

Mark 12:28-34
Law of Love
WRCoB 3.22.20

During the time of Jesus
Judaism had evolved into a rather complicated religion.

To be a faithful Jew involved
Practicing hundreds of commandments.

In fact, the Jewish Law contained 365 prohibitions
And 248 positive commands
For a total 613 detailed commandments.

Essentially 365 “don’ts,” and 248 “dos!”

For the average person, that’s a lot of laws to keep track of.

So the religious leaders spent much time
Interpreting the laws

For an example, take a quick look
At the “don’ts” surrounding the Sabbath.

There were 39 activities prohibited on the Sabbath.

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| 1. Sowing | 8. Grinding |
| 2. Plowing | 9. Sifting |
| 3. Reaping | 10. Kneading |
| 4. Binding sheaves | 11. Baking |
| 5. Threshing | 12. Shearing wool |
| 6. Winnowing | 13. Washing wool |
| 7. Selecting | 14. Beating wool |

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| 15. Dyeing wool | 30. Scraping hide |
| 16. Spinning | 31. Cutting hide up |
| 17. Weaving | 32. Writing two letters |
| 18. Making two loops | 33. Erasing two letters |
| 19. Weaving two
threads | 34. Building |
| 20. Separating two
threads | 35. Tearing a building
down |
| 21. Tying | 36. Extinguishing a fire |
| 22. Untying | 37. Kindling a fire |
| 23. Sewing two stitches | 38. Hitting with a
hammer |
| 24. Tearing | 39. Taking an object
from the private
domain to the
public, or
transporting an
object in the public |
| 25. Trapping | |
| 26. Slaughtering | |
| 27. Flaying | |
| 28. Salting meat | |
| 29. Curing hide | |

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Today's Sabbath laws have evolved
To include contemporary issues.

See the additional interpretations.

- writing, erasing, and tearing
- business transactions
- driving or riding in cars or other vehicles
- shopping
- using the telephone
- turning on or off anything which uses electricity,
including lights, radios, television, computer, air-
conditioners and alarm clocks
- cooking, baking or kindling a fire
- gardening and grass-mowing
- doing laundry

I mean, can you imagine?

Their faith had become so complicated and unwieldy
That it lost its original purpose and meaning.

Jesus enters into this religious milieu.

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Prior to today's lesson

The religious leaders debated with Jesus.

They challenged him on whether to pay taxes to Caesar
And whether it was proper to divorce.

And after hearing Jesus respond

A rather impressed teacher of the law
Challenges Jesus with another question.

That from the 613 commandments
That all good and pious Jews
Know, understand and follow

Which one was THE MOST IMPORTANT!

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You see, the constant argument of the time
Was whether certain commandments
Stood out as being more important than others are.

Some argued ALL of God's laws were equally important.

Everyone should follow all of them without exception.

Others argued that there were major and minor laws.

One followed the major laws faithfully.

But the minor ones, they might be open to interpretation.

Jesus' response to the teacher's question
Is the now well-known Greatest Commandment

Loving God with everything we have
And loving neighbor as our self.

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To the hearers of this debate
The first scripture was a no-brainer.

Everyone would have agreed that this verse
A part of the Shema
Was the FIRST and FOREMOST
Principle of the faith
The cornerstone of Judaism.

Conversely, what might have struck them as rather odd
Is that Jesus quoted a second commandment
Loving neighbor, alongside the first
Emphasizing equal importance.

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Jesus reduces the complicated Jewish legal system
Down to two essential principles.

Love God. Love neighbor.

He condenses 613 "dos and don'ts" into one law . . .
The law of love.

You might call it the Supreme Law
For every other law falls under this one.

The Apostle Paul argues the same thing
In his letter to the Galatians.

Galatians 5:14 NRSV For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

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All the other, lesser laws
Are to be consistent with the supreme one.

All the other minor laws
Are to be judged in the light of the law of love.

Jesus exemplified this new, prioritized set of commandments

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Let's take for instance, Jesus' view of the Sabbath.

Jesus broke the rigid Sabbath laws several times.

First, he allowed his disciples to pick the heads of grain
As they walked through a wheat field

Secondly, as Jesus entered a synagogue on a Sabbath
The religious leaders watched him closely
To see if he would heal a man with a shriveled hand.

Knowing that they are judging his every action
Jesus asks them a question.

Mark 3:4 (NRSV) “Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath, to save life or to kill?”

In other words, which is better
To obey the law of Sabbath
At the expense of someone's well-being?

Or break the Sabbath to fulfill the law of love?

Jesus didn't hesitate but healed the man.

The religious leaders were outraged
That Jesus so blatantly disobeyed and disregarded
Such an important Sabbath law.

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Jesus associated with sinners
Well, that's not good!

Jesus didn't wash his hands before a meal
That's not right!

Jesus talked to a Samaritan woman
He shouldn't do that!

Jesus touched a leper
Another broken law.

Jesus allowed a prostitute to anoint his feet with oil
Another big no-no!

The list goes on.

Jesus made it a point
To purposely challenge their rigid legalism
For the sake of love.

Jesus judge all the lesser laws
In light of the supreme law.

In any given situation
Obey the lesser law
IF it is consistent with the law of love.

If not?

Then what's the point?

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This is our guideline for the church today.

As we face the struggles and conflicts in our churches
Our denomination
And in the larger Christian community

The principle holds true . . .

Hold the minor legalities in light of the law of love.

Don't get caught up in rigid legalism
Or we will end up like the Pharisees.

And we know how Jesus felt about them.

We have seen too many Christians
Follow the letter of the law
But not the spirit of the law.

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Rather, let's do as Paul instructs the Colossians to do.

Colossians 3:12-14 (NRSV) As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. ¹³ Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. ¹⁴ Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

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Like Jesus, let's keep it simple.

Let's not compete with the religious leaders of Jesus' day
With 248 "dos," and 365 "don'ts"

Let's not forget what the essentials are.

We don't have to make it complicated!

Let us build upon the foundation of Jesus Christ
The very basic belief
That our purpose on earth is just this.

To love God with all of our heart and soul
To love God with all of our mind and strength
And to love one another near and far.

When we are known more by our legalistic views
Than for our love of neighbor

We need to take a good hard look at whom we're following
Because it is not the Jesus.

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Arthur Burns, a Jewish economist of great influence in Washington during the tenure of several Presidents was once asked to pray to a gathering of evangelical politicians.

Stunning his hosts, he prayed thus: "Lord, I pray that Jews would come to know Jesus Christ. I pray that Buddhists would come to know Jesus Christ. And I pray that Muslims would come to know Jesus Christ."

And then, most stunning of all he closed his prayer: "And Lord, I pray that Christians would come to know Jesus Christ."

May it be so.

Amen.