

The Lord Is Asked About The Greatest Commandment

Matthew 22:34-46

Matthew 22:34-46 - *“But when the Pharisees heard that He had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. ³⁵ Then one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, and saying, ³⁶ “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?” ³⁷ Jesus said to him, “ ‘You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ ³⁸ This is the first and great commandment. ³⁹ And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ ⁴⁰ On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.”*

⁴¹ While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, ⁴² saying, “What do you think about the Christ? Whose Son is He?” They said to Him, “ The Son of David.”

⁴³ He said to them, “How then does David in the Spirit call Him ‘Lord,’ saying: ⁴⁴ ‘ The LORD said to my Lord, “ Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool”’? ⁴⁵ If David then calls Him ‘Lord,’ how is He his Son?” ⁴⁶ And no one was able to answer Him a word, nor from that day on did anyone dare question Him anymore.”

Background Notes

“When the Pharisees heard that He had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together” (v34). The Pharisees and Sadducees disagreed strongly about miracles, the resurrection of the dead, and life after death. The Pharisees were orthodox in their belief of these biblical truths, but the Sadducees didn't believe in any of these things. They were the “theological liberals” of the day.

Since we're using the term “theological liberals,” let's talk about that term before we get to the Pharisees' question. We're not talking about political liberals, but about **theological** liberals. Theological liberals of our day constantly question the veracity or reliability of Scripture. For example, they say that the miracles of Jesus never took place. Why? Because they don't believe in miracles! In their mindset, miracles don't happen! They believe that the miracles of Jesus recorded in the Gospels are just stories that were created by the early Church, because the early Christians wanted to make Jesus out to be divine when He was really only a good man. That's the position of most theological liberals today.

Theological liberals don't only question the miracles of Jesus - they question His words as well. They say that a lot of what we read in Matthew about our Lord's encounters with the scribes and Pharisees and Sadducees didn't actually happen. They would say that the early Christians made up the brilliant arguments that Jesus used, and inserted them into the record - as if Jesus had really said them!

It's very interesting that the liberal "Four color, Five gospels" book (published a few years ago by a group of liberal scholars) actually credits Jesus with saying, "*Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.*" Why? Because the liberal "scholars" who published this book concluded that such an answer was too brilliant for any of the early Christians to make up - so Jesus must have actually said it! Can you believe it? That's the mind of the liberal skeptic!

Well, we believe that all that everything in the inspired record is **exactly what Jesus said and did**. His recorded words and deeds are not the product of the imagination or the theological agenda of the early Christians. Jesus really said these things, and He really did these things.

In Matthew 22 the Lord conclusively showed the Sadducees from Scripture that death is not the end. There is life after death. You might have thought that the Pharisees would have been glad to see the Lord put down their archrivals, the Sadducees. You might have thought that they would even have congratulated the Lord! But no - their hatred and opposition to the Lord was even greater than their dislike of the Sadducees. So they tried to trap the Lord with a test question.

Doctrinal Points

1. The Pharisees questioned the Lord about the Law.

The Pharisees used one of their lawyers to question Jesus (v35). He was probably the sharpest lawyer they had. This lawyer would have been a scribe, because Jewish law was directly related to Scripture. The scribes, who were involved in making copies of the Scriptures, became the lawyers and the official interpreters of Scripture.

The lawyer asked Jesus, "Which is the greatest commandment?" He was not just thinking of the Ten Commandments. He was thinking of the entire Mosaic Law, which had over six hundred laws (according to Judaism's count). The Pharisees were constantly debating among themselves about which were the most important laws. When the Lord answered the lawyer's question, He summarized the whole Law by quoting two references from the Old Testament – Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18. "*Jesus said to him, " 'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets*" (v37-40).

Notice that all the demands of the Old Testament Law are summed up under "**love**" - love for God (that's the vertical), and love for your fellow man (that's the horizontal). If the Pharisees (or anyone today) showed this kind of love, love for God and love for our fellow man, then all the other moral laws of God would automatically be kept! The Lord summed up all the Old Testament laws by these two: love for God, love for fellow man.

Of course, no one can show this kind of love in his or her own strength, and apart from new life in Christ. This fact should have driven the self-righteous scribes and Pharisees to admit that they were helpless to truly keep God's Law, and that they needed the new life that Christ was teaching and offering to them. Remember the Lord had told Nicodemus (a Pharisee), that you must be "born again" in order to enter the Kingdom of God. But the proud Pharisees who confronted Jesus would not admit that they needed salvation.

From the parallel account in the Gospel of Mark we learn that understanding of the lawyer questioning Jesus was "a cut above" the rest of them. At least he was on the right track. *"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.'* 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" (Mark 12:32-34). So at least this lawyer/scribe was sincere. He was a cut above the rest of the Pharisees in his understanding of God's Law.

I trust that there are no "Pharisees" hearing this Talk from Matthew. Questions about God's laws should lead you to acknowledge that you can't please God in your own strength, and that salvation is found only in receiving Christ as your Savior.

2. The Lord questioned the Pharisees about His deity.

Verses 41-46: 41 – *"While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, ⁴² saying, "What do you think about the Christ? Whose Son is He?" They said to Him, "The Son of David."⁴³ He said to them, "How then does David in the Spirit call Him 'Lord,' saying: ⁴⁴ 'The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool" '?" ⁴⁵ If David then calls Him 'Lord,' how is He his Son?" ⁴⁶ And no one was able to answer Him a word, nor from that day on did anyone dare question Him anymore."*

In verse 44, the Lord quoted from Psalm 110: *"The LORD said to my Lord, "Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool"?"* Psalm 110 is a Messianic Psalm, written by King David, and it's all about the coming Messiah. It's one of the Psalms that is quoted most often in the New Testament. In this Psalm, the Lord God refers to the Messiah as "coming King," as "Priest," and as "victorious warrior." It's a wonderful Psalm! In His question to the Pharisees, the Lord directed them to the first verse of Psalm 110 - and then asked the question: *"If David then calls Him 'Lord,' how is He his Son?" ⁴⁶ And no one was able to answer Him a word, nor from that day on did anyone dare question Him anymore."*

Do you see the point of that question? The Pharisees acknowledged that prophetic Scriptures indicate the Messiah would be a descendant of David. *"What do you think about the Christ? Whose Son is He?" They said to Him, "The Son of David" (v42).* The Pharisees certainly acknowledged that the Messiah would be a descendant of David.

They also acknowledged that Psalm 110 was Messianic - that it prophesied about the coming Messiah. And they acknowledged that David wrote the Psalm. So our Lord said, "Why did David refer to the coming Messiah, his own descendant, as '**my Lord**'?" That's the question - and there's only one answer! The Messiah must be God as well as Man! That was our Lord's point. **As God, He is David's Lord. As Man, He is David's Son.** What a wonderful text, that shows both the deity and humanity of our Lord!

The Pharisees were stumped, but they refused to acknowledge that the One standing before them was the Son of David and the Son of God. *"No one was able to answer Him a word, nor from that day on did anyone dare question Him anymore."*

Practical Application

Lead your friends to The Big Question!

When your non-Christian friends at work or in the neighborhood find out that you're a Christian, they may ask you questions. Some of them may be sincere seekers, but other may be trying to trap you, just as the Pharisees tried to trap the Lord. In either case, we should try to give them appropriate answers.

Isn't it interesting how the Lord answered the critics and skeptics who were trying to trap Him? Sometimes the Lord didn't answer at all – such as with Herod or Pilate. But the Lord usually answered when anyone came to Him with questions - even though He knew they were trying to trap Him!

The Lord answered them, and I think that we should try to follow His example. So whether people ask sincere questions - or even if they're trying to trap us! - we should give them appropriate answers. But we should always try to lead them to the "big question," as our Lord did with the Pharisees in verses 41-46.

What is The Big Question? The biggest and most critical question is: **Is Jesus God?** Is Jesus who He claimed to be?

In this passage and in many other passages, Jesus claimed to be God, and the only means of salvation. If Jesus is who He claimed to be, then all other questions about the Bible, religion, the future, ethics, miracles, etc., are all only secondary to **The Big Question!** So answer your friends' questions, but **lead them to The Big Question**, as Jesus did. Lead your friends to The Big Question!