

Questions About the Greatest Command

Here's a **Full Breakdown** of:

 **Matthew 22:34–40**  **Mark 12:28–34** (No parallel in Luke or John)

These two Gospel accounts describe a moment when Jesus is asked to identify the **greatest commandment** in the Law. Mark gives us a more complete narrative, including the questioner's response.

Parallel Gospel Chart

Detail	 Matthew 22:34–40	 Mark 12:28–34
Audience	Pharisees	A Scribe
Motivation of the questioner	To test Jesus	Genuine interest
Jesus' answer – 1st command	Love God (Deut 6:5)	Same
Jesus' answer – 2nd command	Love neighbor (Lev 19:18)	Same
Emphasis	Law and Prophets hang on these	No commandment greater
Scribe's response	Not included	Affirms Jesus and adds that love is better than sacrifice
Jesus' reaction to the scribe	Not included	"You are not far from the Kingdom of God"

Historical & Cultural Context

- **613 commandments** were recognized by Jewish tradition (248 positive, 365 negative).
- Rabbis often debated which commandments were "light" and which were "weighty."
- Jesus wasn't the only teacher to summarize the law this way, but He gave it unique authority and linked both commands inseparably.
- "**Shema**" (Deut 6:4-5) was (and still is) recited daily by observant Jews.
- **Leviticus 19:18** extended love beyond kin or tribe, which was radical.

Greek Word Studies

- "**Love**" (**ἀγαπήσεις – agapēseis**) – a covenantal, self-giving love, not based on emotion but commitment and action.
- "**Heart, soul, mind, strength**" – Mark's version is more detailed than Matthew's, showing a holistic love for God.

Greek Term	English	Meaning
καρδία (kardia)	Heart	Inner life, will, affections
ψυχή (psychē)	Soul	Life force, personality
διάνοια (dianoia)	Mind	Understanding, reasoning
ἰσχύς (ischys)	Strength	Physical energy, capacity

Questions About the Greatest Command

Theological Meaning

- Jesus fuses **orthodoxy (right belief)** and **orthopraxy (right action)**.
- Love for **God** must result in love for **others**—one cannot be separated from the other (cf. 1 John 4:20).
- The two commandments are **not equal**, but **inseparably linked**—the second flows from the first.
- Jesus elevates **internal devotion** over external ritual (as shown in Mark 12:33).

Old Testament Foundations

Command	Reference	Key Idea
Love God	Deut 6:5	Central command in the Shema
Love Neighbor	Lev 19:18	Applies to fellow Israelites but Jesus broadens the idea (see Luke 10:25–37)

Messianic Implications

- Jesus shows **authority as the true interpreter of the Law**.
- His teaching **supersedes rabbinic debates** and refocuses the Law on **relational love**.
- He is the **embodiment** of both loves—fully devoted to God, fully sacrificial to others.

Summary Points

- Jesus was tested by religious leaders but responded with deep theological truth.
- The greatest commandment is to **love God completely**; the second is to **love your neighbor as yourself**.
- These summarize the entire **Torah**.
- In Mark, a sincere scribe affirms this and is told he's "close to the Kingdom."
- Love is shown to be **greater than burnt offerings**—an echo of Hosea 6:6.

Questions About the Greatest Command

In  **Mark 12:34**, Jesus tells the scribe:
"You are not far from the Kingdom of God."

Why is this significant?

This statement reveals **both encouragement and a challenge**. Here's why it matters:

1. The Scribe Understood Rightly...

The scribe showed genuine insight by:

- Recognizing that **loving God and neighbor** is more important than ritual sacrifices (v. 33).
- Quoting Scripture accurately and **agreeing** with Jesus' interpretation, not opposing it like many Pharisees or Sadducees.

This indicates his **heart and mind** were open, humble, and aligned with truth—qualities necessary for the Kingdom.

2. But Understanding Alone Wasn't Enough

Jesus doesn't say, "You are *in* the Kingdom," only that he is "**not far**" from it.

This implies:

- **Intellectual agreement** is not the same as **saving faith** or full commitment.
- The scribe may have still lacked **personal trust** in Jesus as Messiah or full **repentance and surrender**.

He had proximity, not possession.

3. The Kingdom Requires a Step of Faith

The scribe was close, but **still needed to enter**:

- The Kingdom is not just about knowing what is right—it's about **being transformed** by that truth.
- Jesus is the door (John 10:9)—the scribe must move from acknowledgment to **faith in the King** Himself.

Possible Allusions

- Similar to the rich young ruler who knew the law but walked away (Mark 10:17–22).
- Like the parable of the two sons (Matthew 21:28–32)—one agrees but doesn't obey.

Summary

Jesus' words serve as a **gentle but urgent warning**:

You're close... but don't stop here.

Knowing the truth is not enough—**enter the Kingdom** by trusting the King.