

The Lord Asks and Answers the Question of the Scribes and Pharisees

Mark 12:28-37

Mark 12:28-37 – *“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?”²⁹ Jesus answered him, “The first of all the commandments is: ‘Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.³⁰ 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.³¹ And the second, like it, is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”*

³² 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.³³ 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.”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.

³⁵ Then Jesus answered and said, while He taught in the temple, “How is it that the scribes say that the Christ is the Son of David?³⁶ For David himself said by the Holy Spirit:

‘The Lord said to my Lord,

“Sit at My right hand

Until I make Your enemies Your footstool.”

³⁷ Therefore David himself calls Him ‘Lord’; how is He then his Son?” And the common people heard Him gladly.”

Background Notes

Earlier in Mark 12 we saw that the Jewish leaders were trying as best they could to find a way to discredit the Lord before the people, and to get Him arrested by the Roman authorities. They sent a delegation of Pharisees and Herodians to question Him about paying taxes to Rome, but they failed in their attempt to trap the Lord. And then a group of Sadducees came to Him to ask Him about the resurrection, using a hypothetical situation about the law of Levirate marriage. They, too, failed in their attempt to discredit the Lord.

In verse 28 a scribe came to the Lord, and he asked the Lord a question about the Law. The scribes were the lawyers of that day. They were the official copiers and interpreters of the Scriptures, including the Law, so they were the lawyers of the day. From what we read here in Mark, it seems that this particular scribe had no ulterior motive when he came to the Lord. It sounds like he was a sincere seeker. However, Matthew’s account says that this scribe was also testing the Lord (Matthew 22:34-36). Having said that, however, I think that his attitude changed during the course of his conversation with the Lord, because the Lord’s answers are so perfect. The scribe seemed to change, and he no longer had a challenging attitude.

When the scribe asked, “*What is the first commandment?*” - what was He asking? Basically, he was asking, “What’s the bottom line of the Law?” What’s the most important regulation in all of the Law? At this point in Judaism, the Rabbis had divided the Law up into 613 precepts (and they are still the view in Judaism today). So the scribe was asking the Lord’s opinion. How would the Lord answer the question about which one is the foremost of all the commandments?” What’s the bottom line? What’s first, in the sense of importance?

The Lord answered by summing up the Law in just two commandments, taken from Deuteronomy 6 and Leviticus 19:18. Verse 30: “*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.*” That’s from Deuteronomy 6:4-5. Verse 31: “*And the second, like it, is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’*” That’s from Leviticus 19:18. “*There is no other commandment greater than these.*” So the Lord summed up the entire Law with these two commandments. **All** of the Law comes under these two great commandments - not only the Ten Commandments, but also the 613 precepts! If you keep these two commandments you will automatically keep all of the precepts.

When the Lord quoted Deuteronomy 6:4-5, He was quoting what’s known as the Jewish “*Shema*”: “*Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one.*” This is Judaism’s basic creed, even to this day. The word *shema* comes from the Hebrew word for “hear,” which is the first word of the *Shema*: “Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one.” Not only do orthodox Jews repeat the Shema twice a day, even to this day, but they also put the *Shema* in their phylacteries and their *mezuzahs*.

What’s a phylactery, and what’s a *mezuzah*? Maybe you saw the TV coverage when an important Jewish religious leader, Rabbi Schneerson, died last month. The ultra-orthodox Jewish men strapped small hard leather boxes on their foreheads and on their forearms before praying. Those are phylacteries. The small leather boxes contain the *Shema* written on parchment. And the *mezuzah*: if you go to an orthodox Jewish home (or even hotel) today, you’ll see a small decorative box mounted on the side of the door. The little box is called a *mezuzah*, and inside it is the *Shema* on a tiny piece of parchment. Observant Jews will touch this little box, then touch their finger to their lips as they enter or leave the doorway. This ritual is to show respect for and observance of God’s Word.

After the Lord answered the scribe by summing up the Law in two commandments, verse 34 says that “*after that no one dared question him.*” All mouths were closed! The Lord had wisely and perfectly answered all the questions of the opposition.

In verses 35-37 the Lord asked **them** a question. The question was essentially as follows: If the Messiah is predicted to be the Son of David, which you scribes and Pharisees all admit, then why does David refer to the Messiah as “my Lord” in Psalm 110? Well, the scribes and Pharisees had no answer. The common people knew that the proud scribes and Pharisees had been stumped - and they loved it! “*The common people heard Him gladly.*” They may not have understood all that the Lord was saying here, but they loved listening to Him, and they loved to see Him put the proud and self-righteous religious leaders in their place!

Doctrinal Points

1. The Word of God is both human and divine.

In verse 36, notice the way the Lord referred to the authorship of Psalm 110: *“For David himself said by the Holy Spirit: ‘The LORD said to my Lord, “Sit at My right hand, till I make your enemies Your footstool.”’”* **David said ‘by the Holy Spirit’** - that is, David wrote this Psalm, but the Holy Spirit inspired his writing. Thus the Holy Spirit of God is the Author of this Psalm.

And that’s what we mean by the inspiration of Scripture. There is a human author to every book of the Bible, but the human writers and their writings were controlled or superintended by God. So in essence God wrote every book of the Bible. 2 Peter 1:21 says, in reference to the writers of Scripture, *“Holy men spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.”* So when a question of the inspiration of Scripture comes up, you certainly want to bring up Mark 12:36. This was **our Lord’s view of inspiration**. David wrote Psalm 110, but he wrote it as he was inspired by the Holy Spirit.

The Word of God is **both human and divine**. There’s no other book on the face of the earth, throughout human history, that can make such a claim. The Word of God is both human and divine.

2. The Son of God is both human and divine.

This truth is taught in this passage as well. In fact, that was the essential point that our Lord was making with the scribes and Pharisees. They all agreed that the Messiah would be a descendant of David, but our Lord’s point was that He must be **more** than a human descendant of David. After all, in Psalm 110, written by David, when God the Father spoke to God the Son about sitting at His right hand until the enemies would be made His footstool, David referred to the Son, or the Messiah, as **my Lord**. But (asked the Lord), how could the Messiah be David’s “Lord” if He was only a human descendant of David? The Lord’s point was that He **could not** be only a human descendant - even a perfect human descendant. He had to be God as well as human!

That was the answer to the question about the Christ, or the Messiah, that the Lord asked the religious leaders. As David’s **son** He would be **human**. As David’s **Lord**, He would be **divine**. The Son of God is both human and divine. Jesus is 100% God – 100% man.

Now notice the tense of the verb in our doctrinal point. The Son of God **IS**, not **WAS**, both human and divine. When the eternal Son of God took on humanity at the incarnation, He took on humanity forever! We will see Jesus someday. The Son of God is both human and divine.

Practical Application

Commitment is *more than belief!*

In verse 28 the scribe started out testing the Lord. However, after the Lord gave him the perfect answer by summing up the Law in the two great commandments, it appears that the scribe changed his attitude. He agreed with the Lord. In fact, the scribe commended the Lord's answer when he rightly said, *"to love [God] 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 scribe who started out as a skeptic, testing the Lord, now gave an answer that any evangelical would be proud to give. He properly understood, in the words of 1 Samuel 15:22, that *"to obey is better than sacrifice."* He properly understood that it was not of works. We cannot earn a relationship with God merely by doing religious works, because God looks at the heart and not at the ritual. Remember, this conversation was taking place in the Temple courts where they would have been surrounded by the rituals (the religious works) of the offerings and the sacrifices (v35).

When our Lord saw that the scribe had answered wisely, He said to him, *"You are not far from the kingdom of God."* Not far? Why not *in*? What more was needed? He needed to commit his life to Jesus Christ as personal Savior.

Commitment is more than belief! His theology was right. His belief about the Law was right. But commitment is *more* than belief.

Is it possible that you believe the right thing, and your theology is correct, but you're not yet a Christian? You still haven't taken the step of committing your life to Jesus Christ as your personal Savior? Commitment is more than belief. Suppose you were on a sinking ship, and it was only a matter of time before you'd perish. But the lifeboats were available, and they are the way to escape death – but you've got to ***get into the lifeboat!*** You've got to ***commit*** yourself to the lifeboat. You could have all kinds of correct beliefs - believing correctly that the ship was sinking, and believing correctly that the lifeboat provided a way of escape - but until you make that commitment and get yourself ***into*** the lifeboat, you're doomed.

Commitment is *more than belief.*