

44. Jesus Answered One of the Scribes

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to explain the fact of the eternal existence of Jesus. We also want to help our children understand that the religious leaders tried to trap Jesus in many different ways. In our topic today, we are going to see that Jesus answered one of the scribes.

One of the scribes had heard the Sadducees reasoning together as they tried to trap Jesus with their question about the resurrection. The scribe realized that Jesus had given the Sadducees a good answer. As a result, the scribe then asked Jesus a question and heard His answer. Mark 12:28-31 says, “Then one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, perceiving that He had answered them well, asked Him, ‘Which is the first commandment of all?’ Jesus answered him, ‘The first of all the commandments *is*: ‘Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one. And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ This *is* the first commandment. And the second, like *it*, *is* this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.” We will see how Jesus answered the question of the scribe.

The Pharisees said there were six hundred and thirteen laws in the Old Testament. As a result, the question the scribe asked Jesus was what Jesus thought was the most important of all of the commandments. Jesus answered this question by quoting from the Scriptures. Deuteronomy 6:4-5 says, “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.” Then, Leviticus 19:18 says, “You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I *am* the LORD.” Here, we see that Jesus answered the question of the scribe by combining the statements of both of these verses and pointed out the fact that the second is like the first. Jesus summarized the commandments of the entire Old Testament by quoting from these two verses.

First, the quotation of Deuteronomy 6:4-5 recognizes that the Lord is one. The word used for “one” in this verse means *there is unity*. It is the same word that is used in Genesis 2:24, where we read: “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.” In this verse, it was used to speak of the unity of a husband and wife. In Deuteronomy, it speaks of the unity of the Godhead (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) as one God. This unity is illustrated in Genesis 1:26, where we read: “Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.’”

Second, Deuteronomy 6:4-5 recognizes that we are to love the Lord with our whole heart, soul, and strength. The heart is the inner man or the spirit. Another form of this word is used in both Genesis 6:5 and Jeremiah 17:9. Genesis 6:5 says, “Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man *was* great in the earth, and *that* every intent of the thoughts of his heart *was* only evil continually.” Then, Jeremiah 17:9 says, “The heart *is* deceitful above all *things*, and desperately

wicked; who can know it?” At the moment of salvation, the Holy Spirit comes into our lives. Romans 8:16 says, “The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.” This means that the Holy Spirit has come into our human spirit, and we have a family relationship to the Lord.

Third, we see that we are to love the Lord with our whole soul. Hebrews 4:12 says, “For the word of God *is* living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.” The word translated “soul or life” means *the inner self*. Vine’s Expository Dictionary says, “Generally speaking the spirit is the higher, the soul the lower element. The spirit may be recognized as the life principle bestowed on man by God, the soul as the resulting life constituted in the individual, the body being the material organism animated by soul and spirit.” Simply put, the soul is the mind, emotions, and will. In contrast, Romans 1:19-23 shows that the spirit is natural light, conscience, wisdom, sensitivity, and creativity. An animal can have a soul but cannot have a spirit, which makes it impossible for an animal to relate to God. As a result, we are to love the Lord with our whole mind, emotions, and will. Then, we are to love the Lord with our whole strength.

Jesus went on to say that the second commandment is like the first by quoting from Leviticus 19:18. This shows that the second most important commandment in the Old Testament is to love our neighbor as we love ourselves. These two commandments actually summarize the entire Old Testament. In the parable of the Good Samaritan, in Luke 10:29-37, Jesus showed that our neighbor is any person. If we love God with our whole heart, soul, and strength, and we love our neighbor as we love ourselves, those two commandments summarize the entire Old Testament.

We read the response of the scribe in Mark 12:32-33, which says: “So the scribe said to Him, “Well *said*, Teacher. You have spoken the truth, for there is one God, and there is no other but He. And to love Him with all the heart, with all the understanding, with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love one’s neighbor as oneself, is more than all the whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.” The answer of this particular scribe showed that he had a very different attitude from many of the scribes. He understood that godly inner attitudes were more important than sacrifices. Samuel had told Saul this same thing in 1 Samuel 15:22, where we read: “So Samuel said: ‘Has the LORD *as great* delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, *and* to heed than the fat of rams.’” This scribe understood something Saul was not able to understand.

That is why the scribe told Jesus that Jesus had spoken the truth. The scribe recognized that there is only One God. He said that there are no other gods. 1 Corinthians 8:5-6 says, “For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as there are many gods and many lords), yet for us *there* is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom *are* all things, and through whom we *live*.” Here, we see that the scribe had understanding, as well as knowledge. Most of the Jews could quote many passages from the Old Testament. However, many of the people had no understanding of the spiritual truth that came from those verses.

That is why the statement of the scribe is so important. The scribe recognized that people were to love God with their whole heart, soul, and strength. However, He also added one additional word. The scribe said that it was important to love God with their whole understanding. That shows a key lesson about this particular scribe. 2 Timothy 2:7 says, “Consider what I say, and may the Lord give you understanding in all things.” This scribe realized the need for the understanding that can only come from the Lord. Paul prayed that the Christians in the city of Colosse would let God fill them with spiritual understanding. Colossians 1:9 says, “For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding.”

The scribe also recognized that loving God, and loving one’s neighbor as one’s self, was more important than any number of whole burnt offerings and sacrifices. A whole burnt offering was when the entire sacrifice was burned. The writer of Hebrews explained, in Hebrews 10:6-8, “‘In burnt offerings and *sacrifices* for sin You had no pleasure. Then I said, “Behold, I have come—in the volume of the book it is written of Me—to do Your will, O God.”’ Previously saying, ‘Sacrifice and offering, burnt offerings, and offerings for sin You did not desire, nor had pleasure in them’ (which are offered according to the law).” One thing this scribe did not yet realize was that Jesus would soon fulfill the whole law by His own death and resurrection. Jesus had said in the Sermon on the Mount, recorded in Matthew 5:17, “Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill.”

Jesus publicly recognized the wise answer of the scribe, in Mark 12:34. “Now when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, He said to him, ‘You are not far from the kingdom of God.’ But after that no one dared question Him.” Jesus showed that He recognized the wisdom of this scribe and told him that he was not far from the kingdom of God. Jesus recognized that this man was searching for truth, although he may not have recognized that himself. Jesus said to Nicodemus, in John 3:20-21, “For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God.” That man would soon have an opportunity to make a choice. He would have to choose whether to avoid the light, or come to the One who is the Light.

We also see that no one dared to ask any more questions after the question from this scribe. At this point, the enemies of Jesus had all been silenced by His answers to the various questions they had asked Him, because they could not disagree with His answers. Christ gives us an example of the importance of answering questions from the Word of God, instead of our own opinions. We want to show our physical and spiritual children the importance of answering the questions of others from the Word of God because such answers can be used by the Lord to draw people to Jesus. May the Lord richly bless you as you show your children how to answer questions with the Word of God.