

The Pharisees ask Jesus “**which is the great commandment in the Law?**” What is the one thing above all others that God wills for us? Jesus quotes the creed of ancient Israel: “**Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.**” Those three words cover all aspects of our being: our inner desire, our entire life as living creatures, all our power and members. We are to be entirely devoted to God. It is an unpacking of the First Commandment: “**You shall have no other gods.**”

Our Lord goes on to use the word “mind.” This word carries the idea of “thought or reflection.” This is likely in reference to the verses that continue on in Deuteronomy: “**these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.**”

That is to say, when God is our God, and we love Him, that is not just something that happens in here, inside us, rather, it is lived out in our life and conversation. This is one of the parts my time at the seminary that I cherish the most. You have a bunch of guys studying God’s Word under men who have devoted their lives to teaching it, and that creates a love for talking about it everywhere - in the commons after chapel while getting coffee, at the weekly Friday afternoon social, in circles of friends, in informal chats with the professors. God’s Word is the constant topic of conversation.

But where does God see this happening in the Bible is where? *In the home.* Listen again: “**You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.**” When it comes to what we talk about as families, what decorates our homes, God desires that it be His Word. That is what pours out of hearts that gladly hear and learn it, that fear, love, and trust in Him.

This is what Bible Class encourages. This is what the Congregation at Prayer fosters. But also, especially, the sermon. It sets before you the Word of God, for you to take into yourself, to ponder and consider, to talk about with others, especially those in your household. We easily fall into the habit of just sitting through the sermon. Instead, each time God’s Word is preached, approach it with the thought that each sermon is a tight packing together, a condensation, and having heard it, you can then unpack and unfold it. Maybe there’s something you heard that is entirely new, or a new way of putting something you’ve known for a while. Maybe there’s something you didn’t understand, or just a statement that really stood out to you. Hold onto that and bring it up at the lunch or dinner table. You can do this not just with the sermon, but with the Bible readings from church, or from the Congregation at Prayer.

This is what God wants you to do. He says, “Love Me. Show that love by talking about Me and My Word.” You see in Deuteronomy how this is especially the case with parents. The most natural place, the duty above all others, is for Christian parents to talk about God and His Word with their children. This commandment to love God with all your heart, soul, and mind is the greatest commandment. All other commandments are subordinate to and follow out of this one. Jesus adds a second. One that He says is like the first. “**You shall love your neighbor as yourself.**” This commandment is like the first, because it also commands you to love.

When you love God with all your heart, soul, and mind, you will also love your neighbor as yourself. The apostle John writes in his First Epistle: “**If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen**” (4:20). This shows how serious this second commandment is. If one fails to keep this second commandment, he has failed to keep the first and greatest commandment. If we desire to serve God, we should do unto others as we would have them do unto us: If you do not want your name to be slandered behind your back, then do not speak ill of others or spread gossip; You do not want to be cheated on, so be faithful to your spouse; You would not want to grow up in an unstable household, or perhaps you know the pain of growing up in one, so control your desires and wait until you are married in order to honor the marriage bed; You don’t want your possession taken from you, so don’t steal or even desire to do it. As you cherish your own life, cherish the lives of others. This means we are to be advocates for those weaker than ourselves. The unborn, who are in

danger every day of being killed with approval from the government. The lonely and elderly, who are often in care facilities and not visited by family, or are easily mistreated by staff. They have no voice. If you had no voice, you'd desire someone to speak for you.

**“On these two commandments,”** Jesus says, **“depend all the Law and the Prophets.”** The Scriptures hang on this good will of God for us, that we love Him with everything we've got, and that we love our neighbor as ourself. And yet we hear the full import of these commandments, the weight, not of God's advice or suggestions, but the “You shall” of the Divine Creator and Judge, you hear the examples that have been given of what this looks like, and you see how St. Paul's words in Romans chapter three are true: **“For by works of the Law, no flesh will be justified in His sight, since through the Law comes knowledge of sin”** (v. 20). What God commands informs; it instructs. But it also always condemns.

The Pharisees have the answer to their question, but it leaves them and us in a sorry and most miserable state. Jesus would not leave you there. As much as the Pharisees want to know which of the commandments is the greatest, as much as we want to know as Christians what it is that we should do, all the more Jesus wants to direct the Pharisees' attention and yours to His own question: **“What do you think about the Christ? Whose Son is He?”** Every Jew knew that King David had been given the promise that the Messiah, the king of God's people, would come from his body, and would reign forever. So it is understandable that the Pharisees answer the way they do: “He's David's son.”

But Jesus asks why, in Psalm 110, David prophesied by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, saying, **“The Lord said to my Lord, ‘Sit at My right hand, until I put Your enemies under Your feet?’”** Jesus asks how the Christ can be the son of David if David calls the Christ Lord. Indeed, how could King David call anyone but God Himself “Lord,” since David was the very king of Israel? The Pharisees could not answer this question. The Christ is David's son according to the flesh. He is also David's Lord because He is true God. The Christ is the Son of God, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity: *God of God, light of light, very God of very God, begotten not made.*

Because David needs a Lord. David is called a man after God's own heart. He is the pinnacle of comparison for Israel's kings. Yet as godly as David was, it is this same David who committed adultery and murder, who, in his old age, grew weak in his control of his household and this neglect led to more sins. David eventually died. David, like you and I, needed a Lord, a Savior, a Messiah to redeem him and us.

The Law and the Prophets, which depend on the two great commandments bear witness to the fact that the Christ is David's Son and David's Lord, true man and true God, come to fulfill His own Law. It is He who perfectly loved His heavenly Father, His will in total alignment and obedience to that of His Father. It is He who perfectly loved His neighbor as Himself, giving His holy and perfect life into death as the ransom for us, bearing our sin as His very own, letting the full weight of condemnation under the Law hang on Him. The condemnation for your sins has been poured out and satisfied by His blood. The requirements of Divine Justice met.

With His resurrection from the dead, we see that His sacrifice was accepted. It was sufficient to blot out every sin. It is His perfect life, His atoning death, His resurrection to immortality, that is given to you in Holy Baptism. You are in Christ, which means you are united to the one who has rendered perfect love to God and to all, that is how He has loved you. In Holy Baptism you are given a new man, a new creature, not bent in on yourself, but restored to live in faith toward God and in love toward your neighbor. You can only do this in Christ, because of who you are in Him, but you can and you do, love God and neighbor. You never love God or neighbor perfectly in this life, but you do love God and neighbor. This love grows by the grace of the Holy Spirit, that is what we prayed in the first hymn today:

*O Holy Spirit, enter in, And in our hearts Your work begin, Your dwelling place now make us.  
Sun of the soul, O light divine, Around and in us brightly shine, To joy and gladness wake us  
That we may be Truly living, To You giving Prayer unceasing And in love be still increasing.*

This love grows by continually receiving from the Father what He has to give us in Christ Jesus, His mercy, His forgiveness, His strength and healing, where He speaks His Gospel to our hearts so that we believe Him; when He tells us that for Christ's sake He forgives us all our sins and makes heaven our home; something happens inside of us. Love happens. The law told us to love but could not enable us to love. The gospel of God's love for us does. We can love God and our neighbor because God has first loved us.