

## **“UNATURAL OBEDIENCE”**

**Mark 12:28-34**

**Holiday Island Presbyterian Church**

**November 5, 2017**

**<sup>28</sup> 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?”**

**<sup>29</sup> “The most important one,” answered Jesus, “is this: ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.’<sup>[a]</sup> <sup>30</sup> Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’<sup>[b]</sup> <sup>31</sup> The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’<sup>[c]</sup> There is no commandment greater than these.”**

**<sup>32</sup> “Well said, teacher,” the man replied. “You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him. <sup>33</sup> To 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.”**

**<sup>34</sup> When 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.**

## **INTRODUCTION:**

**First of all, to fully understand what is going on here,  
we need to understand what a “teacher of the law” is.**

**The scribes were called “teachers of the law”**

**because that was their primary task –**

- To study the law as handed down to them**
- To teach that law to ever Israelite**
- To insure the law was applied properly**

**As you can imagine,**

**the oral teaching of the law was subject to interpretation –  
which led to corruption and misconstruing the law.**

**It had come to the point that all religious instruction**

**came directly from the scribes – teachers –**

**and they taught in schools, synagogues, Temple.**

**They came to be seen as “authorities” of the law in every respect.**

**Mark portrays them as high officials,**

**advisers to the chief priests.**

**Presbyterians require ordained clergy to achieve a high level of  
scholarship is to protect the Church from “opinion”**

**and keep it centered on accurately interpreted scripture.**

**So, as Jesus continues to teach and preach,  
He captures the attention of the scribes  
because of His radical departure from their “opinions.”**

**On this particular day,  
A Scribe approaches Jesus and asks a question:  
“Of all the commandments, which is the most important?”**

**At this point, we are left to decide “why” the question was asked.**

**One reason could be that it was asked to gain information.  
Perhaps to test Jesus to see just how far He would stray  
from traditional teachings of the law.**

**The scribe would then report back to the Pharisees and chief priests  
just how far Jesus was transcending the law –  
perhaps to build a stronger case against Him.**

**Perhaps.**

**A second reason could be that the scribe  
was just participating in the debate;  
it was the custom of inviting students to ask questions.**

**Maybe.**

**But what if the scribe was asking a genuine question?**

**The scribe might be saying something like this:**

**“Look, we have 613 laws –**

**stretching all the way from what to eat with what**

**to how to deal with criminals, animals and slaves.**

**That’s a lot of laws.**

**Which of them would you say is most important.**

**While we don’t exactly ask that question in the 21<sup>st</sup> century,**

**but we do spend a lot of time *thinking* about it.**

**We see rioting and looting on the nightly news**

**and we demand justice!**

**We gossip and slander our neighbor**

**and we think that’s a much lesser sin.**

**In other words,**

**we consciously or subconsciously rank laws in our minds**

**thinking that one sin is greater or lesser than another.**

**Surely, not *all* the 10 commandments are of equal importance!**

**Do you know where all that comes from?**

**Obedience.**

**Not being the most obedient person in this room,  
I looked the word up in the dictionary.**

**Obedience is “being submissive to the restraint  
or command of authority.”**

**And three words just leap out at me . . . and maybe you, too.  
“command of authority.”**

**We don't like being told what to do.**

**And when the “commands” are written down  
in a dust old book that's thousands of years old  
and the “authority” is not present . . .  
. . . that's the formula for rebellion.**

**If we are obedient,**

**and I'll admit I've grown more obedient through the years,  
more than likely, it is because of one of three reasons.**

**First, one of the primary reason for obedience**

**is the fear of punishment, reprisals?**

**If I disobey God, somewhere down the line**

**it's going to cost me –**

**- God is going to punish me.**

**My biggest fear – and the biggest motivation for obeying God –**

**is that one day, if I have been disobedient**

**I'll stand in a pulpit and God will simply walk away**

**and say, “Boy, you wanted to do it on your own.**

**so, go right ahead.”**

**There is this sense that if we break a law,**

**and the police don't find out,**

**God still knows and God's gonna get us.**

**A second reason for being obedient**

**is to gain a reward, like a promotion.**

**We think that if we are “good” then God will reward us.**

**that may work with Santa Claus, but not with God.**

**Does God reward good works?**

**Certainly!**

**But not because we are obedient;  
Our obedience is expected!**

**The way this plays out in our lives  
is very, very close to thinking we can “bribe” God.**

**When I was a kid, I had a dog that ran away.  
I really loved that dog and I wanted it back.**

**So, I tried to make a deal with God:  
“Bring my dog back and I’ll be in Church every Sunday!”  
My dog came back – I missed a lot of Sundays.**

**A question I have asked ever Church I have served is:  
“Are we doing the best that we can do?”**

**The purpose behind that question is not to garner God’s favor –  
God could not love us more –  
and God couldn’t love us less.**

**The question grows out of “How authentic is our faith?”  
“How fully do we understand the love God has for us?  
Are we responding out of habit? Fear?  
Or a genuine love for God?**

**Well, these two reasons make up the “stick and carrot” method.  
You’re familiar with that, right?**

**Somewhere along the way, I heard it phrased like this:  
[In a heavy German accent, of course]**

**“It is der schtick and der carrot.  
You get der carrot – or you get der schtick!”**

**If you are trying to get a stubborn animal to do obey,  
first you dangle a carrot in front of them  
and if that doesn’t work, apply the stick.**

**Works pretty good in raising children, too.**

**There is a third principle.  
We obey because we love and respect  
the one we are obedient to.**

**I have remained faithful to my wife throughout our marriage.  
not because I must;  
not because I fear what she might do . . .  
. . . although that could be a factor.  
She has this cast iron skillet . . .**

**I remain faithful to her,  
because I love her, I honor her, I respect her.**

**Sure, in our wedding vows, I promised to be faithful –  
but it's not the promise,  
not the vow that keeps me faithful.**

**It is the love that the vow represents.**

**Each of us should ask ourselves  
why we obey God's commandments.**

**Is it because we fear punishment?**

**Because we desire the rewards for living a good life?**

**Because it makes for a good society?**

**I would argue the primary reason a Christian obeys the laws of God  
is because we love God and Jesus Christ  
and want to please Them and serve Them.**

**Outwardly, that may not look any different  
than the acts of a good Buddhist,  
but the motivation behind the obedience is very different.**

**We should want to be obedient**

**because our obedience represents our core belief as Christians.**

**It is our response to the love God has shown to us.**

**It is putting feet on our faith.**

**So, Jesus answers the scribe with a summary.**

**<sup>29</sup> “The most important one,” answered Jesus, “is this: ‘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 mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.”**

**These two summaries of the law stand as bookends**

**and in between them are all the laws of God.**

**It is what God expects of us,**

**and if we are truly doing our best – and we fail –**

**God loves us enough to forgive us.**