

**SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS**  
**Commentary by Michael Sigler**  
**April 18, 2010**

**Connecting in Community**

**Matthew 22:34-40**

**Key verse: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind” (Matthew 22:34-40)**

It was the first day of training camp for pro football’s Green Bay Packers. Their legendary coach, Vince Lombardi, addressed the team. Lombardi reportedly held a football up for all the team to see. After several moments of silence, the coach said, simply but pointedly: “Gentlemen, this is a football.”

Sometimes the best thing we can do is to get back to basics, make sure we are handling the fundamentals well. It is true in life as well as in football.

One day a Pharisee asked Jesus, in effect, “Is there a way to sum up in a few words how we should live our lives in relation to God?” Specifically, what the Pharisee asked Jesus was this: “Which commandment in the law is the greatest?” (v. 36). The scribes of Jesus’ day said there were 613 laws that a practicing Jew should follow. There was little agreement on how to prioritize all these laws, so knowing how to live by them could be quite a chore. No wonder there was a need to simplify and prioritize these obligations and commands.

Jesus gave a powerful answer. He said: “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’” (vv. 37-39).

If you really want to get down to the basics of life, Jesus taught us, you could break it down like this: *Love God with all that is within you. Love others like you love yourself.* Jesus’ answer actually begins by referencing the Shema from Deuteronomy 6:5, a passage quoted at least twice daily by faithful Jews. That verse calls us to love God with all that we have and all that we are.

Jesus then referenced a second Old Testament passage, this one from Leviticus 19:18. This second command, to “love your neighbor as yourself,” was not nearly as well known as the first. And Jesus was probably the first person to draw these two passages together in this way. *Love God with all that is within you. Love others like you love yourself.* “The height of our love for God,” said Patrick Morley, “will never exceed the depth of our love for one another.”

***Love God with all that is within you. Love others like you love yourself.*** “On these two commandments,” Jesus added, “hang all the law and the prophets” (v. 40). On these two commandments are based every other principle of God’s law.

I find this teaching of Jesus to be extremely significant. “Boil it all down,” Jesus is saying, “and here are two towering truths to live by. If you miss these two, you miss the whole thing”: ***Love God with all that is within you. Love others like you love yourself.***

To say that these two principles for living are fundamental is not to say that the rest of God’s Word is unimportant. Sometimes people cite this passage in Matthew as if to say, “Just love everyone, and forget all the rest of God’s commandments.” That is not what Jesus meant.

The truth is, if you really love God and love others, you will, with God’s help, keep the Ten Commandments. Real love has *no other gods*, for God (capital G) has first place. If you really love, you won’t *steal* from people. If you really love, you won’t *cheat on your spouse, or murder, or lie about people*. Genuine love will motivate us to obey God and follow God’s ways.

Another thing about this important passage: simplifying God’s design for living doesn’t make it easy. To truly live this way—*loving God with all that is within you and loving others like you love yourself*—requires your very best and even more. It requires you to surrender to a power beyond yourself, the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Great truths are often remembered and mastered with *visual aids*. When I think of this teaching of Jesus, I am reminded of the central image of our faith, the cross of Christ. Someone has noted this about the cross: The vertical beam of the cross can represent love for God. The horizontal beam of the cross can represent love for others. Here then is the cross point, the center point of our faith: ***Love God with all that is within you. Love others like you love yourself.***

If you miss these two, you miss the whole thing. If, by God’s grace, you embrace these two great life principles, you will know the “abundant life” that Jesus came to give.

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