

The Attackers: Strategy of the Pharisees to Trap Jesus into Choosing One of the Ten Commandments as the “Greatest”; the Lord Ignored the Decalogue & First Emphasized Developing Personal Love or God Followed by Unconditional Love for Mankind, Mt 22:37–40; Judgment of Others Forbidden, Mt 7:1–2; Immediate Resolution of Conflict Commanded, Eph 4:26–32

**Matthew 22:37** - And He said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind’ [ Deuteronomy 6:5, the introduction to the *Shema*’ (שמע) ].

**v. 38** - “This is the great and foremost commandment.

**v. 39** - “The second is like it, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’ [ Leviticus 19:18b ].

**v. 40** - “On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.”

1. The Pharisees and the scribes have been following the Lord with the intent of finding Him in some violation of the Mosaic Law or the oral law.
2. The question is part of an agreed upon strategy to force the Lord into isolating one of the ten commandments as the greatest and countering His claim with an argument that would indicate a flaw in His logic.
3. The Lord in His wisdom did not fall into their trap but rather went to the revered שמע (*Shema*'), the most important daily prayer of the synagogues which proclaims the unity and sovereignty of God.<sup>1</sup>
4. The love demanded by the Hebrew verb אהב (*'ahav*), translated primarily in the Septuagint by the Greek verb ἀγαπάω (*agapaō*), is personal emphasizing the perfection of the object, God the Father.
5. The love to be exhibited is internal and intrinsic to the individual believer. It encompasses his entire person.

<sup>1</sup> Naomi Ben-Asher and Haim Leaf, eds., *The Junior Jewish Encyclopaedia*, 14th rev. ed. (New York: Shengold Publishers, 1996), 255.

6. The emphasis is on the heart, or the stream of consciousness, the soul with its two compartments, and the mind which is the thinking of the individual.
6. The mandate is to love God and to do that first. The Pharisees and scribes had no relationship with God and therefore could not fulfill the central requirement of the Shema which is to love Him.
7. If they were unable to love God, then all their meticulous efforts associated with the oral law were nothing more than human good that had metastasized into evil.
8. The second commandment that follows is from Leviticus 19:18*b* which requires one to love his fellowman in the same way he loves himself.
9. It is not arrogant to love oneself. This kind of love has nothing to do with anything sexual or narcissistic. The concept is to accept yourself as you are unconditionally. Those who love themselves conditionally must assume perfection and therefore become not only extremely self-centered and self-assured but blind to their shortcomings.
10. Personal love for self is reflected by becoming highly critical of others and an inability to confront one's own failures.
11. Love for self that is unconditional results in a person who is comfortable in his own skin. He understands his limitations and is focused on improvement by means of truth and doctrine, not by relentless efforts to achieve perfection characterized by legalism and works.
12. Judgment of others is forbidden by the Lord in Matthew 7:1-2. One is able to discern the character of others by examining their behavior through the prism of doctrine.

13. However, to draw conclusions without any proof is conjecture which is the same as judging. The sins and wrongdoings assigned to the person result in their imputation to the one who judges followed by discipline that would have been assigned to the alleged culprit.
14. Therefore, the best policy is to love others unconditionally. Most errant behaviors should be ignored and left in the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court of Heaven.
15. Those that require personal involvement should be managed according to Paul's directives in:

**Ephesians 4:26** - Although you may have become impulsively angry, in spite of that, stop sinning impulsively before it leads to chronic sinning. The sun must not set on your angry mood,

**v. 27** - and stop giving the devil a chance to exert his influence.

**v. 31** - All bitterness, both operational anger and motivational anger, both brawling and slander, must be removed from all of you along with all evil.

**v. 32** - Become kind, performing gracious acts toward each other, and compassionate, and keep forgiving each other just as God also by means of Christ has forgiven you.<sup>2</sup>

16. The ability to apply these sophisticated levels of problem-solving is made possible by what Paul refers to in Romans 6:4 as "newness of life."

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<sup>2</sup> For a detailed analysis of this passage consult: Joe Griffin, *Shreveport Bible Conference: From Impulsive Anger to Gracious Acts* (St. Charles, MO: Joe Griffin Media Ministries, 1998), MP3 audio disk.