

About fourteen years ago I recall watching a couple political experts interviewing a political candidate. One of the experts was criticizing the candidate for his position against abortion. The other expert was supposedly pro-life and opposed to abortion, so I was expecting him to step in, defend the candidate for his position against abortion, and argue against his fellow pundit for his position in favor of abortion. Instead, that supposedly more conservative expert began to berate the candidate for his position on foreign policy and war strategy. I was amazed at this. This guy was supposed to defend the pro-life position. The man sitting right next to him was spewing out murderous lies. But at the end of the day, he was more upset about international politics than he was about his colleague promoting the murder of unborn babies.

The Sadducees and Pharisees were religious experts. The Sadducees denied the afterlife. They rejected the Biblical teaching of the bodily resurrection. They also rejected all of the books of the Bible except for the first five books written by Moses. The Pharisees, on the other hand, did not deny the afterlife. They taught the Biblical teaching of the bodily resurrection. They accepted the other books of the Bible, such as the Psalms and the Prophets. And they saw these Sadducees mocking this precious teaching about the bodily resurrection. They witnessed Jesus defend this teaching with more skill and boldness than they had ever seen. So you would think that the Pharisees would come to Jesus' defense. You would think that they would berate the Sadducees for their mockery of God's Word. But instead, they gathered together to conspire against Jesus. And then one of them, an expert in the law, asked Jesus this question in order to test him: "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?"

So at the end of the day, the Pharisees cared more about ranking the commandments than about confessing with Jesus the promise of the resurrection. They knew this promise of the resurrection. Yet, they weren't interested in it, at least not as much as they wanted to catch Jesus in his words. This is the way of the sinful, worldly flesh. It is politically driven. It's driven by envy and jealousy, caring more about winning than about being faithful to the truth. People will sacrifice their principles over and over again if only their side can win a political fight. So they treat God's truth as no more than a playbook to win these battles. And in the meantime, they don't listen to what God's truth has to teach them.

The Pharisees wanted Jesus to tell them which of the commandments was the greatest. There are hundreds of commandments in the law, ranging from what food to eat and what clothes to wear to how to punish criminals. But Jesus brought them back to the two basic commandments, which summarize what all the commandments are about. The first and great commandment is that you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. The second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. Whether it was the Ten Commandments or the hundreds of other judgments about life and worship, the goal of every single commandment handed down by God through Moses was to love God and your neighbor. The Pharisees knew the commandments. They were experts. But in their drive to use God's Word as a political playbook against their rivals, they completely lost sight of this central truth of God's law. They were blind to it.

The law demands love. It sets you squarely before the living God and demands that you love him with everything you have. And by doing this, it exposes all of the idols and false gods your heart naturally clings to. It sets you before your neighbor and demands you to love him. It sets your parents before you and demands that you honor them. It sets your wife before you and demands that you give your life up for her. It demands that you count your neighbor's life, property, and reputation to be as precious as your own. It demands love.

When we listen to the law and pay close attention to it, we will hear God teach us about much weightier matters than just dos and don'ts. The law exposes the self-interested, envious, and altogether corrupt desires of our hearts. We don't love God with everything we have. We don't love our neighbors as ourselves. By nature, we stand condemned under the law. And if we keep listening to what Moses wrote down, we will learn where to flee. As Jesus made clear to the Sadducees, God is the God of the living, not the dead. He is the living God. He breathed his Spirit into the nostrils of Adam, giving him life. He promised redemption and life to his fallen creation through the Descendant of a woman. He rescued his people out of slavery and pledged himself to be their Redeemer, their Savior, their God, and their Lord. He promised the coming one, the Anointed One, who would make all nations his inheritance. If we would actually listen to Moses, then we would not only learn not to rely on our sinful, unworthy works, which can't meet up to the law of love. We would also learn to turn to God's love revealed for us in the anointed Redeemer.

Instead of using God's Word for our own selfish causes to get ahead in life, we should listen to what he actually has to teach us. Yes, God's law has many commandments. But pay attention to the context in which these commandments are given. All of the words of Moses and the prophets point to the Anointed One. The Hebrew term for Anointed is Messiah. The Greek term for Anointed is Christ. The Christ is he who was coming to judge the earth, to give light to those in the darkness of unbelief, to purify people of their sins, and to reconcile sinners back to the righteous God. When we consider the commandments of God, then we should consider the one who fulfilled all of these commandments. All the teachings of Moses point to him. He is the one who perfectly loved God with his entire being and his neighbor as himself. He is the one who will raise up all flesh and give eternal life to all who take refuge in him.

So after Jesus sets the record straight about what the law of God requires, he returns to the main subject. He returns to what he talked about with the Sadducees. He returns to the topic of him who is the resurrection and the life. So Jesus says to the Pharisees, "What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?"

What do you think about the Christ? This gets to the heart of the Scriptures. If you aren't concerned about this, then none of your biblical knowledge amounts to anything. Jesus asks them whose son the Christ is. The Pharisees know the answer, at least part of it. They say that he is David's son. This is what the prophet Nathan told David. One of his sons would build an everlasting temple and establish his kingdom forever (2 Sam 7). In Psalm 89, God says, "I have sworn to My servant David: 'Your seed I will establish forever, and build up your throne to all generations.'" They know that the Anointed One is David's Son. But they are treating this Anointed One as simply a political figure, one who would help them win their battles here on earth. So Jesus challenges them to consider what David himself writes. By the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, David writes in Psalm 110, "The LORD said to my Lord, 'Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet.'"

How can David call his son his Lord? Who is this Son of David? The Pharisees can't answer. They can't answer, because Jesus has done what they wouldn't allow the law to do. He was forcing them to face God. This Anointed One, whom they proudly claim as their own, is not their political figurehead. He isn't their candidate. He isn't some important guy they can set up to represent their selfish thirst for power while they ignore their poor neighbors in need of their love. No, he is God himself. He is the Lord.

And this Lord Christ, this Anointed God of heaven and earth, came down to earth to save the poor, the humble, the broken down, and the loveless. This Anointed One, this Messiah, this Christ, this Son of David, is God himself, the very Lord and Maker of David. Psalm 45 sings:

Your throne, O God, is forever and ever;
A scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your kingdom.
You love righteousness and hate wickedness;
Therefore God, Your God, has anointed You
With the oil of gladness more than Your companions.

Isaiah records the words of this Christ:

The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me,
Because the Lord has anointed Me
To preach good tidings to the poor;
He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted,
To proclaim liberty to the captives,
And the opening of the prison to those who are bound . . . (Is 61:1)

Christ has come to fulfill the love of God. He loved God with everything he had, shedding his blood for you, his neighbor, whom he loved as his own flesh and blood. And risen from the dead, this Christ, our God and our Lord, declares to us this eternal life. This is what the entire Bible is about. This is the end and fulfillment of the law.

So when you listen to the Bible, listen to what the Bible has to teach you. Don't get caught up in simply trying to prove yourself right. Because you might end up fighting against those who are defending the truth, and you will easily lose sight of Christ, who is the way, the truth, and the life. It's good for us to learn the law of God, to strive, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to love him with our whole hearts. It's good to learn how to live with one another in peace, to be humble toward one another as we know that we are not worthy of any of God's grace. God's Word has a lot to teach us.

But by God's grace, may we never lose focus on the main topic. Jesus Christ, God in the flesh, has earned for us poor sinners forgiveness of sins, righteousness, and eternal life. He has shown us grace and made us holy by the anointing of his own eternal Spirit in our baptism. And by his precious Word, this same Spirit of God will strengthen us until the day of the appearing of Christ our Savior. Amen.