

Can diametrically opposed sides find common ground? I thought about going the classic route. You know, the one where I tell a joke about a rabbi, a priest, and a Buddhist monk walking into a bar. But here is a super bowl commercial from 2018 that demonstrates love across boundaries so much better.

[Show Video](#)

Today we finish our series, Do Unto Others. And not a moment too soon with the election looming this week.

Let's one more time remind ourselves of the Golden Rule.

Do Unto Others as we would have them do unto us.

Today we finish with the most important topic of all: love.

But first let me tell you about an article I read not too long ago. Many years ago, Billy Graham ran a daily newspaper column. Someone wrote in a letter to the column. He was complaining about the fact that churches and charities don't pay a cent in taxes. The writer went on to say that he had to "pay until it hurts". Billy Graham's reply?

First, he reminded the writer that if all food banks, homeless shelters, hospitals, community centers, and addiction rehabilitation centers were forced to close, millions of lives would be hurt. Governmental agencies would be forced to fill the gaps and that would be passed down to...the taxpayers. Billy Graham then closed with these words.

No system is perfect, but I urge you not to turn a blind eye to the good done by the vast number of churches and other organizations who are sincerely seeking to serve others. Christians take seriously Jesus' command: "Love your neighbor as yourself".

In our passage today we have the Pharisees who are once again trying to trap Jesus. They failed in the question about resurrection. They failed in the question about taxes, so they turn to their favorite topic, the Law! Jesus is asked to tell them which Commandment is the most important one. Is it just me, or does it feel like this is a loaded question? If it looks like a duck and walks like a duck and acts like a duck.

This question becomes more complex with a better picture of the religious legal landscape of the day. They weren't just referring to the ten commandments. That would be easy. At this point in history, rabbinic teachings have expanded the number of laws to over 600 of them. 365 of them negative and 248 of them positive. Yes, once again, the Pharisees are trying to trap Jesus. And once again Jesus turns the trap on them.

All of the commandments were equal. None was more important than the other. So, Jesus uses this question as an opportunity to point out the fruitlessness of this question.

The Pharisees came up with a lot of unnecessary laws to make certain that Jews kept all of the Commandments. But all of these laws and Commandments could be summed up into two Great Commandments. Jesus takes them back to Deuteronomy 6 and Leviticus 19 in which Moses sums up the Ten Commandments. The first thing Jesus launches at them is a passage that is recited and for many Jews memorized. It's called the Shema. (I was grateful for the correct pronunciation of this from our Jewish/Christian music leader in Show Low). Deuteronomy 6:4-5 and if you know this, please feel free to say it with me. 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.”

Now Jesus does not quote this verbatim. Instead of saying strength or might, he uses the word “mind”. Might Jesus be challenging the Jewish leadership and us to think critically and biblically? Dare anyone challenge Jesus here? He is saying that Yahweh is your God, Yahweh alone! But Jesus doesn't stop there. He goes beyond the question and adds the second commandment, saying it resembles the first. Jesus quotes part of Leviticus 19:18, “Love your

neighbor as yourself”. These are complementary to each other, not to be separated. Because you cannot love God without loving people. I cannot love God without loving people. Say that with me.

Then Jesus does the mic drop by adding...on these two commandments rest all the law and the prophets.

So here is the cliff notes version of what Jesus offers the Pharisees. “Love God, and love people”. Both commandments are related. Both commandments have equal importance. Together, both commandments make up the basics of Christianity.

Love one another as I have loved you. This reminds me of an article I read about a surgeon who removed a tumor from a young woman’s face. Sadly, he had to cut a facial nerve, which left her mouth permanently distorted. The surgeon was amazed by what he saw next.

Her young husband was in the room. He stood on the opposite side of her bed. They seemed to dwell in the evening lamplight. Who are they, the surgeon wondered, this young man and this wry mouth I just made. They gaze at each other and touch each other so generously, so greedily?

The young woman spoke to the surgeon: “Will, Will, will my mouth always be like this?” she asks. “Yes” he said, “it will be. I'm sorry but it's because the nerve was cut.”

She nodded and grew silent. But the young man smiled. “I like it, he said, “It is kind of cute”. All at once the surgeon knew who he was. He understood and lowered his gaze. Instinctively the surgeon knew he was about to encounter God. The young man bent down to kiss her crooked mouth and the surgeon, so close could see how the young husband twisted his own lips to accommodate hers, to show her that their kiss would still work.

That church family is the heart of the great commandment. Loving our neighbor means a willingness to be engaged with it. To have our modern-day building bees where neighbors come together to build barns or houses, to accomplish big tasks. To help each other with harvests or caring for sick neighbors and elderly parents. No matter your religion, no matter your orientation, no matter your politics. Fill in the blank with any other example of loving people as God loved us. (pause a few seconds)

How does God know that we love Him? By how we treat God's people. Whenever we demonstrate kindness, compassion, humility, respect, or love to others, we are putting God's love to work in the universe. Even if the other person has been unkind and doesn't deserve our respectful treatment. It's really quite simple. Love God, Love people. This is how we naturally obey all of the Commandments. If you think about it. These two Great Commandments are basically the Golden Rule.

Church family, it is by our faith in that fact that God loves us that we are able to love ourselves and be grateful for the gift of ourselves. This awareness of life as a gift is what we mean by loving God. When we love ourselves, we are grateful to God, and this gratitude sets us free to love other people. When we truly love people, we value them as gifts of God.

Jesus' teaching isn't just about how we feel about God and neighbor, but what we will do. We are to love God with all our lives, including our work. Doing so restricts our activity to the straight and narrow path that God has created for us to walk on. It is the basis of our obedience to God. It shows that our love for God is number one in our lives. Love for God and love for all of those who are made in his image. That forms the backbone of everything. Love, it is how we honor the greatest commandment. As Paul said in Romans 13:10, "Love is the fulfillment of the law".

Do unto others, church family. Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

Let us pray.