The Greatest Commandment

Read Leviticus 19:18; Deuteronomy 6:4-9 & Mark 12:28-34

Key verses: “You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your being, with all your mind, and with all your strength. The second is this, You will love your neighbor as yourself. No other commandment is greater than these” (Mark 12:30-31).

Sometimes, simpler is better.

The need to summarize the Law into a single, working principle was the likely motive behind the scribe’s question to Jesus: “Which commandment is the most important of all?” (Mark 12:28)

Effectively summarizing the Pharisaical law and tradition of Jesus’ day was no easy task. The oral law alone consisted of some 613 statutes with 365 prohibitions. So it was a difficult question that the scribe asked Jesus.

To answer it, Jesus skillfully drew from the Old Testament scriptures. First, He reaffirmed the foundational truth of Deuteronomy 6:4-5, known as the Shema: “Israel, listen! Our God is the Lord! Only the Lord! Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your being, and all your strength.” These words were written on the doorpost of every Jewish home.

Next, Jesus joined this key truth with the commandment of Leviticus 19:18: “...you must love your neighbor as yourself.” With these few words, Jesus summed up the Law, the Prophets, and the Gospel that He came to bring. Jesus concluded, “No other commandment is greater than these.”

There is no better statement of how God wants us to live than the one Jesus gave us in Mark 12. Love God wholeheartedly and love others like you love yourself. Still today, such love transforms lives.

Terry Muck shared: “A man who had no interest in spiritual matters related casually to the Christian who lived next door—they talked over the back fence, borrowed lawn mowers, stuff like that. Then the non-Christian’s wife was stricken with cancer, and she died three months later. Here’s part of a letter he wrote afterward.

I was in total despair. I went through the funeral preparations and the service like I was in a trance. After the service I went to the path along the...
river and walked all night. But I didn’t walk alone. My neighbor—afraid for me, I guess—stayed with me all night. He didn’t speak; he didn’t even walk beside me. He just followed me. When the sun finally came up over the river, he came over and said, ‘Let’s go get some breakfast.’

I go to church now. My neighbor’s church. A religion that can produce the kind of caring and love my neighbor showed me is something I want to find out more about. I want to love and be loved like that for the rest of my life” (from Men of Integrity, March/April 2009).

(Contact Michael at msigler@fumcfwb.com.)