

Matthew: 22:34-40

From Catena Aurea:

34. But when the Pharisees had heard that he had put the Sadducees to silence, they were gathered together.

35. Then one of them, which was a Lawyer, asked him a question, tempting him, and saying,

36. Master, which is the great commandment in the Law?

37. Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.

38. This is the first and great commandment.

39. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

40. On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.

JEROME. The Pharisees having been themselves already confuted (in the matter of the denarius), and now seeing their adversaries also overthrown, should have taken warning to attempt no further deceit against Him; but hate and jealousy are the parents of impudence.

ORIGEN. Jesus had put the Sadducees to silence, to shew that the tongue of falsehood is silenced by the brightness of truth. For as it belongs to the righteous man to be silent when it is good to be silent, and to speak when it is good to speak, and not to hold his peace; so it belongs to every teacher of the Not indeed to be silent, but to be silent as far as any good purpose is concerned.

JEROME. The Pharisees and Sadducees, thus foes to one another, unite in one common purpose to tempt Jesus.

ORIGEN. All who thus ask questions of any teacher to try him, and not to learn of him, we must regard as brethren of this Pharisee, according to what is said below, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of mine, ye have done it unto me. (Matt. 25:40.)

AUGUSTINE. (de Cons. Ev. ii. 73.) Let no one find a difficulty in this, that Matthew speaks of this man as putting his question to tempt the Lord, whereas Mark does not mention this, but concludes with what the Lord said to him upon his answering wisely, Thou art not far from the kingdom of God. (Mark 12:34.) For it is possible that, though he came to tempt, yet the Lord's answer may have wrought correction within him. Or, the tempting here meant need not be that of one designing to deceive an enemy, but rather the cautious approach of one making proof of a stranger. And that is not written in vain, Whoso believeth lightly, he is of a vain heart. (Ecclus. 19:4.)

ORIGEN. He said Master tempting Him, for none but a disciple would thus address Christ. Whoever then does not learn of the Word, nor yields himself wholly up to it, yet calls it Master, he is brother to this Pharisee thus tempting Christ. Perhaps while they read the Law before the Saviour's coming, it was a question among them which was the great commandment in it; nor would the Pharisee have asked this, if it had not been long time enquired among themselves, but never found till Jesus came and declared it.

JEROME. Or he enquires not for the sake of the commands, but which is the first and great commandment, that seeing all that God commands is great, he may have occasion to cavil whatever the answer be.

AUGUSTINE. (de Doctr. Christ. i. 22.) Or otherwise; You are commanded to love God with all thy heart, that your whole thoughts—with all thy soul, that your whole life—with all thy mind, that your whole understanding—may be given to Him from whom you have that you give. Thus He has left no part of our life which may justly be unfilled of Him, or give place to the desire after any other final good¹; but if aught else present itself for the soul's love, it should be absorbed into that channel in which the whole current of love runs. For man is then the most perfect when his whole life tends towards the life² unchangeable, and clings to it with the whole purpose of his soul.

GLOSS. Or, with all thy heart, i. e. understanding; with all thy soul, i.e. thy will; with all thy mind, i.e. memory; so you shall think, will, remember nothing contrary to Him.

ORIGEN. Or otherwise; With all thy heart, that is, in all recollection, act, thought; with all thy soul, to be ready, that is, to lay it down for God's religion; with all thy mind, bringing forth nothing but what is of God.

And consider whether you cannot thus take the heart of the understanding, by which we contemplate things intellectual, and the mind of that by which we utter thoughts, walking as it were with the mind through each expression, and uttering it. If the Lord had given no answer to the Pharisee who thus tempted Him, we should have judged that there was no commandment greater than the rest. But when the Lord adds, This is the first and great commandment, we learn how we ought to think of the commandments, that there is a great one, and that there are less down to the least. And the Lord says not only that it is a great, but that it is the first commandment, not in order of Scripture, but in supremacy of value. They only take upon them the greatness and supremacy of this precept, who not only love the Lord their God, but add these three conditions. Nor did He only teach the first and great commandment, but added that there was a second like unto the first, Thou shall love thy neighbour as thyself. But if Whoso loveth iniquity hath hated his own soul, (Ps. 11:5.) it is manifest that he does not love his neighbour as himself, when he does not love himself.

AUGUSTINE. (de Doctr. Christ. i. 30.) It is clear that every man is to be regarded as a neighbour, because evil is to be done to no man. Further, if every one to whom we are bound to shew service of mercy, (vid. Rom. 13:10.) or who is bound to shew it to us, be rightly called our neighbour, it is manifest that in this precept are comprehended the holy Angels who perform for us those services of which we may read in Scripture. Whence also our Lord Himself would be called our neighbour; for it was Himself whom He represents as the good Samaritan, who gave succour to the man who was left half-dead by the way.

AUGUSTINE. (de Trin. viii. 6.) He that loves men ought to love them either because they are righteous, or that they may be righteous; and so also ought he to love himself either for that he is, or that he may be righteous. And thus without peril he may love his neighbour as himself.

AUGUSTINE. (de Doctr. Christ, i. 22.) But if even yourself you ought not to love for your own sake, but because of Him in whom is the rightful end of your love, let not another man be displeased that you love even him for God's sake. Whoso then rightly loves his neighbour, ought to endeavour with him that he also with his whole heart love God.

HILARY. Or otherwise; That the second command is like the first signifies that the obligation and merit of both are alike; for no love of God without Christ, or of Christ without God, can profit to salvation.

It follows, On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.

AUGUSTINE. (Quæst. Ev. i. 33.) Hang, that is, refer thither as their end.

ORIGEN. Or, because he that has fulfilled the things that are written concerning the love of God and our neighbour, is worthy to receive from God the great reward, that he should be enabled to understand the Law and the Prophets.

AUGUSTINE. (de Trin. viii. 7.) Since there are two commandments, the love of God and the love of our neighbour, on which hang the Law and the Prophets, not without reason does Scripture put one for both; sometimes the love of God; as in that, We know that all things work together for good to them that love God; (Rom. 8:28.) and sometimes the love of our neighbour; as in that, All the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this, Thou shall love thy neighbour as thyself. (Gal. 5:14.) And that because if a man love his neighbour, it follows therefrom that he loves God also; for it is the selfsame affection by which we love God, and by which we love our neighbour, save that we love God for Himself, but ourselves and our neighbour for God's sake.

AUGUSTINE. (De Doctr. Christ. i. 30. et 26.) But since the Divine substance is more excellent and higher than our nature, the command to love God is distinct from that to love our neighbour. But if by yourself, you understand your whole self, that is both your soul and your body, and in like manner of your neighbour, there is no sort of things to be loved omitted in these commands. The love of God goes first, and the rule thereof is so set out to us as to make all other loves center in that, so that nothing seems said of loving yourself. But then follows, Thou shall love thy neighbour as thyself, so that love of yourself is not omitted.

From Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture:

22:34 The Sadducees Silenced, the Pharisees Gather

The Motive Is Envy, Not Understanding the Law.

Cyril of Alexandria: After the humiliation of the Sadducees Jesus was highly regarded by the crowds. The Pharisees, filled with envy out of an immeasurable shamelessness, again were testing him, hypocritically asking if he might deliver a ruling concerning the first commandment. By doing so, perhaps Jesus would amend the commandment in a manner that might lead to an accusation against him. Now, Matthew and

Luke call the person who asked the question a lawyer, while Mark calls him a teacher of the law. This does not indicate a disagreement. ¹ For they both represent the questioner as one learned in the law and as a teacher of the law who is an interpreter of the law to the people. But the Lord publicly reveals their evil. They were not coming to have him interpret the law so that they might benefit but because they were seized by envy. So Jesus teaches that one should not measure out one's devotion, loving God in part but also clinging in part to the concerns of this world. Through his teaching Jesus said that his commandment was the summary of all the commandments. The lawyer thought he could cast Jesus into danger as one who makes himself out to be God. Jesus failed to respond in the manner he expected, but he ends up praising Jesus, as Mark says. ² Fragment 251.³

22:35 A Lawyer Asks a Question

Who Can Rightly Call Him Teacher?

Origen: Now let us consider one argument of entrapment: "Teacher," he says, "what is the greater commandment in the law?" He says "teacher" trying to entrap him, since he offers his thoughts not as a disciple of Christ. This however, will be clearer from an example we now offer. Consider: The father of a son is indeed the father, and no one else is able to call him father except the son; and the mother of a daughter is indeed her mother, and no one else can call her mother except her own daughter. And so the teacher of a disciple is indeed his teacher, and the disciple of a teacher is truly his disciple. As a result, no one is able to say "teacher" properly except a disciple. And see how, on account of this, that not all who call him teacher do so appropriately but only those who have a desire to learn from him. He said to his disciples, "You call me teacher and lord, and rightly so, for so I am." ⁵ Therefore disciples of Christ properly indeed address him as teacher, and by this word from the Lord himself his servants rightly call him Lord. Thus the apostle spoke well when he said, "Yet for us there is one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and for whom we exist." ⁶ And consider what he says, "It is enough for the disciple to be" not simply like a teacher but "like his teacher." ⁷ Therefore if anyone does not learn something from this word or surrender himself with his whole heart, in order to become his delightful dwelling place but still calls him "teacher," he is brother to the Pharisees attempting to entrap Christ while calling him "teacher." And so all who say "Our Father who art in heaven" ought not to have "the spirit of slavery in fear but a spirit of the adoption of sons." ⁸ However, whoever does not have "the spirit of adoption of sons" and yet says

“Our Father who art in heaven” 9 is lying, since he is not a son of God, while calling God his father.
Commentary on Matthew 2.10

22:36 Which is the Great Commandment?

The Greatest Commandment?

Origen: The question itself, however, was this: “What is the greatest command of the law?”—a question of great worth which will allow us to explain something of the differences between these commands. For certain commands are very great, but certain others are secondary. Hence we must look at each right down to the least important of these commands. For if in the baiting of the Pharisees and their asking, “What is the greater commandment of the law?” Christ had not responded, then we would conclude that one command was no greater than another. Commentary on Matthew 2.11

22:37 Loving the Lord Your God

Love God with Your Whole Heart.

Origen: However, now as he responds, he says, “Love the Lord your God with your whole heart, your whole soul and your whole mind.” This is the greatest and the first commandment. His statement contains something necessary for us to know, since it is the greatest. The others—even to the least of them—are inferior to it. Commentary on Matthew 2.12

Heart, Mind and Soul.

Origen: Worthy is he, confirmed in all his gifts, who exults in the wisdom of God, having a heart full of the love of God, and a soul completely enlightened by the lamp of knowledge and a mind filled with the word of God. It follows then that all such gifts truly come from God. He would understand that all the law and the prophets are in some way a part of the wisdom and knowledge of God. He would understand that all the law and the prophets depend upon and adhere to the principle of the love of the Lord God and of neighbor and that the perfection of piety consists in love. Commentary on Matthew 4.13

With All Your Heart.

Cyril of Alexandria: Therefore the first commandment teaches every kind of godliness. For to love God with the whole heart is the cause of every good. The second commandment includes the righteous acts we do toward other people. The first commandment prepares the way for the second and in turn is established by the second. For the person who is grounded in the love of God clearly also loves his neighbor in all things himself. The kind of person who fulfills these two commandments experiences all the commandments. Fragment 251.¹⁴

22:38–39 Loving One’s Neighbor

The Second Is Like It.

Origen: This he adds since the Pharisees have asked truly “What is the greatest commandment in the law?” The Lord himself responds to them and teaches us. Not only is the greatest commandment to love the Lord, but as well it is the first commandment. It is first, however, not in the order of the Scriptures but in the order of virtue. And as this comes from such a source, it must be adhered to, since as with many established commands, Christ says that it is the first and greatest command that “you love the Lord your God with your whole heart and your whole mind and your whole soul,” and the second, however, “is like unto” the first; and accordingly, this similitude is also great, “that you love your neighbor as you love yourself.” This is how we understand the second one, while another may be third in magnitude and order, or a fourth, and so in order we number the commands of the law, accepting this as wisdom from God, who orders them even to the least. Such is the task of no one else but Christ alone, since he is “the power of God and the wisdom of God.”¹⁵ Commentary on Matthew 2.¹⁶

22:40 These Two Commandments

Law and Prophets in Summary.

Origen: After this you ask how it is that “all the law and the prophets depend upon these two commands.” For it seems that the texts show us that whatever was written in Exodus or Leviticus or Numbers or Deuteronomy depend “upon these two commands.” But how is the law which regards lepers or the continual flow of blood or the menstruation of women dependent “upon these two commands”? And still further, how does the prophecy about captured Jerusalem,¹⁷ or the vision of Egypt in Isaiah¹⁸ and the other prophets, or the vision of Tyre¹⁹ or whatever may be prophesied about Tyre or the king of Tyre,²⁰ or Isaiah’s vision of the four-footed beasts in the wasteland²¹ “depend upon these two commands”?

It seems to me that the answer is something like this. He who fulfills all that is written concerning the love of God and neighbor is worthy to receive the greatest thanks from God.

Concerning this it has been argued that “the utterance of wisdom [comes] through the Holy Spirit,” after which follows “the utterance of knowledge” which is “according to the Spirit.”²² Commentary on Matthew 4.²³