TITLE: The Great Commandment!

TEXT: Ex. 20:3-17; Mt. 22:34-40; Ro. 13:9-10;

 LK. 10:29-37; 2nd Co. 12:20-21; James 3:5-8 & 5:16;

 Ro. 1:28-32; Mt. 12:36-37

INTRODUCTION: After God had delivered the Israelites from the hard bondage and slavery of the Egyptians and led His chosen people out of Egypt, God gave them His law. While on the mountain, alone with God, God gave Moses the Ten Commandments.

**Ex. 20:3 -17 (NIV)
3“You shall have no other gods before me.**

**4“You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below.**

**7“You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God. 8“Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.**

**12“Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you.**

**13“You shall not murder.**

**14“You shall not commit adultery.**

**15“You shall not steal.**

**16“You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.**

**17“You shall not covet your neighbor’s house. You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.”**

In these 10 commandments the first 4 deal with man’s relationship with God and the last 6 deal with man’s relationship with one another.

These 10 commandments encompass the whole law of God to mankind.

 It is out of these 10 commandments that the law is further broken down into over 650 specific laws that stem from these 10 commandments…

The books of Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy are all books of the law.

 All the individual laws that are found in these books find their roots in the 10 commandments that God gave Moses on the mountain.

This morning I want to talk about the Greatest Commandment.

Jesus was good at getting right to the point,

cutting right to the meat of the matter.

And in teaching about the law Jesus condensed the entirety of the Mosaic Law, not just the 10 commandments, but all of the over 650 branches of the Mosaic Law, into two specific commands.

 Two specific laws that we call the Great Commandment.

**Matt. 22:34 -40 (NIV)
34Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. 35One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: 36“Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?”**

Ok, here we have a Pharisee who is an expert in Mosaic Law. He would probably be the equivalent to one of our Supreme Court Justices today. He comes to Jesus who has just silenced the opposing religious/political sect of the Jews, the Sadducees, with His wisdom and divine insight… And in all his legal expertise this Pharisee, in trying to trip up Jesus, asks him a question about the law of which he is a supposed expert….

He asks Jesus… **Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?”**

Normally this would be thought to be a subjective question. Subject to the given circumstances or any given person’s opinion.

What if someone would ask you or me the same question with regards to our laws today? What may be the greatest law to me might not be the greatest law to you and what might be the greatest law to me today might not be the greatest law to me tomorrow.

I have been robbed at gunpoint so to me the greatest law might be the laws against armed robbery.

 You may have never been robbed so that particular law might not be that important to you but maybe you have been cheated by a dishonest company and laws that deal with consumer fraud may be of most importance to you.

I may have a friend or loved one who gets killed by a drunk driver and my view of what the most important laws are may change from armed robbery to laws against driving while under the influence of alcohol or drugs..…

No one’s answer is necessarily wrong because the question can be taken as subjective. Subject to the circumstances or the situation.

Jesus does not give a subjective answer to the question he is being asked but he gives an objective answer.

Subjective truth can change with the circumstances.

Objective truth is true regardless of the circumstances. Objective truth is true in any matter under consideration.

 Jesus always spoke objective truth.

**Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?”**

**37Jesus replied: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ 38This is the first and greatest commandment. 39And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’40All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”**

 What makes Jesus answer objective rather than subjective?

Because in the answer Jesus gives, He sums up the entirety of the Law.

Jesus is saying that the entirety of the law is wrapped up in just two points. Keep, obey these two points and you will be keeping the law in its entirety.

**Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ And**

**‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”**

How so?

Well, if we love the Lord our God with all of our heart, mind and soul then we won’t break any of the commands that deal with our relationship with God.

 And if we truly love our neighbor as ourselves then we won’t break any of the laws that deal with our relationship with our fellow man.

 And that is what the entirety of the law deals with.

Our relationship with God and our relationship with one another.

 If we truly love the Lord our God with all of our heart and with all of our mind and with all of our soul then we will not…have any other gods before the Lord our God!

 We will not make for ourselves an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below.

“We will not misuse the name of the Lord our God!

“We will Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.

 And if we truly love our neighbor as ourselves...

We will Honor our father and mother.

 We will not murder.

We will not commit adultery.

We will not steal.

We will not give false testimony against our neighbor.

We will not covet our neighbor’s wife, house or anything else that belongs to him.

And if we don’t sin against God and we don’t sin against our fellow man then we keep the entirely of Gods law! We keep all of it!

 That is why what Jesus said is objective truth not subjective truth.

**Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ And ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’**

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

Paul says in: **Rom. 13:9 -10 (NIV)
9The commandments, “Do not commit adultery,” “Do not murder,” “Do not steal,” “Do not covet,” and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” 10Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.**

I think all of us have a good understanding of what it means to love the Lord our God with all of our heart, mind, soul and strength.

That is what the Lordship of Jesus Christ is all about. Our giving our all to Him who gave His all for us.

What many of us may have trouble with at times is the second part of what Jesus called the great command… To love our neighbor as ourselves.

When Jesus gave this command the expert in the law asked a question…

**Luke 10:29 (NIV)
29But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”**

 If we are to love our neighbor as ourselves then this is a very pertinent and important question, isn’t it?

Who is our neighbor?

The answer is in the definition of the word neighbor itself..

***play-see'-on***

 ***near*, *close* by; as noun,
a *neighbor*, that is, *fellow* man, countryman.**

A neighbor is anyone who is close by or near.

 Jesus illustrates this to the Pharisee who asked him the question “who is my neighbor” with a parable..

**Luke 10:30 -37 (NIV)
30In reply Jesus said: “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers.**

**They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. 31A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. 32So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. 33But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. 34He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him. 35The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him,’ he said, ‘and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.’**

**36“Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?”**

**37The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.”**

**Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”**

The man traveling between Jericho, which was a Jewish settlement, and Jerusalem was most likely a Jew.

 The priest and Levite who saw the man lying there but passed on by where also both Jews….

Samaritans were natural enemies of the Jews.

The Jews looked down on the Samaritan as less then second class citizens. They actually viewed them as sub-human. Thought of them of having no more value than a dog or cat. Samaritans were despised by most Jews.

Yet, it was a Samaritan who was a neighbor to this Jew who had been beaten and robbed and left for dead. It was only the Samaritan who stopped and helped.

Who is my neighbor, the Pharisee asked? Jesus response…Whoever you come into contact with regardless of who they may be.

Whoever is close to you, whoever you are near at any given moment.

 And you are to love your neighbor as yourself if you want to fulfill the law and command of God.

Think of the person that you despise the most. Despise is a pretty harsh word for a Christian to use so think of a person whom you don’t really like. Think of a person that may have offended or wronged you in some way.

Then realize that this is the neighbor that Jesus was talking about when He said…Love your neighbor as yourself.

Yet how often do we despise and hate our neighbor by our actions.

Wrong our neighbor by what we do or what we say.

I think the sins that are most prevalent within the Church today are sins of the tongue, sins such as slander and gossip.

Did you realize that things such as slanderous speech and gossip are sin? Talking negatively behind someone’s back or breaking a confidence given you is sin against God.

**2 Cor. 12:20 -21 (NIV)
20For I am afraid that when I come I may not find you as I want you to be, and you may not find me as you want me to be. I fear that there may be quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, factions, slander, gossip, arrogance and disorder. 21I am afraid that when I come again my God will humble me before you, and I will be grieved over many who have sinned earlier and have not repented of the impurity, sexual sin and debauchery in which they have indulged.**

 What is the impurity and debauchery here that Paul describes as sin?

**Quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, factions, slander, gossip, arrogance and disorder!**

 Slander and Gossip are here listed as sin.

 These are two separate and specific words in Greek.

Slander…***kat-al-al-ee'-ah***

***defamation:*—backbiting, evil speaking.**

*Gossip...* ***psith-oo-ris-mos'***

***a* secret *detraction:*—a whispering.**

Gossip and slander are usually done in union…

Defaming or Evil speech about someone done in a whisper or behind their back.

 Possibly it is James who has the best handle on sins such as slander and gossip, sins of the tongue.

**James 3:5 -8 (NIV)
5Likewise the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark.**

**6The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell.**

**7All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and creatures of the sea are being tamed and have been tamed by man, 8but no man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.**

**5Likewise the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark.**

Example: Many forest fires out west that have consumed hundreds of thousands of acres of timber have been started by the small spark of a cigarette or a small spark from a campfire.

For how many months did we experience air filled smoke for Canadian Forest fires that raged most all summer this year.

**Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark.**

Scripture says…

**6The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell.**

God is never the author of Gossip. Things such as gossip and slander originate in hell, the dominion of Satan.

 The gossips tongue is described as: **a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell.**

**It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.**

And what is ironic is that it is most probably the most prevalent sin within the body of Christ, within the Church.

 The story is told of three pastors who went fishing together in the northern wilderness of Canada.

 While they were there, they became quite cordial with one another and began to talk about their innermost thoughts. One confessed that he had been guilty of certain sins. He named them, and then he urged the other two to confess their weaknesses.

 The second pastor confessed that he too, had certain weaknesses and recounted them in detail.

 The third pastor remained silent for a long time. Finally when pressed by his fellow elders to reveal his weaknesses, he said, "Brethren, I don't think you want to know my weaknesses, but since you insist, I am going to tell you. I just love to gossip, and I can hardly wait to get home."

Morgan Blake, a sportswriter for the Atlanta Journal once wrote….

 *I am more deadly than the screaming shell of the cannon. I win without killing. I tear down homes, break hearts and wreck lives. I travel on the wings of the wind. No innocence is strong enough to intimidate me, no purity pure enough to daunt me. I have no regard for truth, no respect for justice, no mercy for the defenseless. My victims are as numerous as the sands of the sea and often as innocent. I never forget and seldom forgive. My name is Gossip.*

 Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen…

 *We need more transparency in the church, not fear of it. It's difficult for men and women alike to be transparent in an evangelical church. You put something on the prayer chain, and you never know when your next door neighbor is going to be talking about it.*

 One of the biggest problems that we face within the body of Christ, I believe, is gossip.

 Not having the confidence that if we share something with someone within the Church body that it will go no further…

 All that it takes is to get burned once by having a shared confidence broken by loose lips and we become very reluctant to make ourselves vulnerable again..

**James 5:16 (NIV)
16Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.**

We are admonished here to confess our sins to one another because it is a part of our spiritual healing process, but often that doesn’t happen because of our fear that what we might share with someone will end up on the front page of the Church newsletter or make it on the prayer chain.

 And that is sad. Especially within the body of Christ.

 Church, if someone opens themselves up to us as a brother or sister in Christ and shares something with us and doesn’t explicitly tell us that it can be shared with someone else then we need to keep it to ourselves!

 We need to respect them enough to not repeat it no matter how juicy the information may be.

A old Hebrew proverb:

*Slander and gossip slays three persons: the speaker, the spoken to, and the spoken of.*

True story…At a flower shop in rural West Virginia, A town called Campbell's Creek, the owner is a 41 year old man named Bill,. A while back Bill lost a lot of weight and whispers started around town that he had AIDS. And then there was some graffiti and there were threats, he was labeled a queer, a carrier of AIDS. Customers that he had known for 20 years stopped coming to his store. One long time woman customer drove up and stopped and threw her check inside the flower shop door and then she returned hastily to her car and drove away.

 Well, that did it. Bill gave up the diet with which he'd purposely been losing weight. He got himself blood-tested for AIDS and proved that he does not have the virus. He posted the medical report on the window of his shop, but the whispers persisted. West Virginia Attorney General says shame on the cruel people of Campbell's Creek, but still the whispers persisted. Now Bill’s delivery van has been trashed, his windows have been smashed, his business is depleted. Bill does not have AIDS, but none the less he has been destroyed by the contagious ignorance of gossip.

**Rom. 1:28 -32 (NIV)**

**28Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done. 29They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, 30slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; 31they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless. 32Although they know God’s righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.**

**32Although they know God’s righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death,** (gossip and slander being among this list of things that deserve death) **they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.**

Church, we have been called and commanded to love the Lord our God with all of our heart, mind, soul and strength and to love our neighbor as ourself..

In doing so we fulfill the entirety of Gods law.

 There is no love to be found in slanderous speech or gossip.

Jesus says some pretty challenging and even frightening words in:

**Matt. 12:36 -:37 (NIV)
36But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken. 37For by your words you will be acquitted and by your words you will be condemned.”**

 On that day when we stand before the Lord and have to give an account for every careless word that we have spoken-- will those words acquit us or condemn us?

This morning, do you love the Lord with all of your heart, mind, soul and strength and do you love your neighbor as yourself?

 Do the very words that we speak and the words we refuse to speak bear testimony of our love for the Lord and our love for our neighbor?