CORNERSTONECONNECTIONS
OCTOBER112025

Scripture Story: Matthew 22:15-46; 23; Mark 12:13-44; Luke 20:20-47; 21:1-4.
Commentary: *The Desire of Ages* (or *Humble Hero*), chapters 66; 67.

what belongs to God



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keytext

"Jesus replied: ' "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: "Love your neighbor as yourself." All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.' "

(Matthew 22:37-40, NIV)

flashlight

"The first four of the Ten Commandments are summed up in the one great precept, 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart.' The last six are included in the other, 'Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.' Both these commandments are an expression of the principle of love. . . . When God has His rightful place on the throne of the heart, the right place will be given to our neighbor. We shall love him as ourselves. And only as we love God supremely is it possible to love our neighbor impartially" (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 607).

what do you think?

- Is it hypocritical to act "nicely" when you'd really rather not?
- Which matters more to God, our intentions or our actions?
- Is a certain level of insincerity necessary to smooth over conflicts or combustible situations?
- Jesus used some harsh-sounding words when He talked to the Pharisees. How do you reconcile His blunt words with our understanding of "Christian" attitude and behavior?
- How can an intelligent, well-thought-out answer bring glory to God?
- In what ways can each of us be hypocritical unintentionally?
- What hypocritical attitudes bother you the most?

did you know?

From Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech, delivered August 28, 1963: "But there is something that I must say to my people, who stand on the warm threshold which leads into the palace of justice: in the process of gaining our rightful place, we must not be guilty of wrongful deeds. Let us not seek to satisfy our thirst for freedom by drinking from the cup of bitterness and hatred. We must forever conduct our struggle on the high plane of dignity and discipline. We must not allow our creative protest to degenerate into physical violence. Again and again, we must rise to the majestic heights of meeting physical force with soul force."

INTO THE STORY

"Later they sent some of the Pharisees and Herodians to Jesus to catch him in his words. They came to him and said, 'Teacher, we know that you are a man of integrity. You aren't swayed by others, because you pay no attention to who they are; but you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. Is it right to pay the imperial tax to Caesar or not? Should we pay or shouldn't we?'

"But Jesus knew their hypocrisy. 'Why are you trying to trap me?' he asked. 'Bring me a denarius and let me look at it.' They brought the coin, and he asked them, 'Whose image is this? And whose inscription?'

"'Caesar's,' they replied.

"Then Jesus said to them, 'Give back to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's.'

"And they were amazed at him."

The Greatest Commandment

"One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, 'Of all the commandments, which is the most important?'

"'The most important one,' answered Jesus, 'is this: "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength." The second is this: "Love your neighbor as yourself." There is no commandment greater than these.'

"'Well said, teacher,' the man replied. 'You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him. To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices.'

"When Jesus saw that he had answered wisely, he said to him, 'You are not far from the kingdom of God.' And from then on no one dared ask him any more questions.

"As he taught, Jesus said, 'Watch out for the teachers of the law. They like to walk around in flowing robes and be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, and have the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at banquets. They devour widows' houses and for a show make lengthy prayers. These men will be punished most severely.'"

(Mark 12:13-17, 28-34, 38-40, NIV)

OUT OF THE STORY

When the Pharisees tried to trap Jesus, what did He quote from to answer them?

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If the commandments are based on love, is love a feeling, an action, an attitude, or a combination of all three? Explain.

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What principle can you derive from Jesus' statement to "give back to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's"?

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For whom was Jesus showing love when He talked about the "teachers of the law"?

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Jesus obviously didn't believe that smoothing things over was always the right course of action. When is it proper to "say it like you see it"?

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Compare Jesus' direct language with the smooth, flattering words of the Pharisees trying to trap him. What does this tell us about the integrity of a Christian's speech?

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punch lines

"All you need to say is simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one" **(Matthew 5:37, NIV).**

"But the LORD said to Samuel, 'Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart'" **(1 Samuel 16:7, NIV).**

"Do not hate a fellow Israelite in your heart. Rebuke your neighbor frankly so you will not share in their guilt. Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD" **(Leviticus 19:17, 18, NIV).**

"The mouths of the righteous utter wisdom, and their tongues speak what is just. The law of their God is in their hearts; their feet do not slip" **(Psalm 37:30, 31, NIV).**

"To humans belong the plans of the heart, but from the LORD comes the proper answer of the tongue" **(Proverbs 16:1, NIV).**

further insight

"It is the motive that gives character to our acts, stamping them with ignominy or with high moral worth."

—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 615

Sabbath

Read Matthew 5:37.

Today's reading tells us to let our "yes" be "yes" and our "no" be "no." Words can be used to deceive more often than we notice. Do you ever use your tone of voice to make yourself sound worse when calling in sick to work or school? Do you ever promise to "look into" something without really meaning it? Do you ever promise to pray for someone and then never remember them in your prayers? How can you ensure that your words are not motivated by an urge to manipulate or play games? Think about how you talk. What are your motives behind your words?

Sunday

Read Leviticus 19:17, 18.

Keeping the peace is important, but there are times when it is proper to stand up and say something—stand up for what is right. When people are being put down or treated differently because of their ethnicity, skin color, political views, or gender, what do you think your responsibility is as a Christian? Does silence mean consent when you hear someone being mistreated?

Jesus stood up for the common people who were being mistreated by the religious leaders. He didn't leave them to fight their battle alone. He said something when they didn't have the social power to say something for themselves. Who can you stand up for today?

Monday

Read Matthew 22:37-40.

Love for God and love for your neighbor are the key points that God's law hangs upon. It's pretty simple. First, we must love God and put Him first. Next, we must love each other and think about other people's feelings and well-being before our own. Can you get it right with other people if you don't have it right with God? Is it possible to be right with God if we aren't taking care of each other? Explain.

Tuesday

Read 1 Samuel 16:7.

Loving other people is a lot harder to *do* than to *say*. People frustrate us. They get in our way. They hurt our feelings, misunderstand us, and talk behind our backs. Sometimes people joke about their jobs, saying, "My job would be perfect if it weren't for the people!" Sometimes we just can't understand where some people are coming from. How can we empathize with people who frustrate us? How does putting our relationship with God first help us to empathize with others?

Wednesday

Read Proverbs 16:1.

What is in our hearts ends up coming out of our mouths. If we are angry, it's hard to hide that in our tones, even if we manage to say the right words. It's been said that one of the hardest things to hide is being in love! When something happens on the inside of us, it is natural for that to come out of our mouths. The trick is to be right on the inside so that what comes out of our mouths brings glory to God. How can you put the law of God in your heart? Proverbs 16:1 says that the "proper answer of the tongue" comes from the Lord (NIV). What can you do to shift your focus toward God when you are the most tempted to lash out?

Thursday

Read Jeremiah 17:9, 10.

It is common for people to try to put their best foot forward. We try to appear at our best when being looked at by other people. We will hide our true opinions if we think that they aren't popular. This isn't entirely honest, putting something false on display to hide the truth underneath. What things do you hide for the sake of appearances? What things do you pretend so that you will look better?

Friday

Read Psalm 37:30, 31.

Are you ever tempted to "tweak the truth" a little bit to get what you want or need? Do you make yourself seem more rushed when you arrive late? Do you try to make yourself seem more helpless when asking for an extension on the due date of a paper? How can we trust God enough to be honest and straightforward and let Him sort out the rest?

this week's reading*

The Desire of Ages or (*Humble Hero*), chapters 66; 67.

*A special adaptation of *The Desire of Ages*, entitled *Humble Hero*, has been created just for you by the Ellen G. White Estate and Pacific Press® Publishing Association. Get more info about it at: www.cornerstoneconnections.net. By following this plan you will read at least one book of the Conflict of the Ages series each year.