

# Matthew 22:34-40

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[0:00] Well, good morning everyone, and would you turn with me to Matthew 22. We're going to start in verse 34 and go through verse 40.

So we're in the midst of a series. I should introduce myself. I'm Matt, one of the elders here. And it's my pleasure to be here this morning bringing God's word.

We're in the midst of a series of three attempts from the religious leaders. To challenge Jesus' authority. We've seen the Pharisees, then the Sadducees, and now the Pharisees again, all in chapter 22 of Matthew's gospel.

Let's read our text, Matthew 22, 34. When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law? And he said to them, You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.

[1:07] This is the great and first commandment. And the second is like it. You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets.

Please pray with me, friends. Lord our God. Lord, would you teach us this morning. Lord, teach me. Teach all of us in this room from your word. Lord, your word is our bread. Your word is our nourishment and our life source.

God, we love you. Amen. So laws and rules. Laws and rules. So parents need them. Kids break them. Teenagers despise them. Maybe you've been there. Workplaces require them. Governments create them. Life needs laws and rules.

[2:11] That's what we're going to be talking about today. Tim Keller notes that the Pharisees identified some 613. 613. Distinguishable laws from the Old Testament scriptures that God asked of his people.

And the Pharisees were the best. Am I going in and out here? The Pharisees were the best at abiding by the rules. But they took something that was designed for good and used it in an unhealthy way for their own gain.

They were waist deep in legalism. Refresher. Legalism describes a doctrinal position emphasizing a system of rules and regulations for achieving both salvation and spiritual growth.

So this legalism of the Pharisees led them to really clash with Jesus. Right? Because his ministry was bringing clarity upon which the laws of their life, their moral system and identity were built. He was challenging their authorities as the one who knew most about the law. And he was gaining the affections of the crowds which made them jealous. And in today's interaction, Matthew 22 in our scripture, with the Pharisees, these law motivated leaders ask Jesus, What is the greatest commandment?

[3:32] And Jesus' answer is really good. He gives them what they're looking for, but he also gives them a little more. And I think we could easily kind of breeze by this scripture and not see this.

He goes below the surface showing the reason behind the law by pointing out how the law and love relate.

So what do I mean by this? So what our passage begins to reveal about the law and discussing the great commandment is that genuine God-honoring obedience to the law cannot be accomplished apart from love.

And this idea of love is what we're going to uncover in the text in our time together. So read with me verse 34 through 36 again.

When the Pharisees had heard that he silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. Teacher, what is the great commandment in the law?

[4:41] For much of chapters 21 and 22, Jesus is nose-to-nose with the religious leaders. And his coming to the city of David means he's entered the battleground, right, of this Pharisee versus Sadducee competition for the affections of the crowd.

I can imagine that the Pharisees wouldn't have been very happy, as Dave talked about last week. Jesus has just silenced the Sadducees about the resurrection from the dead.

And so that's Jesus' victory, right? And a victory for Jesus means he's gaining the affections of the crowd, the affections that the Pharisees want. So what do they do?

Well, what do you do when you have a serious problem, right? We've seen the commercials on TV. Call a lawyer. Of course. A lawyer here is a learned theologian and legal expert, not my words, since the law applied to all areas of life, as one commentary puts it.

So the Pharisees, basically, they're getting their best guy to approach Jesus and not to have a friendly discussion, but to test him or trap him in the legal realm. Interestingly enough, their question is actually a really common one.

[5:58] One resource says, Another one says, A poor response from Jesus to their question could have shown his disregard for the law or ignorance, placing his authority far below that of the religious leaders and exposing him for the law or the law or the law or the law or the law or the law.

And the law and fraud that they supposed him to be. Right? So their perfect plan to trap Jesus is in place. They're ready. And so they ask this question. Or maybe it wasn't a perfect plan.

Here's how he responded. 37 and 38. He said to them, You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and all your mind. This is the great and first commandment.

Jesus' response is a quote from Deuteronomy chapter 6 happens to be the first line of what's called the Shema. S-H-E-M-A.

This is new to me. This was a twice daily Jewish prayer that is taken from sections of Deuteronomy and Numbers. And it begins like this.

[7:44] Hear, O Israel, excuse me, The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and with all your might. These words that I command to you today shall be on your heart.

You shall teach them diligently to your children and shall talk of them when you sit in your house. When you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes.

You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. Deuteronomy 6, 4 through 9. Jesus' answer would have sounded familiar, right?

As part of a Jewish routine. And it highlighted the most important part of this daily prayer. Actually, the name of it is Shema Israel, right?

Listen, O Israel, or hear, O Israel. The most important part of this prayer was what he quoted as the greatest commandment. And the prayer was recited so ultimately these people might love God deeply, not simply follow his laws, which was the rest of the mod, much of the Jewish Torah, the first five books, the Old Testament.

[8:59] That's what they go into detail about. So the focus we can see is love the Lord your God. And why does Jesus choose this command? Why not a law about sacrifice as the greatest commandment?

Or worship attire? Or temple worship? His response was so intentional. The greatest commandment is the greatest because it displays what is at the core of obedience to the law.

It declares the importance of the relationship between God's law and love. Although this relationship is inseparable, he noticed that these religious leaders were doing a great job dividing the two in their obeying God's law, dividing the law from love.

And I think that we do the same sometimes. How the law and love relate starts with God's love. The foundation, this is our first of three areas we're gonna look at.

The foundation for the law is God's love. If you have a pen or pencil or smartphone, it's okay to take notes to help you focus if you need to. Foundation for the law is God's love.

[10:09] First, God's love for us gives the law its firm foundation and purpose. How has he shown his love? Well, he chose his people.

We didn't choose him first. He joined himself to them through a covenant and has made himself God and Lord over them out of love.

So covenant people. Genesis 12, one through two, the Lord said to Abraham, go out from your land, your relatives, and your father's house to the land which I will show you.

I will make you into a great nation. I will bless you. I will make your name great and you will be a blessing. Deuteronomy 7, starting in verse 6. For you are people, holy to the Lord your God.

The Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession. Out of all the peoples on the face of the earth, know therefore that the Lord your God is God, the faithful God who keeps his covenant with steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations.

[11:14] Finally, Ephesians 1, 3 and 4. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realm for he chose us in him before the foundation of the world.

How amazing is that? To be holy and blameless in his presence. He chose us. In love he predestined us for adoption as his sons through Jesus Christ according to the good pleasure of his will.

And there are so many good verses like this that talk about this. God choosing his people and find them, read them. They're so encouraging. They will satisfy your soul.

God has loved us by choosing us, his people. And once God chose his covenant people, he dictated a need for law and rules because a holy God demands that his people are righteous in their conduct.

We know this. Leviticus 11, for I am the Lord your God. Consecrate yourselves therefore and be holy for I am holy. Because God chose us and loved us, the law is necessary, right?

[12:25] It sets boundaries and guides God's people towards holy living. So God loves us and what are we to do with this love from God?

God. Well, our love, his love commands us to love him in return so our hearts don't stray. Here is Moses in Deuteronomy 8, the edge of the promised land, giving the law.

Deuteronomy 8, the few verses scattered throughout here. The whole commandment that I command you today you shall be careful to do. Take care lest you forget the Lord your God, not keeping his commandments and his rules and his statutes which I command to you today.

Beware lest you say in your hearts, my power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth. You shall remember the Lord your God for it is he who gives you power to get wealth that he may confirm his covenant that he swore to your fathers.

And then verse 19, if they forget the Lord, their God, they will go after other gods and worship them instead of him. So his command, his love commands our love in return but also, right, and this is so beautiful, God's love for us motivates us to love him.

[13:46] A return of affection and love to the one who loved first. I think it's really hard to not love someone who loves you well, isn't it? I think of someone in your life who really loves you well.

Maybe it's a spouse or family or a parent or a friend. It's hard not to love someone who loves you well. It's hard to ignore someone who loves you well and who loves like the Lord our God.

How can we read about God's love for us in his word and not want to return love for him? So how do we return love for God? Back to our passage of verse 37.

A return of affection with all of our heart, soul, and mind. One commentator says, heart and soul and mind are not mutually exclusive but they're overlapping categories together demanding our love for God to come from our whole person, our every faculty and capacity.

So that means loving God with all that we are and with all that we have. Deuteronomy verse 6, one of the verses says, with all your might. Not the leftovers.

[15:07] Not when we're less busy. Not when we're half asleep. Loving God with all of us means loving him more than our jobs, money, family,

friends, and hobbies.

More than our comforts and desire for sin. Loving God with all our being is loving him far more than anything and anyone else. Wow.

That's the first and great commandment. So I think that when we're not doing this, we've forgotten God's love. We've forgotten that first bullet there.

God's love for us. It's become stale, right? Kind of old. And life has become more about us because there's a lot of pleasures to pursue.

A lot of stuff we need to do. Right? Life becomes about our pleasures not pleasing God. Guilty as charged. So God loves us first and this love is to compel us to return love towards him.

[16:21] And there's more. Jesus says something else after the first and great commandment verse 39. And the second is like it.

You shall love your neighbor as yourself. Must be a typo, huh? Sure. Love your neighbor as yourself.

That's the top two. So God's love for us motivates us and commands us to love him in return but also to love others.

So there it is. Foundation for the law is God's love for us. Our love for God. Our love for others. Jesus quotes Leviticus 19.18 when he says this in verse 39.

That verse says, you shall not take vengeance or bear grudge against the sons of your own people but you shall love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord. Leviticus 19.18 This is what, I found this very helpful.

[17:22] This is what the Zondervan exegetical commentary on the New Testament says. Loving others as yourselves means to have as deep and sacrificial a love for those around you as you have for yourself.

To have as deep and sacrificial a love for those around you as you do for yourself. And this is not a self-disregard or other-centeredness that involves denial of self but rather a consideration and care for others as being part of yourself.

Others have been defined, who are these others, as all people including your enemy, Matthew chapter 5, or anyone in need such as the story of the great Samaritan, Luke chapter 10.

What does a second like it mean? Jesus says there is a second like it. Loving others as yourself is not superior to the first commandment but equal in the sense of its characteristic of love.

Loving others flows from loving God and is part of the DNA of followers of Christ. 1 John 4, 21 says, in this commandment, this commandment we have from him, whoever loves God must also love his brother.

[18:42] Part of the DNA of followers of Christ. To love the Lord your God and love your neighbor as yourself, these two great commandments, we see that they are the foundation of the law, the reason for it.

it's not God giving us a self-help rule book. The foundation for the law is not about earning a right standing before God, is it?

Through our adherence, through legalistic thinking, right, the Pharisee way. But the purpose of the law is best seen through its showing us God's love for us and pointing us towards loving him and loving others.

This is what we've just talked about. So, if the law is foundationally linked to love, we might say then that we are truly obeying the law when and only when our adherence to it shows the fruit of love.

We're only genuinely and truly obeying the law when we see the fruit of love for God and others.

The fruit of the law is our love for God and others.

[19:57] So, how are we doing with this? Is the fruit of love present in your law keeping? It seems to have been missing in the Pharisees.

And so, how do we know if we're holding true to the nature and intent of the two great commandments and the law? I think there's two things we can do.

we can ask ourselves, what is my heart's motive behind keeping the law? Is it to show love to God and others? So, we can ask ourselves that and we can also observe, is my obedience returning love to God and showing love to others?

kind of a litmus test of sorts. So, ultimately, if we're not keeping the law in a way that shows love to God and others, we might be obeying it for our own benefits.

So, we're going to look at the two great commandments and see how we might be failing to keep them with the law and love in mind.

[21:10] So, first, towards God. How might we be failing to keep the law with love in mind in relation to our position before God?

So, how about when my obedience leads me to feel like I've partially earned His grace or my salvation? This is the legalism of the Pharisees.

Right? So, when we don't feel like we really need God that much because we've got it covered, we're not really obeying the law to love Him.

We're doing it to kind of give ourselves some buffer, a grace buffer. When we don't see our need to confess sin and repent because we're doing well, right?

We're obeying the law with our own self in mind. So, that's one way. Here's another one. When through my obedience I enjoy hearing the praise of others, right, this reveals a wrong motive in obeying.

[22:19] And it could happen in areas of Christian disciplines like Bible reading, prayer, fasting, or even evangelism perhaps. Right? When I'm following and obeying God's laws, not to love Him but so that I can enjoy the praise from others.

This could also be true of people in positions of authority in the church, doting leadership skills or techniques to sequester the praise of others. Here's the third way, and I think this one is pretty important.

when we blur the lines of sin and integrity. When we blur the lines of sin and integrity, we could be obeying the law but not out of love towards God.

It's the idea, whether you say it or think it or not, how far can I go without this being too bad, right? Where's the limit?

How far can I bend or blur this line? This is especially true in areas of sin like sexual immorality, pride, our speech, and our thoughts.

[23:41] So that's towards God. How about towards others? When we are attempting to obey the law but we're not acknowledging love towards others.

How about when I put others down to elevate myself or make myself seem more Christian or worthy? So this could be with secular people or Christian people.

It could be with some of the more publicized pastors and Christian folk who have had significant sin occurrences lately. I've seen some of these in the news.

It could be with celebrities or other people and I actually caught myself doing this last week even in preparing for this sermon.

Putting down someone else's lifestyle choices and in doing so, subconsciously elevating my own choices. So I'm elevating how I obey the law and follow the law but I'm not loving someone by putting, by disregarding, and I'm disregarding and putting them down by saying his or her choices are clearly not the best.

[24:55] I'm then putting it back on me. So obeying the law without loving. Right? And I think we do this subconsciously and it's really subtle and very easy to miss.

How about for parents? Disciplining kids not for their benefit but that so we can avoid embarrassment or inconvenience. Oof. Guilty there too.

I mean we're not really focused on loving our kids when we're just trying to avoid things that are bad for us like in the store or at home or late at night or something like that. So a third one for loving others.

When I act in a way that brings inconvenience to or seems to disregard others. this one's convicting me. We can think that we're serving God right?

But if we're only doing a partial job, part of a job, we're actually leaving someone else with something to clean up or finish and that's not showing love to others is it?

[26:04] And we're being obedient to God's law but we're not actually showing love to others. So this is by no means an exhaustive list. This is just some stuff that Jules and I came up with and I would challenge you to look into your own lives.

Please do. And see where you tend to practice a loveless law. A loveless law. Sometimes our efforts to obey the law can be devoid of love and as wicked as times when we disregard the law entirely.

And I think if we're not careful we can obey the law like the Pharisees. Christ says this to them, Matthew 23, 25, Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for you clean the outside of the cup and plate but inside they're full of greed and self-indulgence.

How deceptive, how deceiving is that? I wonder if sometimes we're just like them. We're hypocritical in our religious pursuits when they become about me and don't really have much to do with loving God and loving others at all.

And if we do this we're missing the whole point. Law and love are bound together. And this is pretty sobering and puts us in a pretty challenging spot.

[27:36] And so what do we do about this? Our last verse ushers in an encouragement. Verse 40, read it with me. Matthew 22, verse 40.

On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets. One commentary reads this way.

This is so helpful. This two-fold command, right, love God, and love others, is the peg on which the whole law and the prophets hang.

Remove that peg and all is lost. The entire Old Testament with its commandments and covenants, prophecies and promises, types and testimonies, invitations and exhortation, points to the love of God which demands the answer of love in return.

God's love. But it's hard, isn't it? To love God well and to love others the way Jesus calls us to?

[28:45] It's so difficult. How can we show that fruit of the law in our love? How can I fulfill the law's demands, right?

This was the question the Pharisees were asking Jesus. Jesus? What's the greatest commandment, Jesus? How can we do this better? How? We need to know what's the most important.

The weight of obeying the laws of God's word can be crushing, placing so much pressure on us as we try our hardest to meet all of God's standards.

I don't know if you feel that weight, but praise be to God because the fulfillment of the law is through love himself, Jesus Christ.

The law and the prophets point back to and find their meaning through God's love as creator and covenant-making God, and throughout history, God has pointed forward, setting the stage for the greatest display of love in his sending his son, Jesus, who through love died for the sins of humanity, that we might be reconciled to him.

[30:02] The Old Testament law finds its final and ultimate fulfillment in Christ's love, I think in two ways. First, positionally, out of love, Christ has met the righteous standards that God asks of his people on our behalf.

Our trusting in Christ's sacrifice in our place as the means to meeting God's righteous demands gives us a new standing before him, doesn't it? And relationship with him, too.

Salvation through Christ's love, meeting the law's demands is not my meeting them. It's not legalism. Fulfillment of the laws through love himself, Christ, positionally fulfilling the law.

Before I go on, I wonder, have you embraced that truth today? Have you received Christ as your savior instead of trying to pave your own way to God, like the Pharisees?

Friends, step into freedom. Be reconciled to God today and begin a new life in him. Please come talk to me or someone you've seen up here if you want to make that decision today.

[31:25] Fulfillment of the law through love himself, Christ, positionally and then practically. Christ is our only hope in keeping these two commandments.

I hope we can see this. Christ is our only hope in keeping these commandments. Because you can love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength only when Jesus has given you new life, new intentions, new motives, and desires.

Only someone with new life in Christ can attempt to love God at all. Or even with all or even any of their person. Without Christ, the desire isn't there.

we can love our neighbors as ourselves only after we've seen how much Christ loves us. And his love for us supernaturally empowers us to love and care for those around us as we do ourselves. A concept and an idea that apart from Christ may be exciting for a little while but will fade away through the love of Jesus Christ, the law is fulfilled.

[32:48] So here's what we've seen today in closing. We know that laws are good and God's law is necessary. It was created out of God's love for us to guide and direct our conduct as his chosen people.

But just like the Pharisees, our attempts at keeping the law can be tainted by sin. That is, the heart motive could be for our own selfish gain.

Simply deceiving ourselves in how we see our obedience. Well, how do we know? Like we said, the litmus test for genuine God- honoring obedience is if we're showing the fruit of love, returning love to God and showing love to others, the foundation of the law.

We can ask ourselves, what's my heart's motive in obedience? And then we can observe in our lives, do I see the fruit of love towards God and others?

And we know that the only way that genuine God- honoring obedience is possible is through Christ changing and saving our hearts and then empowering us and motivating us towards living righteous lives that are pleasing to him.

[34:12] By his transforming our heart and our mind with his word, in our hearts daily in relationship with him, we can obey the law and love. So friends, pray to grow in Christlikeness.

You want to keep the greatest commandments? You want to keep God's law? We need to pray to grow in Christlikeness and constantly consider and meditate on the beauty of the gospel and how God has changed our lives forever through Christ's love.

And I truly believe that when Christ is in control of your life, when he is your focal point, when he is your focus, these two greatest commandments, loving God and loving others, will become a natural outflow of your new life in him.

This is ultimately what Jesus wanted the Pharisees to see and what his answer to their question pointed to. And this is what we need to see as well. And I pray that we do see this.

To God be the glory. Pray with me. Lord our God, would you take these hearts, take our hearts, Lord soften them, and Lord please show us what it means to obey the law through love and in love.

[35:59] And Lord show us how these two cannot be pulled apart. Lord may we enjoy and long to follow these two great commandments.

Lord may we recognize that only through Christ Jesus can we do these things. Lord God, work in our hearts and create in us spirits that long to bring you praise and honor and glory for your name's sake.

Amen.