



Scotts Hill Baptist Church

THE MAIN THING • LOVE GOD • MATTHEW 22:34-38 •

MAIN POINT

The summation of all God's commands, and the greatest fulfillment of mankind, is wound up in loving God.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

What were some of the rules in place in the home you grew up in?

If you had to sum up all those commands in one sentence, what would it be?

All of us, whether we are Christians or not, have certain rules for life. As Christians, though, we believe God's commands are more than just rules or advice; they are the binding laws of the universe. What's more, we believe that because He loves us, these commands are actually for our good. The summation of all God's commands, and the greatest fulfillment of mankind, is wound up in loving God with our whole selves.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

In Matthew 22, the Pharisees approached Jesus with a question meant to test and trap Him. In His response Jesus gave us what is known as the Great Commandment, the teaching that summarizes all of Jesus' instruction.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ MATTHEW 22:34-36.

What do you know about the laws of the Old Testament? Does anyone know how many there are?

How do you think the expert in the Law expected Jesus to respond to his question?

Do you ever try to put Jesus to the test? Why? In what ways?

After the Sadducees had failed to trap Jesus with a question about the resurrection (Matt. 22:23-33), the Pharisees took their shot. The expert in the Law asked Jesus which command in the Law is the greatest. The Pharisees expected Jesus to fold under the weight of all the commands in the Law, all 613 of them. Sometimes we also doubt and want to test Jesus to see that He is who He says He is. Instead of buckling under the pressure, Jesus responded immediately by identifying the most important law.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ MATTHEW 22:36-38.

Does it surprise you that loving God is something Jesus had to command? Why or why not?

Jesus identified the greatest commandment as loving God with all your heart, soul, and mind. Part of His answer comes from the passage in Deuteronomy known as the Shema, which means “hear” or “listen” (see Deut. 6:4-9). These verses served as part of a general confession of faith offered by devout Jewish males every morning and evening.

Read Deuteronomy 6:4-5, the Old Testament passage Jesus took His greatest command from. Why do you think Moses reminded the people that God is One, before instructing them to love Him?

“The Lord is One.” This means that God has no rival, no substitute, no peers. The only appropriate response to God’s revelation of Himself is total devotion. It is not enough to know there is only one God. Instead, this is a foundational truth we must live by. The truth of God’s oneness reminded the Israelites that they could have no competing loyalties—whether idols or other people—when it came to loving God.

What are some common objects and relationships that rival God for our devotion?

The Great Commandment emphasizes loving God with all your heart, soul, and mind. What do each of those aspects of a person’s being represent?

Of those three areas of your person, which is hardest for you to love God with on a regular basis? Why do you think that is?

God's united, undivided nature (see Deut. 6:4) demands the allegiance of those who claim Him as their God. Love for God rises as a response to His gracious love for people demonstrated in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Our love for God is to be unconditional and undivided in the way that He and His love for us is unconditional and undivided. This love is to extend from all our heart, soul, and mind. To love God with all our heart means to love Him with our emotions and our feelings. The soul represents the deepest part of who we are, which means loving God with the stuff that makes you you. Loving God with our minds means loving Him with our intelligence. He wants us to grow in our love for Him by finding out more about Him, so we can understand how much more of Him there is to know and love.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

Why should this command be central not only to who we are as individuals but to everything we do at our church?

What happens to the mission and vision of our church when we are not loving God?

What are some ways we as a church or a group can show God we love Him with our hearts? With our souls? With our minds?

What most frequently stands in the way of you truly loving God? How can our group be praying for you related to growth and change in that area of life?

PRAYER

Pray that we would be people and a church who are becoming more in love with our Heavenly Father every day.

COMMENTARY

MATTHEW 22:34-40

This passage contains the third and final verbal challenge from Jesus' opponents recorded in Matthew's Gospel. After this, the Jewish leaders would fall back on their last resort—physical violence or conspiracy to have Jesus arrested and executed.

22:34-36. The Pharisees had regrouped after Jesus turned their first trap against them in 22:15-22. Seeing the same thing happen to the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together, seeking power and courage in numbers. The one expert in the law whom they chose to ask the testing question must have approached Jesus with some trepidation. For the third time in three challenges, the questioner addressed Jesus as Teacher.

This time the question was simple but profound: Which is the greatest commandment in the Law? Matthew used the simple adjective “great” (megas), but it carried superlative force (“greatest”) in this context. The question demonstrated the way the religious leaders looked at the law. In their tradition, they had reduced the law to 365 negative and 248 positive commandments. They spent much time trying to prioritize these innumerable technicalities. They thought they could trap the Lord of the law.

22:37-38. Jesus drew His answer from the most memorized and recited passage in all the Jewish Scriptures: “Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength” (Deut. 6:4-5).

Jesus quoted the Septuagint almost verbatim, but He substituted mind (dianoia) for the similar sounding “might” (dunameos). We are to take this list as an emphatic way of saying, “Love God with everything you are in every way possible.” But it was not without significance that our Lord deliberately substituted “mind” here rather than some other term. Christians need to take a lesson from this. We should learn to think critically and biblically.

Jesus emphasized His answer by identifying this commandment as the first and greatest commandment. This commandment was greatest because of the statement in Deuteronomy 6:4 which preceded it: “Yahweh is your God, Yahweh alone” (paraphrased). To honor Yahweh as the one true God is to love Him exclusively, from among all others who claim to be gods.