think is so daring about bringing your deepest questions to Jesus?

Jesus' response was not to silence the others from asking genuine questions of Him, but rather, to evaluate their heart's motive behind their questions. The scribes were some of the most religious people they knew. If Jesus told him he was close to the kingdom of God, but still not there, imagine what that meant for everyone else.

How can we be sure that we don't miss the Kingdom of God like the scribe in this story?

APPLICATION

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

Why is it important that we "keep a check" on our heart's motives?

How can we encourage one another to love God and others practically this week?

Is there someone in particular in your life who most needs to know the love of Christ? What can you do to demonstrate God's love to them this week?

PRAYER

Thank God for the love He's shown us in sending Jesus to die for us. Pray that He would help us to love well, as we are called to do—to love Him with our whole being, and to love others as ourselves. Pray that we'd see the needs of our neighbors, wherever they are, and we'd be moved to act on their behalf as we testify to the Lordship of Christ.

COMMENTARY

| MARK 12:28-34

12:28 The question reflects the fact that the scribes had identified 613 separate commandments, 365 of which were negative and 248 of which were positive. They divided them further into "heavy" and "light," i.e., more important and less important.

12:29–30 The quotation is from Deut 6:4–5, the first part of the famous Shema. In the second century, the confession of faith that consisted of Deut 6:4–9; 11:13–21; Num 15:37–41 was recited twice daily by pious Jews. Matthew and Luke do not have the prefatory sentence, “Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one”; but it is crucial because the obligation to love God is based on his oneness. Because he is one, love for him must be undivided. The inclusion was important for Mark’s church in their debates with Jews in order to affirm that they also were monotheists, not polytheists, as the Jews sometimes accused them of being. “With all your mind” is added to the statement in Deuteronomy. The piling up of the terms “heart,” “soul,” and “mind” is just a way of saying “with your whole being” and is not intended to designate the component parts of human nature.

The New Testament contains comparatively few references to loving God. In addition to the present passage and its parallels in Matt 22:37 and Luke 10:27, there are: Luke 11:42; John 5:42; 14:31; Rom 8:28; 1 Cor 2:9; 8:3; Jas 1:12; 2:5; 1 John 2:5, 15; 4:20; 5:2–3; Jude 21; Rev 2:4. John 14:15, 24; 21:15–17; 1 Cor 16:22; Eph 6:24; 1 Pet 1:8 refer to loving Christ. If any significance can be attributed to this phenomenon, it is that the New Testament writers were preoccupied with the amazing love of God for sinful human beings.

12:31 The second quotation is from Lev 19:18. In the first part of that verse, the neighbor is defined as “one of your people,” i.e., a fellow Israelite. Leviticus 19:33–34 extends the love command to resident aliens. It is not likely that many first-century Jews extended it any further. Therefore, one of the most significant elements in the teaching of Jesus was to redefine the neighbor as everybody, including the hated Samaritans and Gentiles (cf. Luke 10:30–37, which follows immediately his account of the discussion about the greatest commandment).

One of Jesus’ other great teaching contributions was to bring together and virtually merge the commands to love God and to love fellow human beings. Some deny that Jesus was the first to relate the two. The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs (second cent. b.c.) seem to do so. Philo of Alexandria, a contemporary of Jesus who probably died about a.d. 50, seems to have also. Even if a few others before or during the time of Jesus saw the interrelationship of the commands to love God and love others, no one else put such great emphasis on the combination and made it essential. Jesus showed that it was impossible to really love God without loving neighbors. Love for God is expressed by loving others.

The statement “as yourself” does not justify the self-love advocated by modern psychology as necessary for a healthy self-image. It merely acknowledges that human

beings do love themselves—far too much in fact—and that God deserves as much—actually far more.

12:32 The material in vv. 32–34 is peculiar to Mark. Verse 32 is the only place in the Gospels where a scribe is described as being favorably disposed toward Jesus, and v. 34 is the only place where Jesus commends a scribe. Not all scribes and Pharisees were bad, but being teachable was still far from being "born again."

12:33 The elevation of an ethical quality over sacrificial worship stands in the tradition of 1 Sam 15:22; Hos 6:6; and perhaps also Isa 1:11–17. The word translated "burnt offerings" refers to those offerings totally consumed on the altar. The word translated "sacrifices" refers to offerings in general, only a small portion of which was burned, and the remainder was given to the priest or returned to the worshiper to eat as a sacred meal. The two terms summarize and represent the entire sacrificial system.

12:34 There is a great difference between knowing God and trusting Him. He was receptive to Jesus as a person as well as to his teaching. Jesus indicated that the man was *"not far from entering God's Kingdom"* if only He would obey the commands from a genuine heart. Jesus shows that head knowledge is not enough to inherit God's Kingdom and eternal life; one must possess heart knowledge evidenced in how one trusts and obeys His commands.