

GROWTH GROUPS
WEEK 7
WEEK OF NOV 1



Growth Group Fall 2020

Keeping It Simple

Week 7 – November 1, 2020 - Matthew 22:34-40

Growth groups are one of the best and easiest ways to find community at a church. In this time of Corona19 and “social distancing” please don’t meet in person, but do continue to check in with each other. If your growth group would like to meet online or if you are aware of needs that the church can help fill, please let us know at connect@ljpres.org. Thank you for loving and caring for each other.

Setting the Context

In Matthew 22:34-40, the Pharisees and Sadducees ask Jesus a well-known question: “Teacher, what kind of commandment is greatest of all in the law?” This question is the second of three questions asked of Jesus by the religious rulers. Just as Jesus was tempted physically three times in the wilderness at the beginning of his ministry, he is now tempted intellectually three times. His answer to this question is one that is disarming and unexpected. He answers with not one commandment, but two.

The first thing to notice in this passage is that the Pharisees and Sadducees are not asking Jesus a question in order to learn from him, but rather to test him. They have their own answers for this question and they are trying to catch him off guard. With this knowledge, Jesus answers in a way they did not anticipate. He grounds himself not in the law, but in Love. The first part of his response is: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” He points, all those listening, Godward, as he draws from Deuteronomy 6:5. He is not reinventing the law, but rather piecing it together in a way that simplifies it.

The second part of his response is to “love your neighbor as yourself” which comes from Leviticus 19:18. He does not rank these two commandments in order of importance, instead he says we must hold both simultaneously. The phrase “as yourself” does not mean that we must love ourselves and practice self-care so that we can love others well. Instead, it calls us to love others with all that we are! To see each person as someone for whom Jesus Christ died and rose again.

In holding both love of God and love of neighbor equal, Jesus presents a tension that is common throughout scripture. Even in the greatest singular commandment we find a duality that cannot be ignored. To have one without the other is a far too narrow view of the Christian life. By not answering singularly Jesus demonstrates that two truths can exist without devaluing each other. Where the Pharisees and Sadducees sought to bring division, Jesus brought wholeness.

To conclude his statement Jesus says “from these two commandments the whole law dangles.” These centering ideas of the law do not dispute other laws, they enhance them. When two sides don’t seem to come together or align, ground yourself in Love. Jesus did not come to abolish the law, but to uphold it. He does so by commanding us to “Love the God who loves you, and cherish the person who meets you.” (Dale Bruner)

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Exploring the Text

Read Matthew 22:34-40

Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. ³⁵ One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: ³⁶ “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?”

³⁷ Jesus replied: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’

³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹ And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ ⁴⁰ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

Questions

If you are answering these questions alone, we would urge you to try journaling. Rather than just pondering the answers, try writing them out along with a prayer to the Lord.

- 1) Tell a story of a time you got in trouble at school for breaking the rules.
- 2) The religious leaders were attempting to catch Jesus responding incorrectly. Why do you think we see them doing that so often in the gospels? Why did they want to “trip” Jesus up with their questions?
- 3) What do you think the verse, from Leviticus 19 about loving our neighbors as ourselves, means? If we don’t love ourselves can we “truly” love our neighbors?
- 4) Is it more natural/easier for you to love God or to love your neighbor?
- 5) Do you think the whole of the Bible and its teaching is summed up in the Great Commandment to love God and neighbor? Why?
- 6) How do you love your neighbor even when you don’t agree with them, or when they are disagreeable?
- 7) What is an active or tangible way that you can love God this week?
- 8) What is an active or tangible way that you can love your neighbor this week?