

## His Answer is Our Answer

### Matthew 22:34-40

#### Interesting Facts

After Jesus answered their first 2 questions the text said the Sadducees were silenced. The Greek word means “they were gagged”. It is the same word Mark uses when describing how Jesus silenced a demon and a storm. His truth left them speechless. Then a lawyer steps up. The Greek word here is different than what is usually translated as a scribe. It is the only time it is used by Matthew and is better translated as “an expert in the law”. In other words they brought in their best and brightest to stump Jesus. It appears that although the lawyer was out to test Jesus, he had some objectivity and a seeker’s heart because Mark’s account includes his acknowledgement that Jesus had given good answers previously and affirmed this third answer as being right.

<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.”

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This question was designed to have Jesus upstage Moses with His response which would have offended the multitudes. At a bare minimum it was the kind of question that would have been ripe for debate and dissension. Jewish history says that there were 613 separate laws in addition to the 10 commandments. Many Rabbis believed in the use of letterism which gave almost magical relevance to the individual letters used in important text. There were 613 letters in the 10 Commandments which drove their creating 613 other laws. Of all those there were 248 affirmative laws (thou shalt) which was one for every recognized part of the human body. The remaining 365 laws were negative laws (thou shalt not) which was one for every day. Some were considered light ones that were somewhat optional because after all nobody’s perfect. Wow – with that much detail and legalism can’t you just imagine the firestorm they thought they would create when asking Jesus which one was the greatest one. Little did they realize that Jesus is one with the Father who gave Moses the law. Of course He was in perfect harmony with God’s word and Moses, God’s leader and spokesman. His answer was a part of the Shema which was a prayer they recited twice a day and was from Deuteronomy 6:4-5. Jews have this scripture in wooden boxes called Mezuzahs on their doors and some had these scriptures tied around their heads or arms in what are called tefillin.

The devastating irony is that His answer was as clear in their minds as any text He could have cited and yet it was the furthest from their hearts.

- I. **His Audience** – Only days before the cross Jesus had a crowd of people around Him including: 1) Critics, 2) Seekers, and 3) Followers.
- II. **His Accuser** – Although impressed with Jesus’ previous answers, this lawyer tries to trip Him up and asks Jesus what the greatest commandment is. The critics wanted to point out flaws and discredit Him. The seekers wanted to evaluate Him, and the followers wanted to learn from Him.
- III. **His Answer** – Jesus quotes what they already knew better than any other verse and yet weren’t living it – “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.”

Notice how Jesus could have run these parts together as a series (Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind). But instead He separated and emphasized each one because they are each different and require a different part of our being. As a bonus He gave them another familiar scripture and the second greatest commandment – “Love your neighbor as yourself.” They knew these commandments intellectually but they didn’t know them with their whole being. Jesus tells us to love God fully with our intentions and purposes, with our emotions and affections, as well as our thoughts and actions. We miss out when we love Him only partially like any relationship does when we love in part and with limits. He then adds that we should love the people that God dearly loves – which is everyone around us.

**IV. His Authenticity** – We say, “Practice what you preach.” Jesus certainly did that a few days later when He surrendered Himself fully out of love for the Father. He loved with His commitment and free will; He loved with His emotions and affection for His Father and for us, superseding His other competing human emotions of fear and hurt; He loved with His thoughts fully believing and confident in His Father’s plans and intentions. Then He died loving us as Himself so that we could experience oneness with the Father like He had with His Father.

**V. Our Assessment** – Jesus wanted all of His audience including each of us to examine where we are in loving God with our full being and loving others as ourselves. He asks us not from a place of condemning but from a place of wanting us to experience the abundant life that He has for us and that transcends our circumstances. (Side note: Abundant life gets misinterpreted too often. This is not health, wealth and unlimited blessings. Jesus clearly lived an abundant life and yet He did not have long life and riches. Abundant life is the spiritual abundance of being one with God and having clear purpose, fulfillment, peace, love, joy and the other fruits of the spirit in this life as well as a promise of a perfect eternal life to come.) In contrast with His command to love God with our full being, immature love can be selfish and lacking in different areas. Think back on some of your early relationships such as child/parent, early friendships, high school sweethearts, first year of marriage. Sanctification helps us mature in our love for God, but we can have our growth stunted through our choices. Each of us has areas that we love more easily in and those that are much harder for us. For example, some of us love God with a thirst to read His word and know Him with greater understanding while others struggle to find time. Some worship Him and praise Him with reckless abandon of emotion and affection while others have difficulty emotionally connecting with Him and quench the Spirit distracted by what others may think. Some love Him through serving others or attending church but they may find it hard to follow His lead to change careers, give financially, or do something else they felt called to do but didn’t understand or didn't want to do.

**VI. Our Adjustment** – Once we ask God to reveal to us where we can love Him more fully, we must ask Him to reveal what is standing in our way. I see three major stumbling blocks for us.

The first one is that we can feel like we constantly let God down and that He has to be fed up with us. The enemy and great accuser loves to amplify that in our heads and hearts. In some deep place we feel like God is secretly mad at us. The Bible says God turned His anger to the cross and dealt with our sin once and for all. It goes on to say that if we have accepted His grace and surrendered our lives to Jesus, that wrath and condemnation is gone and we are clothed in the righteousness of Christ forever - period. His discipline and correction from that point forward is constructive and driven by His love and kindness

towards us so that we don't miss out on His best things for us. This discipline also helps us not to hurt others that He loves, which bring us sorrow down the road. The problem with this misconception is that we tend to want to avoid and have a distant love for the one that we feel is upset and put out by us. Consequently, we stay apart from Him and "apart from Him we can do nothing." Satan can't take away our salvation but he can rob us of our joy, fruitfulness, and a close relationship with our Good, Good Father. Sometimes I need more convincing that He wants me to come to Him despite my messiness. I have to meditate on the Father's response to the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32). And I have to choose to have faith that Jesus was indeed fed and filled with the food that His disciples knew nothing about after He had just ministered to a broken outcast woman at the well. Jesus wasn't angry or worn out by her repeated sins. He was energized by her coming to Him and allowing Him to minister to her so that she could experience freedom (John 4:3-42), and He is the same with each of us. The Holy Spirit's conviction shows us our desperate need for Him and draws us to that love, forgiveness and repentance. The enemy's accusations make us feel worthless and hopeless, driving us to run from His love, forgiveness and repentance. See the difference?

The second significant barrier is that the part of our being that is not fully loving Him is being spent loving something or someone – control, image, comfort, toys, pleasures, relationships and other “idols”. Readjusting our love priorities isn't about earning God's favor, proving our love or self-discipline, or being more spiritual or more Christian. It's about experiencing God's best for us and the joy and fulfillment of having the close relationship that He created us to have with Him.

The third obstacle is our focus on our circumstances. We can't love God with our full being and keep one eye on our circumstances whether they are good or bad. If things are going great and we are enjoying various blessings, we can neglect God and start looking too much in the mirror or at the blessings themselves. More often than not it is the hard times that cause us to love God with only part of ourselves because we are holding on to keeping watch on the source of pain and worry. When Peter took his eyes off of the Lord and looked at the waves, the lowliness of having his feet washed, and the fear of being tortured and killed by Jesus' accusers, he missed experiencing the fullness of loving Him in an undivided way. Let's compare that with how his love grew and matured for the Lord. In Acts we see where Peter was brought before the Jewish leaders for his preaching. What did he do? He boldly preached to them too. They threatened him and ordered him to stop spreading this message, and he started preaching again as soon as he was released. Although not covered in the Bible, church tradition says that Peter was to be crucified for his faith. Instead of fear, his love had matured to the point where he reportedly told them to crucify him upside down because he wasn't worthy to die like Jesus. I think he learned to love God with his full being and focus. This full love is why it was possible for Paul to be singing in prison and for James to tell us that we can consider it all joy to suffer in trials because they bring about our maturity.

## **VII. Our Attraction** – God made us to have a desire to love and be loved by Him and others.

When we love Him fully, we more naturally love others well. When we love others well most people are drawn to us. The number one call of the church is to make disciples. This calling gets much easier as people want to be around us, feeling loved and connected. Think of all the age old criticisms of church people. Sadly, most of them have been earned, and yet all of them fade away when we love God with our full being and we love others as ourselves following the model of church life in Acts 2:42-47 (see if you can find Scott's focus on PTL - Prayer, Teaching and Love) and Paul's teachings in Romans 12: 9-10.

<sup>42</sup> They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. <sup>43</sup> Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. <sup>44</sup> All the believers were together and had everything in common. <sup>45</sup> They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. <sup>46</sup> Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, <sup>47</sup> praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. Acts 2:42-47 (NIV)

9 Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. 10 Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. Romans 12:9-10 (NIV)

### **Closing**

Regardless of whether we find ourselves as God's critic, seeker, or follower today, Jesus has given us THE answer to experience the life He created us for. It is not about the shalts and shalt nots, the striving to get ourselves together, or doing a lot of good Christian things -- when we love Him with all of our heart and with all of our soul and with all of our mind, these things will start falling in place. If we realize this truth we are so close. Here is how the story ended again according to Mark:

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The lawyer was so close, but the saddest part of this story is what we don't read. He realized the truth, but we don't read how he surrendered his life to Christ to live out the truth. If you haven't asked Jesus to forgive your sins and become Lord of your life so that you can fully love Him with all of your being, take the step that this lawyer didn't and experience the kingdom of God. If you have taken that step but you're not loving Him with everything, don't keep cheating yourself and your Savior of the relationship that He made you for and the abundant life He promises.