

When Your Priorities Are Challenged  
February 7, 2010  
Allen Power

- Sometimes the government drives us crazy!
- Sometimes other people drive us crazy!
- It's a wonder we don't ALL drive God crazy!

The Roman philosopher Seneca said...

“Men love their country, not because it is great, but because it is their own.”

When we think of other people...

Tennyson said:

“I am a part of all that I have met.”

John Donne said:

“No man is an island, entire of itself...any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind;”

The old saying goes: “Whenever you see a turtle on a fencepost, you know he didn't get there by himself!”

- Our government may drive us crazy at times, but where would you rather live?
- Other people may drive us crazy at times, but try living without other people!
- It's a wonder we don't ALL drive God crazy! And aren't we grateful for his mercy, love, and grace...not to mention patience?

The government; other people; and God. What do we owe to each? Jesus had something to say about that in Mark 12 and that's where we're headed this morning.

In Mark 11 and the first part of Mark 12 a number of things have happened since last week's lesson:

- Jesus continued his RESOLUTE path to Jerusalem and to His crucifixion
- He rode into the city on a humble donkey to the adoring cheers of the people
- He ran the money changers out of the temple with great force!
- He was hotly pursued by the religious leaders who wanted to destroy Him
- They sought to trap him by questioning him
- Jesus turned their attacks against them
- And in the passages we're studying this morning He gets us to the “heart” of what living the Christian life is all about: **LOVING GOD and LOVING OTHERS**

Mark 12:13-17

Paying Taxes to Caesar

13 Later they sent some of the Pharisees and Herodians to Jesus to catch him in his words. 14 They came to him and said, "Teacher, we know you are a man of integrity. You aren't swayed by men, because you pay no attention to who they are; but you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not? 15 Should we pay or shouldn't we?"

But Jesus knew their hypocrisy. "Why are you trying to trap me?" he asked. "Bring me a denarius and let me look at it." 16 They brought the coin, and he asked them, "Whose portrait is this? And whose inscription?"

"Caesar's," they replied.

17 Then Jesus said to them, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's." And they were amazed at him.

- "Render unto Caesar what is Caesar's"
- Peter got Jesus' point...

1 Peter 2:13-17

Peter writes...

13 Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority, 14 or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. 15 For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men. 16 Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God. 17 Show proper respect to everyone: Love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, honor the king.

- Paul understood what Jesus was saying and he wrote about it in the first seven verses of Romans 13

Romans 13

Submission to the Authorities

1 Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. 2 Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves.

5 Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience. 6 This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing. 7 Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor.

Warren Wiersbe wrote...

*The word translated “render” in Mark 12:17 means “to pay a debt, to pay back.” Jesus looked on taxes as the citizens’ debt to the government in return for the services performed. Today those services would include, among other things, fire and police protection, national defense, the salaries of the officials who manage the affairs of state, special programs for the poor and underprivileged, etc. The individual Christian citizen might not agree with the way all of his tax money is used, and he can express himself with his voice and his vote, but he must accept the fact that God has established human government for our good (Rom. 13; 1 Tim. 2:1–6; 1 Peter 2:13–17). Even if we cannot respect the people in office, we must respect the office.*

- The government may drive us crazy...but try building your own roads; starting your own police force; fighting your own wars.
- Jesus teaches believers to respect the institution of government and give it what is due government. As Paul put it in Romans 13:7: “If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor.”

Let’s move on to Mark 12:28-30

### The Greatest Commandment

28 One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?"

29 "The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.[a] 30 Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.[b]

- The greatest commandment!
- We need to get the CONTEXT of what this “scribe” was asking Jesus
- He wasn’t just talking about the 10 Commandments
- The Jewish scribes had identified 613 laws to be followed
- And they categorized them as 365 negative and 248 positive
- They distinguished between “heavy” and “light” laws
- 613 laws to interpret and follow!
- Thank God, Jesus is about to boil it all down to TWO...can I get an AMEN?
- Verse 29 “Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.” Jesus is quoting from Deuteronomy 6...a passage known as the Shema (SHEE-mah) --- a Jewish confession of faith that these Jewish leaders would recite EVERY MORNING
- The Lord our God is ONE ---
- In theological terms we call that MONOTHEISM --- in layman’s terms: THERE IS ONLY ONE GOD
- And if we claim Him as our God, what do we owe Him?
- Verse 30 Love the Lord your God with all your heart; soul; mind; and strength
- Question: What else do you and I have in addition to our heart; soul; mind; and strength? Answer: NOTHING. So what does that make our heart; soul; mind and strength? Answer: EVERYTHING!

- What is the chief end of man?

Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.

- Can you think of any motivation stronger than LOVE or HATE?
- If you LOVE something or someone enough you'll do ANYTHING for them!
- Unfortunately, because of our fallen nature, if you HATE anything or anyone enough you'll do ANYTHING to destroy them.
- How do we show that we love God? By obeying him.
- So if we don't obey God what does that say about how we feel about him? The reverse is true.
- Here's a radical question: What if you get up some mornings and don't feel as loving toward God as you should?
- You might gasp at that question but if we loved God perfectly we'd never disobey him.
- So how CAN we LOVE GOD with EVERYTHING!

John MacArthur writes:

*Christ not only can forgive man for a past lack of love, but also can infuse man with the ability to love God in the present and future... The Spirit of God, who indwells the believer at salvation, enables him to love God. We could never love God the way He desires, so we need divine enabling to do so. Jesus Christ came to pay the penalty for our sin. He forgives our unloving attitude toward God, and enables us to love God in the future by the Holy Spirit. When a believer sins, he hates his sin because he is controlled by his love for God.*

- There's the GOOD NEWS! The Holy Spirit enables the believer to LOVE GOD with EVERYTHING!
- And there is no stronger motivation NOT TO SIN than our LOVE for God!
- And nothing strengthens our LOVE for God more than REMEMBERING all that he has done for us!

Elizabeth Barrett Browning wrote:

How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.  
I love thee to the depth and breadth and height  
My soul can reach!

- Let me count the ways! Isn't that why it's so important to DAILY count the ways we love God?
- When we PRAISE Him we count the ways we love Him for WHO HE IS
- When we THANK Him we count the ways we love Him for WHAT HE'S DONE FOR US!
- How about we have a little "old fashioned" testimony time right her and right now?
- Let's start with WHO GOD IS.
- "I love the LORD BECAUSE HE IS...(fill in the blank)!"

- Now let's move to WHAT HE'S DONE FOR US
- "I love the LORD BECAUSE HE HAS...(fill in the blank)!"

Here's a thought I wrote:

When we skip over PRAISE and THANKS we cheat ourselves out of allowing the Holy Spirit to RECHARGE our batteries of LOVE for WHO GOD IS and WHAT HE HAS DONE!

- There's no stronger motivation for obeying God than loving Him with all we are!
- We CAN do that through the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives!
- God has promised to supply every need. Sometimes our need is to LOVE HIM MORE...WE SHOULD ASK HIM TO HELP US DO THAT.
- What about OTHERS?
- Jesus told his the FIRST and GREATEST commandment...what about the SECOND?

Verses 31-34 of Mark 12

31The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' [c]There is no commandment greater than these."

32"Well said, teacher," the man replied. "You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him. 33To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices."

34When Jesus saw that he had answered wisely, he said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." And from then on no one dared ask him any more questions.

- "Love your neighbor as yourself." But, you haven't met MY neighbor!
- Be honest! Sometimes, with some people you say: "God, how do you expect me to love THAT?"
- This person that has hurt me; rejected me; criticized me; ignored me; belittled me
- How can I love someone like that?
- What if God turned us toward the mirror and asked the same question?
- How can I love someone like this?
- You've rejected me at times; neglected me at times; ignored me at times; grieved my Holy Spirit.
- Yet, I LOVE YOU. In spite of all your failures and sin...I LOVE YOU.
- So how can you love THEM?
- YOU CAN'T! Unless you love them like I LOVE YOU.
- And only GOD can do that work in our hearts to enable us to LOVE SOME PEOPLE.

Dr. Charles Stanley's In Touch Devotional puts it this way:

*Experiencing God's love should inspire us to love our neighbors—everyone in our sphere of influence—although this is easier with some than with others. Throughout the gospels, Jesus repeated the command to his disciples, probably because He knew how often His followers, both then and now, would run into people who are difficult to love. But we are most like God when we ask, “How can I serve this person? What is in his or her best interest?”*

- The scribe who asked Jesus the question repeated back the answer to show he understood.
- Loving God and Loving Others is greater than any burnt offering or sacrifice.
- Loving God and Loving Others IS our sacrifice to God!
- In verse 34 Jesus said to him: “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” That’s New Testament Greek for “This guy gets it!”
- In Matthew’s account of this story (Chapter 22 and verse 40) Jesus said:

“All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

- In other words, if you just focus on these two concepts: Loving God and Loving Others, the rest of the commandments will take care of themselves.
- No other Gods; No idols; Don’t take God’s name in vain; Keep the Sabbath; = LOVING GOD.
- Honor your parents; don’t murder; commit adultery; steal; give false testimony; or covet = LOVING OTHERS

John Piper writes:

*If God made us for his glory, it is clear that we should live for his glory. Our duty comes from his design. So our first obligation is to show God’s value by being satisfied with all that he is for us. This is the essence of loving God (Matthew 22:37) and trusting him (1 John 5:3-4) and being thankful to him (Psalm 100:2-4) It is the root of all true obedience, especially loving others (Colossians 1:4-5).*

So, What’s the Takeaway?

- If we’re going to honor God we owe some things.
- We owe it to our government to give what is due to the government and that’s not just patriotism, it’s in scripture.
- We owe it to others to LOVE THEM as we love ourselves not because it’s NICE but because God commanded us to.
- We can’t do any of this unless we LOVE GOD with everything we have. And if we make that our CHIEF PRIORITY, out of that relationship we’ll be motivated to live lives that glorify Him.