

Sermon on Matthew 22:34-46 – October 22/23, 2011

People of God, grace and peace from our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

When I was younger, I remember a goalie coach of mine say something that I'll never forget. He told me the "golden rule" of being a goalie. He basically said: Look at the net, look at you. Your job is to stop the puck from going into the net. No matter what anyone says to you, that is your job; to stop the puck. You can blame the defense or anyone else on the team for letting someone shoot, but it's your job to stop the puck. And if someone scores, it's your fault.

The text we just read is one that is commonly called the "Golden Rule." It's pretty simple when you look at it: Love God, love others. But in practice, it can be very difficult. Just like being a goalie, it's pretty simple to know what your job is – stop the puck. However, in the middle of the game with all of its momentum shifts, with all the shots, all the deflections, it is one of the most difficult jobs on the ice. If your team wins, it's largely because of you. If your team loses, it's largely your fault. And the golden rule from our Lord is kind of like that. It's easy to say, yes that's a good teaching to follow, but to put it in practice can be so difficult. That shouldn't scare us away of course. God promises to support and sustain us as we do our best to love him and to love our neighbors. However, there's no room for excuses here. Either you love God and your neighbor or you don't. If you don't love God you won't love your neighbor. And if you don't love your neighbor, chances are that you probably don't love God that much either. So that when you hear this command from Christ, to love God and your neighbor, you just might make up all sorts of excuses not to. "I can't love God because of all the things that have happened in my life. I can't love God because there is too much pain and suffering in the world; how can a good God let that happen? How can I find time to love God when I have to work,

work, work.” Or, “I can’t love my neighbor because I’ve been hurt by others and the wounds still haven’t healed. I can’t love my neighbor because, well, have you seen what they look like? They don’t look at all like me.” And there could be a ton of other excuses too. But I can understand some of these things. Life isn’t easy after all, and if someone tells you it is, they’re lying. Bad things do happen. People do hurt us and we do hurt other people, whether we know it or not. And when those things happen, those situations should be handled with extreme care and love.

What I’m getting at here though, is that if we keep pointing to anything else besides ourselves, we are refusing to take ownership of that call to love God and love neighbor. It’s much safer to say that, “Because this and this has happened, I can’t possibly love God or my neighbor.” And any kid knows this. If they do something wrong, it’s a heck of a lot easier to blame someone else than to face up to the fact that we ourselves are more to blame than anyone else.

The command still remains: Love God, love neighbor. Now, let’s look at what Jesus says: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment” (vv. 37-38). And what I want to do now is to parse this out: **How do we love God with our heart, soul, and mind?**

When we hear the word “heart” we often think of mushy stuff; dates, flowers, candy, people falling in love, etc. However, to love with your heart deals with much more than sentimental feelings or emotions. In the Bible, **the heart is the center and source of your physical, mental, and spiritual life.** So if the heart is hardened and made of stone and rotten to the core,

so is the rest of your life. If the heart is full of darkness, deceit, and deception, so you will act that way full of darkness, deceit, and deception. The heart is also the place where decisions are made; whether or not you will take care of yourself or others, how you will treat yourself or others, etc. It's the place where you decide whether or not you'll cheat on your taxes or on a test, it's the place where you decide whether to give to others, or buy something else for yourself to make yourself feel better. So to love God with our whole heart is to make good and godly decisions for our own sake, but also the sake of others.

Now, when we hear the word "soul," all sorts of images get conjured up. We often think of the soul as something that lives in us that is detached from anything else. When we die, the soul flies out of the body and into the heavens. This teaching is not from the Bible, it's from the Greek philosopher Plato. And this teaching really makes the resurrection of the body an afterthought, as something that really isn't that important. In the Bible, whenever the soul is mentioned it's probably better to use the word life. **So to love God with our entire soul is to love God with our entire life.** It is to love God for giving us life. It is all encompassing. It is to love God in everything that we do thanking him for giving us a roof over our heads, food to eat, friends, family, the means for making a living, a safe country to live in, etc. So to love God with our whole soul, our whole life, is to love God for providing us with everything we need day to day.

And when we hear the word “mind,” we are to think of, well, the brain. **To love God with our minds leads us to think, “What are we putting into our brains?”** Here are some staggering statistics from a study that was done by Michigan University.¹ Children from 2-5 years old spend about 32 hours a week watching anything on TV; shows, games, DVDs, etc. Kids 6-11 years old watch about 28 hours a week of TV. 71% of 8-18 year olds have a TV in their bedroom. In homes of 7th to 12th graders, over half of those houses have no rules about what to watch on TV. Another study said that a typical American child that watches 30 hours of TV a week will, by the age of 18, watch 200,000 episodes exhibiting violence and see 16,000 people violently destroyed. And that’s just TV. This says nothing about all the hours spent on the computer, on websites like Facebook, and video games. So what kind of impact does this sort of brain development have? Many kids will learn racial stereotypes from TV. Many kids will learn about stereotypes between men and women. Many kids will learn about relationships and about sex from what they see on TV. Basically, our children won’t have a firm grip on reality. Also, kids stop (or don’t even start) reading and watch more, or they’ll want to do anything else but read. Their abilities to reason and to think critically are greatly hindered because everything they need to know has been fed to them through the small screen. Three passages come to mind; (1) The great commission from Matthew 28 that applies to all Christians where Christ calls us to baptize, and to make disciples, teaching them everything he has commanded to us. (2) Deuteronomy 11:19: Teach these things to your children, talking about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. (3) And Acts 3:39: For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls him.”

¹ <http://www.med.umich.edu/yourchild/topics/tv.htm>

Now, these stats may say something about the kids, but if we look below the surface these stats say even more about parents. So how **do** we love God with our minds? Simply, put godly things in your mind; read Scripture, families have a family devotions night in the midst of all the business so that you can be still and know who God is, pray in the morning, in the evening, keep God at the center of you doing and your thinking. Keep all the garbage out. If we think that one or two hours a week of Christian education at church will be enough to sustain our kids, let alone anyone else, we're fooling ourselves. To say we don't have enough time obviously isn't true – is what we do with what time we have that matters.

So far we've only really looked at one part of the "Golden Rule," love God. I could go at length to talk about how to love our neighbors, but I think we all know how to do that. It's just a matter of execution, of doing it or not. Like I said, if love of God is there, love of neighbor will follow. But also, if you don't know what to do, I encourage you to read the last 7 of the 10 commandments, as well as how they are explained in the Small Catechism. You can find the Small Catechism online in a number of places, but if you want a hard copy just let me know or swing by the office and we'll get you one.

So far, we have only talked about the Law – what God does and doesn't want us to do. And before you leave today, I can't let you leave without hearing the Gospel, about what God already has done. The Gospel promise we hear in today's reading comes at the end where Jesus quotes Psalm 110 and says, "The Lord said to my Lord, 'Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet.'" For we know with absolute certainty that all enemies have been put under Christ's feet; sin, death, the devil, our failure to live up to God's Law. And God has done all that for you, so that you may be his own. Amen.