

**Exegetical Notes, Matthew 22:34-40**  
**“The Greatest Commandment”**

Prepared by Charles H. Jensen, Pastor, & Peter E. Jensen, Assistant Pastor,  
Cornerstone Fellowship  
101 Kylies Road, Coatesville, PA 19329  
610-384-1375  
charleshjensen@aol.com  
PEJensen1@aol.com

**Matthew 22:34-40**

**Verse 34**

*Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together.*

- In Matthew 22:15-22, it was the Pharisees and the Herodians that came to Jesus with a question. In Matthew 22:23-33, it was the Sadducees that came to Jesus with a question. Both of these groups pretended to be interested in Jesus’ opinion on the matters about which they questioned him. However, they were not. Their questions were traps that were designed to discredit Jesus (See exegetical notes on Matthew 22:15-22 & Matthew 22:23-33). In both cases, the traps failed.
- This verse explains that the Pharisees got together to try to trap Jesus again.

**Verse 35-36**

*One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: “Teacher which is the greatest commandment in the Law?”*

- The word translated “greatest” means “most important.” Thus the question was, “what is the most important commandment.”
- The rabbis contended that the Law of Moses contained 613 commandments. They attempted to arrange these from “heavy commandments” to “light commandments.”
- The person who asked this question was an “expert in the law.” The KJV translation says that this person was a “lawyer.” This was a person who knew the law and the arguments of the rabbis around it.
- The question was designed to make Jesus look ignorant and stupid. Jesus was just a carpenter’s son. He had not spent years memorizing and studying the law as had the person asking the question and the

Pharisees. This question would reveal Jesus' ignorance of the law, itself, and of the debate which raged around it. Or so the person asking the question thought.

### **Verse 37-38**

***Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment.”***

- The phrase, “with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind” means “with your whole being.” It is a quotation from Deuteronomy 6:5.
- The first of the 10 Commandments states, “You shall have no other gods before me.”
- In responding to the question, Jesus says that this is the most important commandment. Above everything else, we are to love God. As Moses listed this commandment first, this puts Jesus in agreement with Moses. Most of the rabbis would also have agreed that this is the most important commandment.
- The word translated “love” is the Greek word “AGAPE.” “Agape” does not denote an emotional form of love. Instead, it is love as an act of the will or duty. It means that reasoned thought and good sense cause us decide to love God with our entire being. It is a deliberate, reasoned response to the nature and character of God.

### **Verse 39**

***“And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’”***

- Jesus did not stop simply by answering the question that was put to him. He went on to show that he was fully aware of the nature of the law and the rabbinical controversy that raged around it.
- After having identified the most important commandment, Jesus went on to identify the second most important commandment, “love your neighbor.”
- Again the word translated “love” is “AGAPE.” Thus, the nature of this love for one's neighbor is, like your love for God, a reasoned, as opposed to an emotional, response. It is thought through and thought out.
- The phrase, “as yourself” explains the nature of this love. Neighbors are to be as highly valued as we value ourselves according to Jesus.

## Verse 40

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

- Jesus’ point is that the entire Old Testament is organized to show that these two commandments are the most important. So is the entire New Testament.
- This remains true even today. The most important commandment is to love God above all else and to love our neighbors as we love ourselves.

(These exegetical notes are the foundational study for the sermon entitled *The Greatest Commandment*. They have been prepared by the Reverend Doctor Charles H. Jensen, Senior Pastor & Mr. Peter E. Jensen, Assistant Pastor at Cornerstone Fellowship, Coatesville Pennsylvania. All rights are reserved by Dr. Jensen, Mr. Jensen and *Cornerstone Fellowship*.)