

Loving God, Loving Others

Mark 12:28-34; James 2:14-17

SS Lesson for 03/01/2026

Devotional Scriptures: 1 John 4:7-12

OUTLINE

LESSON BACKGROUND AND KEY VERSE

Background from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

Key Verse: Mark 12:33

MAJOR THEME ANALYSIS

THE GREATEST COMMANDMENT OF LOVE (MARK 12:28-34)

Loving God (28-30)

Loving God as our Father (1 John 3:1-3)

Loving God is a commandment (Deut 6:1-5)

Loving God has a requirement to obey Him daily (Micah 6:8)

Loving God has a promise that all things will work for the good (Rom 8:28)

Loving Others (31-34)

Loving others through the Golden rule (Matt 7:12)

Loving others as a debt (Rom 13:8-9)

Loving others is acting upon that love without thought of self (Luke 10:35-37)

Loving others by supplying their needs (1 John 3:17-19)

Loving others by seeking to have agape love (1 Cor 13:4-8)

Loving others confirms we are born again and know God (1 John 4:7-8)

FAITH WITHOUT LOVE IS DEAD (JAMES 2:14-17)

Faith without love is non-profitable (14)

Non-profitable faith is faith that is in vain (1 Cor 15:1-2)

Non-profitable faith is faith not accompanied by love (1 Cor 13:2)

Non-profitable faith is when our works deny knowing God (Titus 1:16)

Faith without love does not provide needs (15-16)

By withholding good from those to whom it is due (Prov 3:27-28)

By trying to avoid or get rid of those in need (Matt 14:15-16)

By not helping the helpless when given the opportunity (Matt 25:41-46)

By closing our hearts to those in need (1 John 3:17)

Faith without love cannot produce godly results (16-17)

Because ungodly results comes from unproductive lives (Titus 3:14)

Because ungodly results come from walking in darkness (1 John 1:6)

Because ungodly sources bear bad fruit (Matt 7:17-20)

Because ungodly results have been choked by the cares of this world (Matt 13:22)

Because ungodly results causes us to be ashamed (Rom 6:21)

Because ungodly results don't come from a faith that has matured (2 Peter 1:5-8)

CONCLUSION AND OTHER THOUGHTS

COMMENTARY THOUGHTS FROM BOB DEFFINBAUGH

The Question Concerning Life After Death (12:18-27)

The Greatest Commandment (12:28-34)

The Meaning of Messiah (12:35-37)

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS FROM THE NIV STANDARD LESSON COMMENTARY

Lesson Background and Key Verse

Background from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

The setting of Mark 12:28-34 is the temple in Jerusalem during Jesus' final week. He spends much of that week teaching in the temple environs (Mark 11:15-17, 27; 12:35; etc.). Earlier, Jesus expressed his opposition to the economics of temple practices when he drove out the money changers who had turned the temple into a commercial center rather than a place of prayer (11:15-17). This, along with his teaching, enraged the temple authorities (11:18). Consequently, those authorities sought to undermine Jesus' credibility with the people by questioning his allegiances and debating him publicly. Should his popularity wane by being discredited, the authorities could act against Jesus without incurring the people's anger. If his answers questioned the authority of Rome, he could be handed over to the Romans for execution. Either way, the authorities wanted to undermine Jesus' credibility because they perceived him as a threat to their own powerful positions (compare John 11:48). Concerning the book of James, there are four or five men named James in the New Testament. The author of the book that bears his name is the James of Matthew 13:55. Thus, he is the half-brother of Jesus. We see the influence of this James in Acts 15:13-21. James writes his letter to a group we call the "diaspora": religiously and ethnically Jewish people who are dispersed and scattered, many of whom have come to see Jesus as the fulfillment of the hope of Israel (James 1:1). He is evidently concerned with his readers' actions. In providing a solution to the areas of concern, he exhorts his readers to live in light of the gospel they profess (James 1:21-22, 27; 2:8, 24). James's identification of the "royal law" is the same that Jesus quoted in Mark 12:31: love your neighbor as yourself (James 2:8).

Key Verse: Mark 12:33

And to love Him with all the heart, with all the understanding, with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as oneself, is more than all the whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.

Major Theme Analysis

(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)

The Greatest Commandment of Love (Mark 12:28-34)

28 Then one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, perceiving that He had answered them well, asked Him, "Which is the first commandment of all?"

29 Jesus answered him, "The first of all the commandments is: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.

30 And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' This is the first commandment.

31 And the second, like it, is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."

32 So the scribe said to Him, "Well said, Teacher. You have spoken the truth, for there is one God, and there is no other but He.

33 And to love Him with all the heart, with all the understanding, with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as oneself, is more than all the whole burnt offerings and sacrifices."

34 Now when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, He said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." But after that no one dared question Him.

Loving God (28-30)

Loving God as our Father (1 John 3:1-3)

3 How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. 2 Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. 3 Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure.

Loving God is a commandment (Deut 6:1-5)

1 These are the commands, decrees and laws the LORD your God directed me to teach you to observe in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess, 2 so that you, your children and their children after them may fear the LORD your God as long as you live by keeping all his decrees and commands that I give you, and so that you may enjoy long life. 3 Hear, O Israel, and be careful to obey so that it may go well with you and that you may increase greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, just as the LORD, the God of your fathers, promised you. 4 Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. 5 Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.

Loving God has a requirement to obey Him daily (Micah 6:8)

8 He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

Loving God has a promise that all things will work for the good (Rom 8:28)

28 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

Loving Others (31-34)

Loving others through the Golden rule (Matt 7:12)

12 So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.

Loving others as a debt (Rom 13:8-9)

8 Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law. 9 The commandments, "Do not commit adultery," "Do not murder," "Do not steal," "Do not covet," and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: "Love your neighbor as yourself."

Loving others is acting upon that love without thought of self (Luke 10:35-37)

35 The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.' 36 "Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" 37 The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him." Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."

Loving others by supplying their needs (I John 3:17-19)

17 If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? 18 Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth. 19 This then is how we know that we belong to the truth, and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence True love never fails

Loving others by seeking to have agape love (I Cor 13:4-8)

4 Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. 5 It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. 6 Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. 7 It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. 8 Love never fails...

Loving others confirms we are born again and know God (I John 4:7-8)

7 Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. 8 Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.

Faith without Love is Dead (James 2:14-17)

14 What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him?
15 If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food,
16 and one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit?
17 Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

Faith without love is non-profitable (14)

Non-profitable faith is faith that is in vain (1 Cor 15:1-2)

Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, 2 by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you -- unless you believed in vain.

Non-profitable faith is faith not accompanied by love (1 Cor 13:2)

2 And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.

Non-profitable faith is when our works deny knowing God (Titus 1:16)

16 They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him, being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work.

Faith without love does not provide needs (15-16)

By withholding good from those to whom it is due (Prov 3:27-28)

27 Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, When it is in the power of your hand to do so. 28 Do not say to your neighbor, "Go, and come back, And tomorrow I will give it," When you have it with you.

By trying to avoid or get rid of those in need (Matt 14:15-16)

15 When it was evening, His disciples came to Him, saying, "This is a deserted place, and the hour is already late. Send the multitudes away, that they may go into the villages and buy themselves food." 16 But Jesus said to them, "They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat."

By not helping the helpless when given the opportunity (Matt 25:41-46)

41 "Then He will also say to those on His left, 'Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels; 42 for I was hungry, and you gave Me nothing to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me nothing to drink; 43 I was a stranger, and you did not invite Me in; naked, and you did not clothe Me; sick, and in prison, and you did not visit Me.' 44 "Then they themselves also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not take care of You?' 45 "Then He will answer them, 'Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.'

By closing our hearts to those in need (1 John 3:17)

17 But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?

Faith without love cannot produce godly results (16-17)

Because ungodly results comes from unproductive lives (Titus 3:14)

14 Our people must learn to devote themselves to doing what is good, in order that they may provide for daily necessities and not live unproductive lives.

Because ungodly results come from walking in darkness (1 John 1:6)

6 If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.

Because ungodly sources bear bad fruit (Matt 7:17-20)

18 A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. 19 Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 20 Therefore by their fruits you will know them.

Because ungodly results have been choked by the cares of this world (Matt 13:22)

22 Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful.

Because ungodly results causes us to be ashamed (Rom 6:21)

21 What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death.

Because ungodly results don't come from a faith that has matured (2 Peter 1:5-8)

But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge,⁶ to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness,⁷ to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love.⁸ For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Conclusion and Other Thoughts

Commentary Thoughts from Bob Deffinbaugh

The Question Concerning Life After Death (12:18-27)

The Pharisees and Herodians having utterly failed at their mission of humiliating Jesus, the Sadducees make their bid in verses 18-27. The issue here is that of life after death. The Sadducees were the religious liberals of their day, believing neither in resurrection or angels. They tended also to reject the inspiration and authority of the Old Testament books other than the five books of the Law. Their approach was to discredit Jesus by posing a ludicrous hypothetical situation based upon the overly physical and materialistic interpretation of the Scriptures and the injunction of levirate marriage (Deuteronomy 25:5-6).

The hypothetical question is based upon two premises. First, that men will be raised from the dead. (Remember that the Sadducees didn't believe this, verse 18.) The second was that the necessity of levirate marriage was still binding. (This, too, had largely been explained away by contemporary Judaism.) It is little wonder that the Sadducees could not accept the proofs posited for the resurrection of men by the Pharisees, for they were, indeed, difficult to defend.

With tongue in cheek, the Sadducees posited a hypothetical dilemma. A woman by levirate marriage was married to seven husbands, but bore children by none. Whose wife would this woman be in the resurrection? Jesus' response was that both the Sadducees and the Pharisees were greatly in error, as revealed by such a question (verse 24). There were two fundamental misconceptions which must be corrected.

The first error was concerning their understanding of Scriptures. The Pharisees viewed life in the resurrection as virtually a continuation of things as they presently are. While the Pharisees were correct in their conviction that men would rise from the dead, they were very wrong in their estimations of what this life would be like. There would be no need of physical procreation, and therefore, no need for marriage as a means of child-bearing. To be 'like the angels' does not necessarily mean to be sexless (cf. Genesis 6:1-2; 19:1-11), but rather not to be in need of earthly relationships or in institutions such as marriage.

The problem of the Pharisees was too earthly a view of heaven. The error of the Sadducees was a failure to believe in the power of God, as disclosed by their disdain of the Supernatural, and, in particular, the resurrection of the dead. While the Pharisees had been ineffective in their efforts to biblically defend the resurrection from the Old Testament, our Lord beautifully expounded it from a portion of the books of the Law (which the Pharisees held to be authoritative).

In Exodus chapter three, God had said, "I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob."

Even when God made this statement Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were dead. How could God be the God of dead men? God had made specific promises to these men which, until the present, have not been fulfilled. No self-respecting Jew could believe this statement, regarded as one of the cornerstones of the Jewish faith, without grasping the implications it had toward the resurrection of the dead. By their rejection of the doctrine of the resurrection the Sadducees greatly erred and failed to grasp the power of God, the power over death and the grave.

Here is a truth fundamental to all men concerning life after death. All men will be raised from the dead; some to everlasting life, and others to everlasting torment (Daniel 12:2; John 5:28-29; Revelation 20:4-15). The nature of our resurrection life has not been (and, in fact, cannot be) fully defined, but we are safe in assuming that it will not be a mere continuation of life as we presently know it.

The Greatest Commandment (12:28-34)

It would seem that there was one exception to the rule of rejection by the religious leaders confronting our Lord. Almost in spite of himself he applauds the wisdom of Jesus' reply. This, in turn, evokes a question, although perhaps initially intended as a test (Matthew 22:35), it results in a positive influence upon this student of Scripture.

The Jews loved to discuss which parts of the Law were weightier than others. This may have suggested another question to this lawyer, "What commandment is the foremost of all?" (Mark 12:23). Jesus began with the Shema of Deuteronomy 6:4, followed by the commandment to love God with all your heart, self, mind, and strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself. If the whole Old Testament Law were to be condensed to its simplest terms, this is what it must be.

The lawyer could not help himself. What Jesus replied could not have been said better. While this scribe agreed with our Lord's statement, I cannot help but get the impression that this religious authority is giving his approval as a superior to an inferior, such as a professor would respond to one of his students. He virtually repeats Jesus' words with a few additional comments. While he has accepted the truth of His teaching, he has not yet acknowledged His sovereign authority, otherwise he should have fallen at the feet of Jesus.

The answer of the Savior must have been shocking. If the scribe had commended Jesus with an evaluation roughly equivalent to 'not bad, not bad at all,' Jesus appraises this man's position as 'not far from the Kingdom' (Mark 12:34). That is tantamount to saying to a man like Billy Graham, "That was a fairly good sermon," or to John Calvin, "Your theology is coming right along, so stay with it." If the best word Jesus can give to this somewhat receptive scribe is 'not far,' what can His evaluation of the rest be? Matthew chapter 23 tells us, with these words no one else dared to ask anything further (Mark 12:34).

The Meaning of Messiah (12:35-37)

But Jesus was not quite finished. He had been asked many difficult questions; now it was His turn to ask one final question, for it was on this one final question that the whole issue hinged: "How can Messiah be both David's son and David's Lord?" That the Messiah would be the 'Son of David' was nearly universally accepted in Judaism. From this supposition it was easy to regard Messiah as a man, a mere man, and one who would be a military leader like His father, David.

Jesus had claimed to be more than man. His authority was not that of men, but of God. The religious leaders could not tolerate Jesus largely because He claimed to be more than a mere man. This was the bone of contention underlying all of the questions of the day. Jesus would not depart from His interrogators until the real issue was clearly in view.

The Messiah was to be the seed of David. This was without dispute. It was also widely held that Psalm 110:1 was a Messianic Psalm. How could David refer to the Messiah as his son on the one hand, and his Lord on the other? Here was a real dilemma. Here was a question for His questioners to ponder. For in the answer to this question is the key to the identity and authority of Jesus. Jesus was, at one and the same time, the Son of David and the Son of God. He was the God-man. This is where He derived His authority. And this is what the religious leaders refused to acknowledge.

Many today, like those in Jesus' day, were willing to accept Jesus as a good man, an impressive teacher, a noble example for men to follow. But they stop short at the crucial point of His divinity. This is what sets Him apart from all men, and what qualified Him to be the Savior of the world.

Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

The Law of Moses established many specific things that God desired of his people living under that covenant. But the people were pleasing to God only when those required actions were motivated and accompanied by love for God and love for those created in his image. Having these priorities rightly aligned enables us yet today to live rightly in other, subsidiary matters. Jesus made this abundantly clear in Mark 12. Similarly, James 2 reveals that as critical as faith is, it means nothing if it is void of proper action. Bringing these passages together, true faith and right response to God comes down to love lived out daily. When Jesus was asked what the greatest commandment was, he gave a twofold reply. That's because one cannot be the case without the other. The two replies are interlinked in an inseparable way. We cannot love God without loving our neighbor, and we cannot love our neighbor properly without loving God first (1 John 3:16-17). True faith is expressed in such good works. To love God and neighbor is the best sacrifice we offer to God; it is the gift of our whole selves to God and to others. We offer ourselves as living sacrifices worked out in love for God and others—even our enemies (Romans 12:1, 9-11, 20-21).