

# Connect 360: The Greatest Commandment

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- *Lesson 12 in the BaptistWay Press Connect 360 unit "Pillars" focuses on Matthew 22:37-39.*

In Matthew 22:15-33, the Pharisees plotted together to trap Jesus. Jesus saw through their malice and called them hypocrites. After he answered wisely, they were amazed and went away. Then the Pharisees came back a second time to take a crack at tripping up Jesus, who gives his response to them in our focal passage.

This Scripture is known as the Greatest Commandment: "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'"

In stating that the most important law was to love God with one's total being and to love others as oneself, Jesus was not teaching that the other laws were no longer valid. Instead, he showed the only way to give allegiance, honor and service to God is to experience God's love.

## Called to a right relationship

The Pharisees and the Sadducees appeared content to know God with their minds but not their hearts. Religion for them was about right theology, not right relationship. Once again, they settled for religious practices, instead of knowing God. We, too, are tempted to settle for either a faith that knows or a faith that feels. Jesus calls us to a higher love.

Each of us must love God with all our heart, soul and mind. These are not exclusive categories but overlapping expressions of loving God with our total being. What we believe is foundational. Trusting in what is not true is fatal. The post-truth culture implies that each of us is entitled to an individual version of truth. However, God is who he is. Our selfish desires and personal imaginations do not change God's nature. All of creation is made by God, through God, and for God. This is not a human-centered world, but a God-centered universe. We must not allow our culture to define Scripture. Instead, we must pray that God will work through his word to shape culture.

Jews drew distinctions among the laws, giving greater weight to some. We also face the temptation of settling for religious arguments and theological nuances, preferring to engage in biblical debate rather than biblical mandates. While the Sadducees and the Pharisees fought over controversial interpretations of Scripture, Jesus loved God by loving and serving others. Jesus healed the sick, blessed sinners, and showed outcasts compassion. The love of God and love for people are intertwined; you cannot have one without the other.

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