

‘YOU ARE NOT FAR FROM THE KINGDOM OF GOD.’

Joseph finding their 12 year old in the Temple until the beginnings of his ministry when he was about 30. There was so much to learn. We Christians think of the 10 commandments as the basis of Judeo-Christian Theology and morals, but we often forget that there are 603 more commandments in the Law. They range from practical ones about marriage and the family; they include ethics and morals, forbidding, for example, adulteration of cloths by mixing fibers; they consider public charity with commandments such as the requirement of not picking the edges of one’s field so that the poor might harvest the remaining crops.

Jesus would not have stopped with the Biblical requirements. He would have had to both know and also understand the scholarly interpretations of the 613 laws. There had been centuries of discussion. To the Pharisees at least, as well as to some others, Biblical interpretation on the law *was law itself*. Thus, the Pharisee feared that *not* tithing things not required to be tithed, like spices, was a sin.

St. Matthew 23²³⁻²⁴ ‘Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint, dill, and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. It is these you ought to have practiced without neglecting the others. You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel!’

The pious Jew was not content to be ignorant of any of the laws. One can picture Jesus honing his dialectic skills on the question of *Which commandment is the first of all?* and upon hundreds of other bits of Scripture and tradition that comprised the core of rabbinical discussion.

Jesus states that which is the most important: Love God, and love your neighbor as (much as you love) yourself.

Please prepare Saint Mark 12:38-44 for next Sunday.

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Czech Torah Scroll

Manuscript on Parchment, wooden shafts

The Torah is the five books of the Jewish Biblical laws; Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy

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This scroll is one of 1,564 Torah scrolls seized and numbered by the Nazis during World War II that were taken from synagogues in Central Europe. The scrolls were stored in the basement of an abandoned synagogue in Prague causing significant deterioration to their condition. In 1964 after extensive negotiations, the scrolls were transferred to Westminster Synagogue in London under the auspices of the Memorial Scrolls Trust. There the scrolls were renumbered, inspected and classified noting the condition of parchment, writing and other distinguishing features. The scrolls in usable condition were then made available on permanent loan to qualifying synagogues throughout the world. This sacred and historic scroll originally came from the synagogue in Budinye nad Ohri (Budin on the Ohri River) near Terezin, Czechoslovakia. It is now on permanent loan to Temple Emanu-El in Providence, RI.

Today's Gospel Saint Mark 12:28-34

✠ ONE OF THE SCRIBES CAME NEAR AND HEARD THEM DISPUTING with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, he asked him, ‘Which commandment is the first of all?’ Jesus answered, ‘The first is, (1) **“Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, (1a) and with all your strength.”** The second is this, (2) **“You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”** There is no other commandment greater than these.’ Then the scribe said to him, ‘You are right, Teacher; you have truly said that “he is one, and besides him there is no other”; and “to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the

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strength,” and “to love one’s neighbor as oneself,” —this is much more important than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.’ When Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, (3) **‘You are not far from the kingdom of God.’** After that no one dared to ask him any question. [© NRSV]

Source of the Summary of the Law

Jesus’ summary is taken from Deuteronomy 6:4-5. (*and with all your mind*, in italics above in section (1), is omitted. The *mind* passage is often found in other places (but not here) in the **Greek** version of the Jewish Bible)

Jesus begins:

(1) **“Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul.... and with all your strength.”**

To that he adds Leviticus 19:¹⁸

(2) **“You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”**

Jesus’ response (3) to the scribe’s question illuminates the true spirit of Christian morals:

‘You are not far from the kingdom of God.’ .

Why a Summary of the Law?

The rabbis loved debates. One of their favorite topics was trying to determine which of the commandments of the Jewish Law was the greatest one, that is, the most important. The question asked of Jesus is one that any rabbi might expect. One can imagine the young Christ anticipating rabbinic arguments and increasing in wisdom. St. Luke 2:52 outlines his development: Luke says, **And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, in stature, and in divine and human favor.** He pondered the law during the 18 some years from Mary and