

The Royal Law in the Incarnation: A Lawyer Tests the Messiah on the Greatest Commandment; the Lord Summarizes the Decalogue: Personal Love & Royal Law, Matt 22:35-39

III. The Royal Law in the Incarnation:

1. The Lord classified the royal law as the second most important commandment. He does this in Matthew 22 in response to a question raised by one of the most brilliant and esteemed theologians of the day.
2. This man is characterized as a lawyer – **νομικός, *nomikos***, an expert in the Mosaic Law and in jurisprudence related to the Law. These individuals were very closely associated with the Pharisees and this man was most likely a Pharisee.

NOTE: A synonym for *nomikos* is **γραμματεὺς, *grammateus***, which is often translated “scribe” in the New Testament. For example, in the parallel passage in Mark 12 the *nomikos* “lawyer” of Matthew 22:35 is the *grammateus* “scribe” in verse 28 (NASB; KJV).

Since all details of Jewish life were expected to be regulated by the law, and since it was impossible for an ordinary Jew to know the multitude of mandates and requirements, it was absolutely necessary for some men to devote themselves to the study of the law.

Among the leading duties of the lawyers were to study, interpret, and expound on the law; to teach the law in the schools and synagogues; to decide questions of the law; to act as judges and to act as judges.

3. Apparently one of the hot theological topics at the time was which of the commandments was the greatest and so this question is posed to the Lord in:

Matthew 22:35 - One of them [a Pharisee], a lawyer, asked [ἐπερωτάω, *eperōtaō*: the controlling verb] Him [Jesus] a question, testing [πειπάζω, *peipazō*] Him,

4. The word “testing” – *peipazō* – is present active participle. This participle is classified as “telic,” meaning that it indicates the purpose of the action of the controlling verb, *eperōtaō*, “to ask.”
5. The Pharisees were suspicious of Jesus. They did not believe His assertions of Messiahship and had repeatedly sought to stump Him by asking supposedly trick questions.
6. For example, earlier in Matthew 22:17, they asked the question, “Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not?” Jesus’ answer in verse 21 caused them to leave Him alone, at least for a few verses: “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s; and to God the things that are God’s.”
7. In verse 35 the purpose of the question about the greatest commandment is designed to trick the Lord into giving an answer that would brand Him a heretic.

Matthew 22:36 - “Teacher [διδάσκαλος, *didaskalos*], which commandment in the Law is the greatest?”

8. Note that the Lord is addresses as “Teacher.” This is equivalent to calling him “Professor,” which is intended as a put-down. The lawyer was considered to be the expert in the Law and he did not anticipate the Lord to teaching him anything.
9. Referring to the Lord as “Teacher,” was not only an insult but it also indicated either a failure to recognize His deity or betrayed ignorance of it.
10. No matter which of the Ten Commandments the Lord cites as the greatest, the lawyer will be able to refute it. His is trained and experienced in cross-examination and debate. He can easily pick apart any one of the ten that the Lord might select.
11. The Lord’s response is, as usual, ingenious. What he does is summarize the Ten Commandments in two concise statements, the first in:

Matthew 22:37 - Jesus immediately said to him, [Deuteronomy 6:5] “Love [ἀγαπάω, *agapaō*] the Lord your God with all your heart [καρδία, *kardia*], with your entire soul [ὅλος ψυχή, *holos psuchē*], and with your entire mind [ὅλος διάνοια, *dianoia*].”

12. The verb *agapaō* is an imperatival future active indicative. It takes on the force of an imperative since the future tense indicates that the lawyer does not presently have the capacity to love God since he is an unbeliever but may do so should be believe that the “Teacher” is in reality the “Messiah.”
13. This love must become a part of the lawyer’s thought process. The *kardia* is the place where doctrine is stored in the stream of consciousness as *epignōsis* understanding of who Christ is and from which the capacity to respond to Him with personal love instead of trickery would occur.
14. *Holos psuchē* refers to the entire soul which contains one’s self-consciousness, mentality, volition, and conscience.
15. Self-consciousness is man’s ability to be aware of his own existence and that his actions originate from his own thought process.
16. The mentality of the soul is made up of both the left lobe – the **νοῦς, nous** – were receptive comprehension takes place, and the right lobe – the *kardia* – where perceptive comprehension takes place.
17. Volition is the attribute that enables man to make decisions and thus the freedom to make good or bad choices but nevertheless to do so independently of any other individual. Each of us is responsible for our own decisions. It is through making correct choices that man is saved, learns doctrines, and in doing so contributes to the resolution of the Angelic Conflict.

18. Conscience is the attribute by which one distinguishes between right and wrong, soliciting the individual to make decisions based on what is good, right, and true and restrains him from making decisions that are bad, wrong, or false. In the conscience of the believer, all priorities must be developed from Bible doctrine stored in the norms and standards of the *kardia's* stream of consciousness.
19. Love for God must therefore be developed in the soul of a believer through the consistent intake of His Word. This cultivates one's knowledge, appreciation, reverence, and respect for Him which is manifested by reciprocal love.
20. Therefore, the greatest commandment is to love God personally. Personal love can only be virtuous when it is directed toward a perfect object. Since God is perfect then our reciprocal love must be directed toward Him personally.
21. This love is virtuous because of the integrity of the object. It would be blasphemous to love God unconditionally for this assumes that on occasion God would fail forcing us to maintain our relationship with Him based on our own integrity.
22. The Lord specifies personal love for God as the greatest commandment in:

Matthew 22:38 - "This is the first and greatest commandment."

23. This is a summary statement of the first four commandments cited in Exodus 20:3-11, so the greatest commandment is that referenced by Moses in his commencement address to the Second Generation in Deuteronomy 6:5.
24. The second summary statement by the Lord concerns our relationship with others:

Matthew 22:39 - "The second is like it: [**Leviticus 19:18**] 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"

25. This commandment follows the one that demands personal love for God. Therefore, problem-solving device number 7 precedes problem-solving device number 8.
26. Virtue love for others is the opposite of that directed toward God. Love for others must be unconditional since no one is perfect and thus unqualified to be the object of personal love.
27. This is not to say that you cannot love others personally, it's just that such an attitude has no virtue. People fail and when they do the relationship must be maintained by the integrity of the subject.
28. Therefore, unconditional love is virtuous since it depends on the subject being able to manage the failures of others without getting involved in sin – mental-attitude, verbal, or overt.