The Greatest Commands

Throughout the Gospel accounts the Pharisees and Sadducees are constantly trying to “trip” Jesus up. They want so desperately to ask a question or present an idea that will cause problems for Him. Every time that they resort to these tactics it always ends up that they are the ones who are proven to be hypocrites. In Matthew 22:34-40 Jesus is presented with an interesting question. He is asked, “which is the great commandment of the Law?” To fully understand the implications of this question it is important to understand how many of the Jews thought. Most of them understood that no man could perfectly keep the Law of Moses so they had, over time, created what they called “heavy” and “light” laws. They viewed some laws as imperative to keep while other laws really were not that important. Many of them had come to believe that if one man could perfectly keep the most important law that it would be accepted as perfect obedience to all of the laws. Of course, this idea caused lots of controversy because many arguments ensued about what the most important law actually was. Some said that the Sabbath was the most important while others viewed respect to human life as the most important. Still others had their favorites that they felt were most important.

With that idea in mind it makes the question here seem much more important. The lawyer asks Jesus the question hoping to find the answer. (It appears that the individual in this story is sincere. Mark 12:34 shows that Jesus gives Him a very favorable response which would probably indicate that the Pharisees were “using” him, a man with a good heart, to accomplish their purpose.) Jesus responds by saying, “You shall love the Lord your God with all you heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and foremost commandment.” In other words, the most important commandment is to love God fully with all your heart (affections, desire set upon him), with all your soul (your spiritual nature), and mind (intellect). This encompasses the entire being. Do you love God with your entire being? It is also interesting to note that the first 4 of the 10 commandments are summarized in this statement. This is man’s duty to God. Next, Jesus says that the second greatest commandment is like the first. He says, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” This commandment encompasses the last 6 of the 10 commandments. This is man’s duty to his fellow man.

So what is Jesus ultimately saying? He is saying that no one section or clause is more important than the other. To follow the law you have to follow ALL OF THE LAW!!! I’m afraid this idea still stumps many Christians today. We want to make sure we don’t commit the “big sins’ (murder, adultery, stealing, etc.) while not worrying about the “smaller sins” that can be just as damaging. We as Christians have to realize that following God’s law is all encompassing. We can’t follow the parts that are easy and leave behind the parts that are hard. Christianity is all or nothing. Are you 100% committed? Ryan D.