

## STUDY GUIDE

**PLEASANT RIDGE BAPTIST CHURCH**  
**BUILDING HIS CHURCH**  
**THE GREAT COMMANDMENTS**  
**MATTHEW 22:34-38**  
01/14/2018



### MAIN POINT

Following Jesus well leads to loving others well.

### INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

**Have you ever written out a priority list for your family? If so, what's on it?**

**Why is it important for a family to clearly understand these priorities? What happens if they don't?**

**What about the Church? Why would it be important for God's people to understand their priorities?**

Jesus made our priorities clear. We are to be , above all else, people who love. As we seek to love God with everything in our lives, we will learn to love other like Him. Following Jesus well will lead to loving others well.

### UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

**ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ MATTHEW 22:34-38.**

In Matthew 22, the Pharisees approached Jesus with a question meant to test and trap Him. In His response, Jesus gave us what is known as the Great Commandment, the teaching upon which all of the Law and the Prophets depend.

**Based on what you know about the Jewish laws of the Old Testament, how do you think the Pharisee expected Jesus to respond to his question?**

**What surprises you about Jesus' response to the Pharisee?**

The Pharisees expected Jesus to fold under the weight of all the 613 commands in the Law. Instead of buckling under the pressure, Jesus responded immediately by identifying the most important law. Part of His answer comes from the passage in Deuteronomy known as the Shema, which means "hear" or "listen" (see Deut. 6:4-9). These verses served as part of a general confession of faith offered by devout Jewish males every morning and evening.

**Read Deuteronomy 6:4-5, the original law Jesus cited as the greatest commandment. Why was it important for the Israelites to proclaim the Oneness of God?**

**How was the religious climate of Israel different from the religious climate of our community today? In what ways might it be similar?**

The Shema begins, “Hear, O Israel! The LORD our God, the LORD is One!” It emphasizes the united, undivided nature of God. Since God is unique, no other being exists like Him. This fact stands as the foundation for Jewish belief in one God (monotheism).

**What makes loving God the greatest command?**

**The Great Commandment emphasizes loving God with all your heart, soul, and might. What do each of those aspects of a person’s being represent?**

God’s united, undivided nature (see Deut. 6:4) demands the full allegiance of those who claim Him as their God. Love for God rises as a response to His gracious love for people demonstrated in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Our love for God is to be unconditional and undivided in the way that He and His love for us is unconditional and undivided. This love is to extend from all our heart, soul, and might. The Jews believed human thoughts originate in the heart. From the soul came a person’s will and feelings. The might represented a person’s physical nature. Combined, these words highlight the requirement to love God with all our being—emotion, spirit, and body.

**Why do you think loving God comes before loving others?**

**What does it look like in practical terms to love God with your heart, soul, and might?**

Making God the supreme priority of our lives requires constant attention to Him. As we involve ourselves in day-to-day living, our commitment to God above all else should guide our thoughts and actions. But when asked what the greatest commandment is, Jesus added a second commandment to the first one. The two cannot be separated from each other. We can’t love others well if we don’t love God well.

**ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ MATTHEW 22:39-40.**

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Again, Jesus took a command from the Old Testament, this time from Leviticus 19:18, “Do not take revenge or bear a grudge against members of your community, but love your neighbor as yourself; I am Yahweh.”

**Who would Jesus say is your “neighbor”?**

**What does it mean to love another person “as yourself”?**

“The second is like it” is a profound statement that shows the two commands are intrinsically tied together—if people love God then they will love those whom God loves. The way people interact with God affects how they interact with others.

Jesus redefined the Jewish concept of “neighbor.” To the Jews, a neighbor was another Jew to the exclusion of non-Jewish people. Jesus, however, with the parable of the good Samaritan (see Luke 10:25-37), expanded on that definition. According to Jesus, a neighbor was anyone who needed help. Jesus added that a believer should love others as themselves. Certainly Jesus never promoted an egocentric self-love. However, people do watch out for themselves. Love for others should equal or exceed concern one has for oneself.

**Why are each of these commands foundational to the life of a Christ follower? What happens if you choose to obey one but not the other?**

**What actions and attitudes make it evident that people love their neighbors as themselves?**

## APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

**Why do you think love is such a defining mark of the Christian? Do we tend to think of love as the primary mark of the Christian life? If not, what do we think of as that mark? Why?**

**What most frequently stands in the way of you truly loving others? What are some tangible expressions of this kind of love you might practice this week: At your workplace? In your home? With your friends?**

**Is there someone in your life who you need to extend forgiveness to as a means of growing in Christ? What are some of the difficulties of doing so?**

## PRAY

Thank God for the love He's shown us in sending Jesus to die for us. Pray that He would help us to love well, as we are called to do—to love Him with our whole being, and to love others as ourselves. Pray that we'd see the needs of our neighbors, wherever they are and we'd be moved to act.

## COMMENTARY

### MATTHEW 22:36-40

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Stuart K. Weber, *Matthew*, vol. 1, *Holman New Testament Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000), 358.

22:34–36. The Pharisees had regrouped after Jesus turned their first trap against them in 22:15–22. Seeing the same thing happen to the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together, seeking power and courage in numbers. The one expert in the law whom they chose to ask the testing question must have approached Jesus with some trepidation. For the third time in three challenges, the questioner addressed Jesus as Teacher.

This time the question was simple but profound: Which is the greatest commandment in the Law? Matthew used the simple adjective “great” (*megas*), but it carried superlative force (“greatest”) in this context. The question demonstrated the way the religious leaders looked at the law. In their tradition, they had reduced the law to 365 negative and 248 positive commandments. They spent much time trying to prioritize these innumerable technicalities. They thought they could trap the Lord of the law.

22:37–38. Jesus drew his answer from the most memorized and recited passage in all the Jewish Scriptures: Hear, O Israel! The LORD our God the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength” (Deut. 6:4–5).

Jesus quoted the Septuagint almost verbatim, but he substituted *mind* (*dianoia*) for the similar sounding “might” (*dunameos*). We are to take this list as an emphatic way of saying, “Love God with everything you are in every way possible.” But it was not without significance that our Lord deliberately substituted “mind” here rather than some other term. Christians need to take a lesson from this. We should learn to think critically and biblically.

Jesus emphasized his answer by identifying this commandment as the first and greatest commandment. This commandment was greatest because of the statement in Deuteronomy 6:4 which preceded it: “Yahweh is your God, Yahweh alone” (paraphrased). To honor Yahweh as the one true God is to love him exclusively, from among all others who claim to be gods.

22:39. But Jesus went beyond the critics question and added a second command, which is like (*homoios*, “resembling”) the first, this time drawing from Leviticus 19:18 (cf. Matt. 19:19): love your neighbor as yourself. This commandment and

the first complement each other, so Jesus mentioned them together. They are not to be separated. It is impossible to love God without loving people, for his law and heart's desire is to love others. The measure by which we know if we are truly loving people is if we love them as much as we love ourselves (cf. Eph. 5:28–31).

22:40. Finally, Jesus defended his choice of these two commandments by observing that all the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments (or “depends” on them). Every Old Testament commandment and teaching fulfilled the commands to love God and to love people.

**Craig Blomberg, Matthew, vol. 22, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 334–336.**

22:34–36 The Pharisees regroup after their defeat in vv. 15–22 to initiate the next round of questioning. Before, they simply sent their disciples; now they come themselves. One, a nomikos (lawyer, “expert in the Law,” avoids reading in anachronistic impressions of the occupation), again tries to trap Jesus. His question seems innocent enough but reflects an intra-Jewish debate on how to rank and/or summarize all of the scriptural commandments and on whether such ranking is in fact possible at all (cf., e.g., m. Hag. 1:8; b. Ber. 63a; Mek. 6). Moreover, given Jesus’ radical views on the law, an open-ended question such as this would surely elicit some remark by which Jesus would indict himself.

22:37–40 This is the first of the controversy stories in which Jesus gives a straight answer to the question, one with which many in his audience would have agreed, and does not rebuke his interrogators either implicitly or explicitly. He quotes Deut 6:5, replacing “strength” with “understanding.” Neither form of the text implies a compartmentalization of the human psyche. Rather, both refer to wholehearted devotion to God with every aspect of one’s being, from whatever angle one chooses to consider it—emotionally, volitionally, or cognitively. This kind of “love” for God will then result in obedience to all he has commanded (cf. Deut 6:1–3, 6–9).

Going beyond the original question, Jesus adds a second commandment that is also foundational—Lev 19:18. “The second is like it” probably means that this commandment is of equal importance. Jewish interpreters had long recognized the preeminent value of each of these laws; Jesus apparently was the first to fuse the two and to exalt them above the whole law (though Philo, Spec. Leg. 2:15, comes close to doing this). Divine love issues in interpersonal love. “As yourself” is not a call to self-love but does presuppose it. These two commandments are the greatest because all others flow from them; indeed the whole Old Testament “hangs” on them. In other words, all other commandments are summed up and/or contained in these. Verse 40 is unique to Matthew and reminds one of the concerns of 5:17 and 7:12. Matthew omits Jesus’ relatively positive interchange with this lawyer following his answer (Mark 12:32–34), in keeping with his unrelenting focus on the hostility against Christ. But the Pharisees could scarcely object to Jesus’ reply, even if he elsewhere defines neighbor love much more radically than was customary in Judaism (Luke 10:25–37).

The relationship of all the Old Testament to the double love commandment shows that there is a hierarchy of law that above all requires one’s heart attitude to be correct. If this is absent, obedience to commandments degenerates into mere legalism. Combining Jesus’ teaching here with his approach to the law, as, e.g., in the Sermon on the Mount, demonstrates that while the principle of love remains constant, applications vary for different circumstances. Nevertheless, Jesus’ words also strongly differentiate him from situation ethicists. Love does make specific moral demands, including certain absolutes. What is more, the proper motivation for correct interpersonal relationships always remains a profound sense of gratitude for what God has done for us in Christ. Jesus’ twofold answer should warn Christians against emphasizing either piety for God or social concern at the expense of the other.