

Sermon Notes: 1st Sunday @ All Saints
Matthew 22:34-46 “Carbon Copy Answer”

Jesus usually gave very succinct answers when people came to Him with questions, whether the questions came from friends or foes. But short and pointed as His answers were, He often told His questioners more than they wanted to know.

Earlier on the Pharisees were directing questions to Him. Unfortunately, their questions were not for purposes of information or for guidance in life decisions; their only goal was to see if they could somehow trip up Jesus so they could discredit Him.

They tried a question they thought would get Jesus in trouble with the Roman government, but Jesus handled it skillfully; it was about paying taxes. Then the Sadducees asked a religious question about heaven; interesting because they didn't believe in heaven.

Now a lawyer offers a question. Lawyers in Jesus' day, in Israel, were by definition theologians, because the law of Israel was the Law of Moses, the teachings of the Torah, the first 5 books of what we call the Old Testament.

The question is so straightforward that it's hard to tell whether the lawyer is really trying to put Jesus on the spot or whether he is simply taken with Jesus' answers. "... which commandment is the greatest?"

It seems to me that the lawyer is going beyond the Ten Commandments. It is almost as if the lawyer is saying, "What's the purpose and goal of life? Give me the story in a nutshell."

I think this man really wants to get to the heart of the matter. I think that he's tired of the minute details of the law that simply seeks to win cases or to cloud issues. He wants to know what the law is all about.

Jesus' answer is as straightforward as the lawyer's question, "'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." I think that if Jesus had stopped there, the lawyer might have said, "I agree with you and ..."

Any truly devout person would conclude that the beginning point is an all-out, all-consuming love for God and thus doing the will of God. Love God with all your being.

But Jesus doesn't stop here. He adds, "'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these 2 commandments hang all the law and the prophets." (Deuteronomy 6:4) But the 2nd words Jesus spoke, about loving our neighbor as we love ourselves, appears in Leviticus 19:18. In our English translations, it is only the latter part of a verse. You might easily skip over it.

But Jesus lifted it out of near-obscurity and makes it part of the keystone of the Law: Everything in the law and the prophets, Jesus said — that is, everything in the Hebrew scriptures — hangs on these 2 statements.

After reciting the first statement and saying, "This is the greatest and first commandment," He continued, "And the 2nd is like it." He didn't say, "This is an addition to the first" or that it is a sub-section. No, this "2nd" is like the first. That is, it's a kind of duplicate — "a carbon copy."

What in the world does that mean? Well, for one thing, these 2 commandments are equally significant before God. In a way, that's a bit of a shock. There's a duplicate here, a commandment that is equally crucial. All of which is to say that we can't pick and choose between these 2 commandments.

Jesus said, "You can't separate these 2. The one is just like the other. You can't have one without the other. They are carbon copies." To omit one or the other is to deny what we are: human beings.

There are 2 commandments and the one is 'like' the other." What God has joined together we dare not put asunder.