

The Most Difficult Commandment

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[0 : 00] Mark chapter 12, we came to this passage last Sunday, and we studied what Jesus Christ said was the most important commandment.

! The first of all, He said to love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, with all thy mind, with all thy strength. We realized that this wasn't about keeping the law at all, but it was about a relationship with God.

And we learned that this commandment, this first commandment, it has to be a priority, because it is in fact the first. It's first to God. It's what Jesus Christ said of all the law. This is the first one.

And so it's got to be a priority to you. Why wouldn't it be a priority to you if it's such a priority to God? We said also that this command must be personal. It's about you loving Him.

It gave you plenty of reasons, and there's plenty more to discuss if you need any. That you love Him is what He's requiring. And it must be practice. We saw that the scribe knew the right answer to the question.

[1 : 07] But putting that answer and that truth into practice in his own life was something else. It's turned out later in that passage, he loved something more than he loved God. So, last Sunday, an attempt to give the first commandment all of our focus, to give it its full weight and attention, I purposely glossed over the rest of what Jesus Christ said in His answer.

We read it, but I really didn't comment at all on it. He called something else the second. The second commandment. And that's what I want to take a look at today. So, with me, would you reread this portion of Scripture from verses 28 down to 31, from Mark chapter 12, starting in verse number 28. And 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? And Jesus answered him, And 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. And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these.

After identifying the first commandment, the most important thing that we should be concerning ourselves with in this life, our relationship, our love toward God, after identifying that, he decides to give some additional information.

[2 : 46] Information that was not asked for. He easily could have stopped with, This is the first commandment, period. The question has been asked. The question has been answered.

But Christ was compelled to continue. Nobody asked for this additional information, but he added to his answer a short seven-word statement that is quite possibly the most difficult command to obey and to fulfill.

The first commandment he gives is the most important commandment. The second commandment, I'm going to submit to you, is the most difficult.

And so as we consider that this morning, before we do, let's pray together. Thankful for the chance to get in the Bible again with you. Father, please help us as we study this book and read these words, these words that Jesus Christ offered, that he insisted upon saying to this audience.

God, help us to understand them, to understand and know their place, and help us to be in submission to this. God, please speak through your word here to our hearts and renew our mind on this topic.

[4 : 04] If we're negligent, if we bypass it, and if we give ourselves a pass in this in some way, then show us the relevance to us and to the importance of it, not just in this world, but in our relationship to you ultimately.

And may you reveal this truth to your people today. We ask in Christ's name. Amen. Amen. All right. So the difficulty of this commandment, I want to show you three reasons why I find it to be so difficult.

And let's dive right in. The first reason, because the second commandment, love thy neighbor as thyself, that commandment lacks the motivation of the first.

The first commandment is, love the Lord thy God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. Love God. We read it last week. Because He first loved us. God loved us. He gave His only begotten Son for us.

He withheld nothing from us. When we didn't deserve any of it, it's easy to love God. God forgave us of our sins. God acted upon His love.

[5 : 08] He cares for us. He provides for us. He protects us. The Bible says, in Him we live, we move, we have our being. We're so dependent upon God for everything. It's natural to love Him.

It just makes sense. Maybe loving Him with all your heart and all your soul, well, that might take some work. But it's still a natural tendency to love somebody that has so greatly loved you and does so much for you.

Just like a child would love a parent. It's easy to love somebody that cares for you. It's easy to love somebody who sets their heart upon you.

But your neighbor, what motivation do I have to love my neighbor? In comparison to loving God versus loving my neighbor, no neighbor has ever made such a sacrifice for me.

No neighbor has gone out of their way to do such wonderful things for me when I didn't ask for it or when I didn't care. My neighbor doesn't feed me.

[6 : 23] My neighbor doesn't pay my bills. My neighbor doesn't care for me. My neighbor doesn't love me like that. They might come to my aid if I got in a bind.

My literal neighbor, they might check my mail if I was away. They might do something like that for me. But they're not going to go to great lengths for me. They're certainly not going to die in my place.

Loving God comes easy. When you consider who the Lord is, when you consider what God has done, when you consider His person and His personality, it's natural and somewhat easy then to love Him.

But other people in my life, other human beings in this world, some neighbors of mine, some neighbors, they've lied to my face.

Some neighbors have stolen from me. Some neighbors in my life have cheated me out of money. Some neighbors have stabbed me in the back or gossiped and been ugly to me.

[7 : 29] Some have deceived me. And you say, well, what are you saying? I'm saying your neighbor will let you down. Your neighbor is flawed. Your neighbor is imperfected. They're a sinner.

And they care more for themselves when it really comes down to it. It's much harder to be motivated to love somebody that has let you down. It's harder to be motivated to love somebody who has lied to you or stolen from you or doesn't love you back.

And this is a difficult command. To love thy neighbor as thyself. It's far more difficult than loving God who has done so much for me. It's difficult because it lacks the motivation that the first one lacks.

And yet Jesus Christ, when answering the question, says the second's like, namely this, thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. Man, why'd you have to say that?

Why couldn't we just focus on loving God? He's wonderful. And now you turn it into something far more difficult. Secondly, it's difficult because of my neighbor.

[8 : 39] Because of my neighbor, who they are. Kind of similarly, the kind of person. It's one thing to love a holy God, a righteous God, a loving God. But to love a fallen, sinful man.

Now, before we get into that, the Old Testament law makes several commands regarding interactions one with another. Regarding things like business. Interactions with, you know, dealings in the business world.

It implements these safeguards in the law, in the judgments of what you are and are not to do.

Safeguards protecting the neighbor that is less fortunate, that is a widow, the fatherless, the poor, the strangers that live among them.

They're very easy targets to take advantage of. And God expects His man, the people, they're forbidden to act in any way that would be less than upright.

And less than honest, they're forbidden. They're actually commanded in the law to care for them, to love them, to provide for them, to bless them, to lend to them when they're in need.

[9 : 49] And if it's in your power, God says, then when I see you behave that way, then I'll bless you for blessing them. I'll consider that you obeying me. So, I just want you to understand within this culture, it's already been established that you are to show love for your neighbor.

That you are not to neglect your neighbor. That you're not to take advantage of your neighbor, but rather love thy neighbor. It's understood. But the scope of this command that Jesus puts forth that says it's the second most important command, the scope of this goes far beyond one's kindred, one's family, one's familiar friends, beyond their nation even.

Christ was once challenged on this very topic, and would you turn to Luke chapter 10, and let's see how he handled this challenge. He was challenged on loving the neighbor.

And it was the scribe that asked him, who then is my neighbor? Luke chapter 10, and I'll begin with this passage in verse 25.

Luke 10, 25. Behold, a certain lawyer stood up and tempted him, saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?

[11 : 17] And he said unto them, what is written in the law? How readest thou? And he answering said, thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind, and thy neighbor as thyself.

And he said unto him, thou hast answered right. This do, and thou shalt live. But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, and who is my neighbor?

That's a pretty broad stroke back there to say, love thy neighbor. So who exactly am I to love? And then the Lord answers him. He responds with a story that it has an otherwise despised individual, the Samaritan, acting as this, the one that's fulfilling the command, the one that's obedient in this, that is keeping the law, as a matter of fact.

The one that he doesn't like is the one that has compassion. I don't want to read this. We read it earlier. This is the good Samaritan. What Jesus Christ gives is a man that, in John 4, the Bible says that the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans.

They're considered enemies. They're ignored and rejected. And Jesus Christ purposely chose this man, a Samaritan, to force this lawyer, this man that is immersed in the law, to force this man and all of them to rethink their obligation in obeying this command to love thy neighbor.

[12 : 53] Because all I see is take care of the widows and the poor and to just be fair and to be kind to them and to love my brother and to those that I live around.

Yeah, they're Jews and we're all children of God. So, yep, take care of them. But the Lord Jesus Christ challenged them to rethink what this command is actually saying. Who is my neighbor?

He asks him. The takeaway from this teaching of Jesus Christ is that when determining who thy neighbor is, there are no ethnic barriers to who the neighbor is.

There are no political distinctions that would eliminate fulfilling this law. There are no religious distinctions to be observed.

When considering who is thy neighbor, you don't get to look at their economic situation. You don't get to look about what their gender or gender preference is. You don't get to look at them and analyze them and determine if they meet the qualifications of whether they're thy neighbor.

[14 : 01] The Lord Jesus Christ is showing you there's no separation. You don't get to base it on their worldview. You don't get to base it on their standing in society, whether you're going to love them or not.

They're all your neighbors. They're all your neighbors. Red, yellow, black, and white. They're all your neighbors.

Atheist, agnostic, spiritist, Catholic, Mormon, blessed, saved, or reprobate, lost.

They're all your neighbors. There is no difference. Friend, enemy, they're all your neighbors. And the command is to love thy neighbor.

When Peter charged servants to be subject to their masters, he said, not only to the good and the gentle, because that's easy, but he said, but also to the forward.

[15 : 00] That's different. And the similar truth carries through were to love the ones, not the ones that's easy to love. Look back at Matthew chapter 5. Find Matthew chapter number 5.

Here's some things the Lord taught them that they did not otherwise understand. There was some new information to them. They had to have a different view on some things in this, with relationship

to others.

Matthew 5, I'll start in verse 43. Matthew 5, 43. Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor and hate thine enemy.

But I say unto you, love your enemies. Bless them that curse you. Do good to them that hate you. And pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you.

In verse 46, If ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? Do not even the publicans the same? Of course they do.

[16:09] You're no better than them. If ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? Do not even the publicans so? Of course they do. You get the teaching.

It comes through pretty clear. You're expected to love not the lovable. The neighbor is all of them. All of them.

And herein is the difficulty of this command magnified. How hard it can be to love somebody that hates you.

That can't stand you. That their purpose in life is to destroy you. How hard it is then for you to love them.

Somebody maybe even on a different level just somebody different than you. Somebody that has a different look. Somebody that has a different language. Somebody that has a different religion.

[17:14] A different behavior. It is far easier to despise those people that we don't agree with. That we don't connect with.

It's far easier to ignore them and dismiss them and yet the command says, no, love them. Love thy neighbor. It is the most difficult command.

Loving God is far easier than loving people that we don't even like. It's the most difficult command. It's difficult because, thirdly, because of how much you love yourself.

Look back at Mark chapter 12 at our text. Mark chapter 12. It's difficult because of the degree at which Christ is commanding us to love our neighbor.

In verse 31, the second is like, namely this, thou shalt love thy neighbor, period. Why couldn't he just say love thy neighbor?

[18:29] Good, sure, sure. I'll be nice to them. I'll wave at them. I'll say good morning to them. Why couldn't he just say love thy neighbor?

Be a good guy. Great. But he didn't say that. He didn't say that at all. The qualifier is that you love them to this degree, the way you love you.

You love them as thyself. You're called to love your neighbor to the same degree. This is where the weight of this commandment becomes evident.

It is the most difficult commandment. When have you ever stopped loving yourself? When have you ever stopped giving yourself a pass on things that you should be doing?

Just decided, eh, I just didn't. When have you ever stopped making excuses for yourself? When have you ever not kept something from yourself that you desire?

[19:30] There is nobody on earth that you love more than yourself. There is just something innate, something instinctive inside of you that you're driven to preserve yourself, you're driven to feed yourself, you're driven to gratify yourself and fulfill all those inner desires.

It's self, self, self. Got to look out for numero uno. You might say, well, I love my spouse, I love my wife, I love my husband, I love my children.

If there was a building that was burning, I would rescue them first. I'll show I love somebody more than I love me. Yeah, that sounds good.

And that's probably true in that wild, very isolated, maybe never in a lifetime situation. That might sound good to you, you could say that, but I'm not talking about the burning building.

Because that has nothing to do with tomorrow morning. That has nothing to do with how you're going to interact with people at work tomorrow. How you're going to operate through your day and through your week.

[20:44] Are you going to love your neighbor to the same degree that you love yourself? And are you going to do it tomorrow? Because you love you, and you always will love you.

And if no one on earth loves you, you love you. And God says, well, then you should know exactly how I want you to love your neighbor. you love on the way you love yourself.

There's plenty of folks that say things like, I don't even like people. I was listening to a preacher from Montana this past week, and he made this comment about folks in the Northwest, folks in

Montana.

He talked about the church, and about, he's like, just because there's empty seats doesn't mean we're not full. People just don't like to sit on top of other people. He said, this is Montana. I've never met so many people in my life that say they don't like people.

people just the way they are, just the mindset, and maybe that's here, and maybe that's in you.

That's fine. You might feel that way about strangers, or about obnoxious people. You may feel that way about crowds.

[21 : 44] You just don't like being around people. I get that. But this command doesn't say do you like people. It doesn't say that. It's not even about whether you like people or not. You like yourself.

You care for yourself. You look out for yourself, so you should understand exactly how you are commanded, to treat other people in your life. It is a difficult commandment, but it's a commandment that you can fulfill.

It's the most difficult commandment, because the motivation doesn't match in any way the first, loving God. It doesn't even compare to that.

it's difficult because of the neighbor, who they are, and what they are, and what they look like, and how different we are, and how in some cases they hate me. How am I supposed to love them?

It's difficult because the degree of which this is commanded, to love them like you love yourself. It's hard to meet that with people that you don't even like.

[22 : 44] It's a difficult commandment. But the Bible says, and this is where I want to pivot and start to show you how this is possible. In Galatians chapter 5, the Bible says, but the fruit of the Spirit is love.

That's number one on the list. Whether that's number one, I don't know, but that's number one in that list. The fruit of the Spirit, not the works of the flesh, the fruit of the Spirit.

If you're walking in the Spirit, a fruit that is displayed, that comes out of the branches, is love. And the more you're abiding in the vine, the more you're walking in the Spirit, the more the fruit is showing and being displayed love, love, love is coming out.

This is not a human emotion. This is not a reference to some carnal feeling. This is unconditional, divine, because God is inside of you, working this out of you, love.

It's not after the flesh. It's not dependent upon a response. It's not reciprocal. If you are nice to me, I'll be nice to you. If you love me, I'll love you.

[23 : 54] No, this is something that's inside of the well. It's in there. God's inside of you. When you exercise and allow Him to live, it starts coming out.

This is what it is. It's not dependent upon who the neighbor is. It's not conditioned upon what they do for you. It's about exercising the love of Jesus Christ that is already inside of you.

It's the same love that God manifested when He gave His Son for you. It's the same love that Christ displayed when He laid down His life for you. Turn with me back to the back of your Bible for a point here.

1 John chapter 4. We came here last Sunday. Let's go back. 1 John chapter 4. I want to show you the importance of this and how fulfilling this command is to be accomplished in your life.

It's not something that I'm determined that I'm going to. No, it's allowing God, walking with Him, allowing Him to change you and to allow this fruit to come out of you.

[25 : 06] 1 John 4. Let's read a portion here from 9 to 17. 1 John 5. Beginning in verse 9. In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent His only begotten Son into the world that we might live through Him.

Herein is love, not that we love God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.

No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and His love is perfected in us.

Hereby know we that we dwell in Him and He in us, because He hath given us of His Spirit. And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world.

Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in Him and He in God. And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love.

[26 : 10] And He that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God and God in Him. Herein is our love made perfect. When we dwell in God, God's love dwells in us.

Our love is changed into a divine love, a fruit of the Spirit. Herein is our love made perfect when we walk in the Spirit.

Not when we just love our kids and love our friends that we have connections and relationships with and we see things the same way and we enjoy the same things. That's easy. This isn't who we're called to love.

And the only way you're going to love somebody that doesn't love you back, somebody that you don't agree with, somebody that you don't really naturally care about, is if God changes you from the inside to love them with His love that is dwelling inside of you.

You're going to have to put yourself down. You're going to have to constantly allow the love of God to channel through you to your neighbor.

[27 : 26] that's allowing the Spirit of God to manifest His love to others through you. That's how it's accomplished. Now, keep your place here, but in the text that we read in Mark chapter 12, the Lord answered the question with what is the first commandment.

This is the first commandment. And then he added, the second is like. Namely this, thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. The second is like, meaning it's like the first.

It's very much just like the first. So if it's like the first, then it's got to be of high importance to God.

And it is. If it's like the first, then it's going to deal with a relationship that is displaying love between people, individuals.

To, I won't take you to the places, but just for context sake, to show the importance of this command, it's not just like, oh, that's back in Leviticus and, you know, that's the law.

The Apostle Paul wants to teach the church to love one another. And to do that, he cites and quotes the Scripture and says, thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.

[28 : 49] In Romans chapter 13. In Galatians chapter 5, Paul wants to command and to teach the church to by love serve one another and to do so, guess what he does?

He cites the command, the Scripture, that says, thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. When James comes around talking about the commands, he calls loving your neighbor as yourself, he calls it the royal law.

James chapter 2, the royal law. Name another commandment that gets some kind of nickname like that. This thing is important. It's important to God and it just doesn't get shoved back into the Old Testament.

It's like the first and it has to do with your relationship with God. Watch this. In verse 19, 1 John chapter 4, in verse number 19, we love him because he first loved us.

Now watch this. If a man say, I love God, that's the first command, love the Lord thy God. If a man say that he's obeying the first command and hate his brother, he's a liar.

[30 : 04] What's he lying about? Loving God. Verse 20, If a man say, I love God and hateth his brother, he's a liar. For he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?

This commandment have we from him. He who loveth God, love his brother also. You can't fulfill the first if you're not compliant with the second.

That's why Jesus said, well, here's the first commandment and the second is like. They go together. You don't get to just say, well, I'm going to do the most important one at least, you know, because that's it.

Of course it is. But you're not doing the most important one if you're ignoring the one that goes hand in hand with it. You can't say you love God if you don't love your neighbor as yourself.

You can't say that because he commands it and demands that you do. God has chosen to use you and I as vessels on this earth to display to your neighbor the love that he has.

[31 : 20] He has chosen to use us. This is his choice. This is his way. If you want to ignore that, then you're not fulfilling his will. Man was never intended to live on an island by himself.

God first put man in the garden and then right away said, it is not good that man should be alone. I'm going to make him and help meet for him and then I'm going to make them be fruitful and multiply and this is what I need.

God created marriage. God created family. God created community. God created nations. Man is never meant to isolate. He was never designed to just glorify God as some loner.

Even nature teaches you that the wolves operate in a pack. A lone wolf is of no real value and is going nowhere doing nothing. They operate in a pack.

Insects in a colony. Deer in a herd. Birds in a flock. Man was created with the expectation of social interaction and dependency.

[32 : 34] It's not some modern concept living under the same roof as others. Working together with others. Playing. communicating with others. You've been designed.

God's your creator. He designed us to function together as neighbors. Not all up in each other's business and faces. There are families.

There are neighbors. But God designed us to function together as neighbors. You work with them. You live with them. You cross paths with them. You interact with them.

And you're commanded to love them. Jesus Christ displayed exactly how to do it. Jesus Christ puts that same fruit, that love inside of you.

It's in you. And you can love them because you can show them the love of Christ. In plainer words, God has revealed it to you.

[33 : 33] God has put it in you. And now He commands you to exercise it, to live it. And you're expected to live it. It's difficult, but it's doable through Jesus Christ.

God doesn't command us to hug our neighbor every time we see him. He doesn't even command us to exchange pleasantries every time we see him. Jesus gave us this example.

In closing, understand this. In Luke chapter 10, when the question was, who then is my neighbor? Jesus gave the example. He used a situation where somebody was in great need and He showed, where someone had compassion on them.

They went out of their way to show them love. And so, it's not about hugs and good mornings. It's about being prepared and looking for opportunities to show love to our neighbors.

To be vessels that are sanctified and meet for the Master's use every day of our lives. And to be available and to be willing to love the neighbor when they need it.

[34 : 50] To show them a difference in us than the rest of the world. to show them we're not so caught up on ourselves. We'll gladly spend and be spent to show the love of Jesus Christ to you.

The first command is to love God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind and your strength. The second is like that. But it's to love your neighbor as yourself.

The one's the most important. The other one, I believe, is the most difficult. But it's accomplishable through Jesus Christ. So your duty now is to be aware.

Your duty is to be willing and available when a need presents itself. To be a Christian. To be the Christian in the room that says, I can help you with that.

To have compassion on their situation. Not saying, I told you that was going to happen and you did it anyway. You're getting what you deserve. No, to be, what has God, how has God loved you?

[36 : 00] How do you love yourself? You don't deny yourself. So you don't deny them when you have it to do. Loving your neighbor as yourself.

It's difficult, but it's doable. And it's commanded and expected. And finally, you are all going to give account for your obedience to this very important command.

You're going to give account for it. Were you like that priest or that Levite that just not interested? Not interested. Don't know you. Not going to help.

Because that attitude is frowned upon and is despised and God never treated you that way. So you have an obligation to your neighbor church. You have an opportunity through this love to then perhaps preach the gospel.

Could it be that God could rescue a soul from hell because you were a willing vessel to have compassion on somebody that you don't even like but you were able to show that Jesus Christ died for them too?

[37 : 07] There's the lesson. Father, please take these thoughts and these words. Please help me to look upon my neighbor with compassion and care.

Lord, I'll speak for myself. I love myself. I care more about my flesh. I care more about how I look many times than I care about others.

And it's not right. Lord, change me, change us all. Renew our minds to lining up with your thinking. May we see ourselves as vessels that are placed here to bring glory to you, to not satisfy ourselves but to glorify you.

God, I pray that you'll give each one of us an opportunity to fulfill this command perhaps even sometime this week to go out of our way to show the love of Christ to another.

[38 : 21] And as we do and as we're obedient, may we experience the joy, the joy that Jesus Christ experienced, the joy that was set before Him. May we experience that joy in the Holy Ghost. So help us to submit. Change us, Father, by Your grace. You're a merciful God and You know what we need.

So my prayer is that You'll deal with each man and each woman in the way they need it. I pray You'll give us grace, give us humility, give us love.

may this fruit flow out of us. Oh God, may it flow out of us for Jesus' sake. With your heads bowed, your eyes closed, it's a difficult commandment, but it is doable.

Some of you have a way about you that in your heart, in your spirit, you just don't care about other people. do you see that that's wrong? Do you see that God cared for your soul and He wants to show that to somebody else?

[39 : 42] Would you submit yourself to God in this? If there's been an opportunity that you let go by and He brought it up, maybe you can make good on it today.

Would you pray and allow God to change you where you need to be changed? We're going to sing a hymn of invitation here, give you an opportunity.

If the Lord speak in your heart in any way, do not reject Him. Do not put it off. Respond right now and just talk things over to God.

It's important to Him. Let it be important to you. who who who Thank you.