

October 4, 2020

## **"Who do you say that I am?"**

**"Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked them, "Who do people say that I am?" They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets."**

**"But what about you?" he asked, "Who do you say that I am?"**

Mark 8:27-29

Nearly every Jewish child growing up in Jesus' day could have answered the question posed by one of the Teachers of the Law during our Lord's final week. He asked, **"Of the commandments, which is the most important?"**

Jesus answered, **"The most important one is this: '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 mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these.** (Mark 12:29-31)

All of us, I am confident, recognize that these two commandments should and must be at the very center of our faith. If we do not keep these two commandments we literally have no relationship with our Lord. But there is, I think, a reason that the two are so often connected, that many of us fail to fully understand.

To develop a love for God that meets this standard **"...with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength..."** is something that all of us who follow Jesus long to do. Any true believer will long to have an overwhelming and all consuming relationship with God.

For most of us there is, I think, a disconnect in living to keep this first commandment. We long to love our God completely, but how do we live that out in our day-to-day existence? How do we demonstrate our complete love for God in our daily lives?

In John 14, verse 15, Jesus says, **"I you love me, you will obey what I command."** So, the mark of our complete devotion to our God is always going to be found in our obedience. To love God absolutely is to obey God absolutely.

But, we might complain, there are so many commandments. How can we keep them all? And that is why, I am convinced, our Lord tied these two commandments together. I cannot love my God completely, unless and until I learn to love my neighbor as myself. In underlining the importance of learning to love our neighbor Jesus focuses attention on this concept throughout his ministry.



In John 13:34-35 Jesus gives us his **"new"** commandment. He says, **"Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."** In this same context our Lord says, **"If you love me, you will obey what I command."**

So, if we, as those who truly believe, love our God completely we will demonstrate that love through our obedience and most particularly in our obedience to God's commandment to love others as ourselves; to love others as Jesus loves us. Why is loving others such an integral part of this equation? In John's first epistle the Apostle writes, **"If anyone says, 'I love God,' yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen."** (I John 4:20)

I am convinced that in a very real way there is no practical way to demonstrate our overwhelming love for God except through our love for others. For believers, hate is never an option, no matter the cause. My love for others lived out in the way I treat them is the mark of my discipleship. I literally cannot love God without loving my brothers and sisters. Loving as Jesus loved, treating others the way I would like to be treated, loving my neighbor as myself really is the only way I can demonstrate my love for God. So, do you love God? Do I love God? Does it show? Does the world know?

