

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church
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Sermon title: Challenges for the New Year, Mark 12:28-34

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INTRODUCTION: The sermon today is based on the two greatest commandments. Loving God and loving people are more important than all the burnt offerings and sacrifices.

SCRIPTURE: Mark 12:28-34 ²⁸ *One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, “Of all the commandments, which is the most important?”*

²⁹ *“The most important one,” answered Jesus, “is this: ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.’³⁰ 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: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.”*

³² *“Well said, teacher,” the man replied. “You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him.³³ To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices.”*

³⁴ *When Jesus saw that he had answered wisely, he said to him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” And from then on no one dared ask him any more questions.*

EXPLANATION: As you know, teachers of the Law in this day, as well as other religious officials did their best to trick Jesus. They wanted to catch him in a bind he could not get out of. But, tricking Jesus proved to be impossible. Having the mind of God, he knew what people were thinking before they spoke their words. He knew the conditions of their hearts. And, he always replied in a way they did not expect.

In this case, a man asked which commandment was the greatest. A fair enough question, I guess.

Let's look at the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20.

SCRIPTURE: Exodus 20:3-17 ³“*You shall have no other gods before me.*

⁴ “*You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below.* ⁵ *You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me,* ⁶ *but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.*

⁷ “*You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.*

⁸ “*Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.* ⁹ *Six days you shall labor and do all your work,* ¹⁰ *but the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns.* ¹¹ *For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.*

¹² “*Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you.*

¹³ “*You shall not murder.*

¹⁴ “*You shall not commit adultery.*

¹⁵ “*You shall not steal.*

¹⁶ “*You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.*

¹⁷ “*You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.*”

EXPLANATION: This man who came to Jesus was a teacher of the Law. This means he knew the Law and did his best to keep the Law. In fact, it's possible he

had kept all the commandments. But, something was in his mind—was he trying to trick Jesus, or was he sincere in his question?

Since Jesus knew the heart of the man, Jesus knew his need. Perhaps this man was so busy keeping the Law he missed the point of the Law, which Jesus identified—love God, love people.

Look what the man says in our main text, Mark 12:33— Loving God and loving people are more important than all the burnt offerings and sacrifices. Perhaps this man had been so caught up in burnt offerings and sacrifices he forgot to love God and love people. Or, perhaps as a teacher of the Law, he saw people around him who did the same. It's easy to get caught in the cycle of rituals which lose their meaning.

When Jesus said to love God and love people, what he gave was a summary of the Ten Commandments. The first four commandments have to do with people's relationship with God, and the following six commandments have to do with people's relationship with people. It would be possible to keep all the commandments and neither love God nor love people!

ILLUSTRATION: Let me give you an example. In the commandments about loving God, the fourth one is about keeping the Sabbath holy. When I was a boy, my family went on vacation to Texas. We left Tennessee early one Saturday and spent the night in Memphis. On Sunday morning, we got up and drove to attend church at First Baptist, Forest City, Arkansas. Somewhere between Prescott, Arkansas, and Emmet, Arkansas, we heard a loud knocking noise coming from the engine of the 1974 Ford Torino station wagon. Someone directed us to the only mechanic in Emmet, and we went to his home. He was really a nice guy and said he would like to help us. But, since it was Sunday, he couldn't help a family with five children on a miserably hot summer day. You see, he kept the commandment, didn't he? In my adult life, I've driven through Arkansas numerous times and winced when I saw the Emmet exit sign.

APPLICATION: If we love God, then we'll love what God loves, won't we? We will love **His Will, His Word, and His people.**

With His Will, we'll surrender our will to His. We'll seek first His kingdom as the scripture says in Matthew 6. We'll say, like Jesus said, "*Not my will, but Yours be*

done.” And, when seeking His will, we’ll come to realize the truth that our life is really His life, our belongings are really His belongings, our talents are really His talents, and our money is really His money. And, we’ll realize our future is really in His hands. If we love God, then we’ll love His will.

With His Word, we’ll ponder its meaning and wrestle with its application in our lives. We’ll discuss it, we’ll revere it, and we will live it out. We believe in the closed canon of scripture, meaning there will be no more scripture added to the Bible. And, that’s good because there’s plenty here. I don’t want any more. A friend of mine who is a Bible teacher told me years ago the more he reads the Bible, the more he wonders, “What is it?” I didn’t understand what he meant then, but I am beginning to understand it more. If we love God, then we’ll love his Word.

With His People, we’ll love God’s people, and we’ll love others who are not His people. Folks, we have got to love God’s people. God did not call us to love only His people, who are just like us, did he? No. If you have not read the Book of Acts, you’ve just got to do it. It reads like a novel of how the early Church functioned. Acts is about what happened when Jesus ascended into heaven and the Holy Spirit was sent. People came together and were unified. If there was a conflict, they worked through it. They followed their leaders. They loved each other. They shared all things. And, they spread the Gospel.

And, with those who are not God’s people, we’ll love them too. I’m convinced the reason many churches don’t grow is because church people don’t know people outside the church. I ask you, do you have any friends outside the church or is 100% of your socializing happening in the church. I challenge you in the new year to develop new friends outside the church. If we are to be salt and light, yet we never leave the salt shaker and hide the light, how will we ever be God’s people on this earth?

APPLICATION: What’s the application here? The teacher of the Law replied loving God and people were more important than all the burnt offerings and sacrifices. A modern day interpretation of this is that having love in your heart is more important than the money you give, your church attendance, all the songs you may sing, or the prayers your voice may speak.

You know, it’s possible for us to do all the things we think a Christian should do and miss the point completely. It’s possible for us to study about God and not be in

a loving relationship with God. It's possible for us to sing about God and not sing to God. It's possible for us to read the Bible, study it, and talk about it, yet not do what it says.

As you look back on the previous year, how's your report card? Did you love God? If you answered yes, then that means you loved what God loves. What grade did you give yourself?

The teacher of the Law asked what is the greatest commandment? He asked for one, but he got two. Why—because it's not possible to love God and not love people.

How about in 2017 you let go of those crippling grudges and sore feelings against that person who comes to your mind?

In the coming year, let's focus on loving God and loving people. If you're already good at it, there's always room to grow. If you've not been very good at it, you can start today. Begin to see your life as if you were someone else watching you. Where is the love of God in your life? Where is the love of people in your life?

Are we truly available to God? Are we surrendered to Him? Let's take this scripture literally and make the changes which need to be made.

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Sincerely, Paul Gunn
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