

1. The Pharisees test Jesus by asking what the greatest commandment is.
  - a. I remember as a kid that when I was at my friend's house and I wanted to stay longer than my parent's said I could, I had this clever little scheme I used. I would just tell my parents that they had their clock set different.
  - b. I was in like sixth grade when I thought that this was such a cunning way to get around my parents' rules. In hindsight, it was a scheme that bore all the signs of having been devised by a sixth grader.
  - c. This kind of foolish attempt at pulling something over on my parents bears a striking resemblance to what they Pharisees and Sadducees would try to do to Jesus. They would approach him with what seemed like very cunning little propositions that were intended to trap Jesus.
  - d. Their schemes tended to be so transparent that they did nothing but reveal the hardness of their own hearts.
  - e. There is no better example of this than the question put to Jesus by the Pharisees in today's gospel lesson. They ask Jesus, in an attempt to trap him, what he thought was the most important commandment.
  - f. In their minds there was no clear right answer to this because every single law had to be obeyed. And they had turned the 10 commandments into literally hundreds of laws, many of which carried a death penalty if broken.
  - g. Also consider that it was a lawyer (an expert on Jewish law) who was posing the question. Whatever answer Jesus gave, this lawyer, clearly the intellectual superior of the Son of God, would be ready with an argument to tell him how wrong he was.
2. The Pharisees' question shows that they don't keep the commandments.
  - a. Jesus wasn't afraid of the question, and being the embodiment of the word of God, understood the word better than any religious expert.
  - b. He answered that the greatest commandment is to love God with everything you have. And he said that the close second was to love people the same way. Love God. Love people. All of the commandments boil down to those two rules.
  - c. Jesus boiled the entire law of God down to two simple rules while the Jews had taken the law and made it so complicated that one needed to know the weight of a stone before they knew if they were legally allowed to lift that stone on the Sabbath.
  - d. Jesus' answer wasn't just a slam dunk answer to a question that was meant to lead him into blasphemy; it was a condemnation of the Jewish leaders themselves.
  - e. The Pharisees showed that they didn't love people by the fact that they repeatedly try to test Jesus simply because he challenged their authority. They were willing to tear him down and kill him because he was a threat to their power.
  - f. They showed that they didn't love God in the fact that they didn't even recognize Jesus as being from God, let alone the Son of God. Their attachment to the law in asking these questions wasn't in order that God should be honored. Instead, it

was to prove that Jesus wasn't religious enough. And in the end, they killed him-God in the flesh.

- g. The Jewish leaders believed themselves to be beyond reproach and to be the holiest of holy people. Yet they didn't understand that God's basic expectations of his people were that they love God and love people.
  - h. God didn't care if they lifted a heavy rock on the Sabbath. He cared if he was the most important thing in their lives. And he cared if that love for him was reflected by showing love for the rest of his people.
3. Jesus asked his own question
- a. Jesus followed up their pathetic attempt at trapping him by setting a bit of a trap of his own. He asked a question that would reveal that they didn't even understand their own scriptures.
  - b. He asked, "What do you think of the Messiah? Whose son is he?"
  - c. The Pharisees respond, "The son of David." This was the traditional Jewish understanding of who the Messiah was. And by this they don't mean the son of David, but a direct descendent much farther down the line.
  - d. Jesus said to them, "How is it then that David by the Spirit calls him Lord, saying, 'The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet"'? If David thus calls him Lord, how can he be his son?"
  - e. John 1:1 tells us that Jesus is the eternal Word of God. Can you imagine getting into an argument about scripture with the divine and eternal Word himself? The point of his argument isn't to challenge whether or not the Messiah would come from David's bloodline. He was challenging their understanding of who, or more accurately, what the Messiah would be.
  - f. They believed that the Messiah would be "merely" the son of David. They thought he would be just another guy, only one who would restore Israel. But this isn't what their own scriptures taught. As Jesus challenged them, if the Messiah were merely one of David's human offspring, David would not call him Lord.
  - g. However, if the Messiah were the Son of God who happened to take on human flesh, then even David would recognize his superiority and call him Lord. And this is Jesus' point. The Messiah that the Hebrew Bible prophesied of was a divine Messiah, the Son of God.
  - h. Now Jesus had regularly referred to himself as the Son of God. So what message do you think he is trying to send? "You guys are looking for the wrong thing. You don't even know that the Messiah is so much more than you want him to be. And I, the Son of God, am that Messiah."
  - i. The response of the Pharisees was to leave speechless, incapable of answering him, and to never ask him any more of their petty challenge questions again.
4. We should love God by loving his Son, and love others through his Son.
- a. So what do we do with all of this? First, we have to come to grips with the reality that Jesus is God's Son. His words matter. They carry weight. It is amazing how people will generally agree with the bible until they find a part that they don't like. Then they just ignore that part and move with the rest.
  - b. But Jesus, the Son of God, the Messiah, demands more than that. If the command is to love God with everything we have, then that means committing ourselves to following all that he says, even the stuff we don't like.

- c. If his command is to love our neighbors as ourselves, then we ought to look closely at how we take care of ourselves and ask whether or not we truly love our neighbors in the same way.
- d. Our love for God is expressed through worship, personal sacrifice, a relationship with him, prayer, and through showing love for those around us.
- e. In loving God we not only fulfill our primary purpose in creation, but we reflect his love and goodness to the rest of the world so that others might come to him as well.
- f. We fulfill our duty to love God and love people through the Son of God Jesus Christ. It is through Christ that we express our love. It is in Christ's name that we worship and honor God.
- g. And it is through Christ that we love others. We take the sacrificial example of Christ and put that principle to work in our own lives.
- h. Likewise, we love others in that we point them to Christ so that they can know and love God as well.
- i. Most importantly we must understand that the question asked was about what are the greatest commandments, meaning what is the greatest part of the law. But we are not under the law. Jesus, the son of David and Son of God has fulfilled all the law on our behalf. By grace through faith in him we are found without guilt. In Christ we have fulfilled the law- all of the commandments, because he kept them on our behalf.
- j. So we have to be careful not to set up a series of rules and hoops that we feel we or others need to jump through. Christ is the key, but our relationship with Christ is expressed in how faithful we are to the two great commandments. So go forth into the world, loving God and all of his people in Christ.