

Related topics

For further study:

Conversion; social teaching; charity; biblical justice; discipleship; service; mission; morality; law of God

Closing Prayer

Holy God,
whose justice is without partiality
and whose mercy embraces all that live,
remove all trace of injustice
from the hearts of your people,
that through love of you and of neighbour,
hatred may yield to forgiveness
and quarrels give place to reconciliation.
We ask this through Jesus Christ,
your Son and our Lord, for ever and ever.

Celebrating the Christian Year, Proper 25, Year A²

CPL • LBC Year A Proper 25.odt • 2020-07-20

² *Celebrating the Christian year : prayers and resources for Sundays, holy days and festivals, years A, B and C / compiled by Alan Griffiths. – 3 vols. – Norwich : Canterbury Press, 2004-5.*

Proper 25

(Sunday between 23 to 29 October inclusive)

Principal Service readings

Leviticus 19.1-2,15-18	'Be holy, as I am holy'
Psalms 1	Delight in meditating on God's law
1 Thessalonians 2.1-8	Paul's concern for the Thessalonians
Matthew 22.34-46	The greatest commandment

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,
speak to our hearts in the stillness,
keep us steadfast in the foundation that cannot be shaken,
lift up our eyes to behold the vision of your glory;
and perfect our faith, now and always. Amen.

Society of Saint Francis

Gospel Reading

The greatest commandment

³⁴When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, ³⁵and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. ³⁶Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?' ³⁷He said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." ³⁸This is the greatest and first commandment. ³⁹And a second is like it: "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." ⁴⁰On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.'

⁴¹Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them this question: ⁴²'What do you think of the Messiah? Whose son is he?' They said to him, 'The son of David.' ⁴³He said to them, 'How is it then that David by the Spirit calls him Lord, saying,

⁴⁴"The Lord said to my Lord,
'Sit at my right hand,
until I put your enemies
under your feet'?"

⁴⁵If David thus calls him Lord, how can he be his son?' ⁴⁶No one was able to give him an answer, nor from that day did anyone dare to ask him any more questions.

Matthew 22.34-46 NRSV¹

Comments and Questions

In Mark 12..28 Jesus is approached by a friendly scribe; in Luke 10.25 the questioner is a lawyer. Matthew turns the episode into a confrontation with the Pharisees. The Pharisees would have been pleased by Jesus' answer to the Sadducees about the resurrection (22.23-33), where he stated his belief in the resurrection from the dead, but now they find themselves drawn into a debate with Jesus.

Jesus' answer to the question from the Pharisees is taken over from Mark 12.30-31: the combination of the commandments to love God (Deuteronomy 6.5) and neighbour (Leviticus 19.18). Matthew adds two further points: the command to love your neighbour is on the same level as the command to love God (22.39a); and by these two commandments all the other teachings of the Torah are supported (22.40).

Rabbis counted up 613 commandments in the Torah – 248 positive ones and 365 negative ones. How could anyone keep track of all these instructions? Are some more important than others? This problem has been handled in various ways. A distinction was drawn between the 'heavy' commandments like honouring one's parents (Deuteronomy 5.16), and the 'light' commandments like the law of the bird's nest (Deuteronomy 22.6-7). Another strategy was for teachers to provide a summary statement on the Torah. So, for example, Hillel says: 'What is hateful to you do not do to your neighbour; that is the whole Torah, while the rest is commentary on it; go and learn it' (*b. Sabb.* 31a). This is a version of the Golden Rule; Jesus uses it in Matthew 7.12: 'In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets'.

The statement that on these two commandments 'hang all the law and the prophets' (22.40) assumes that the whole law remains in force. Jesus'

¹ *New Revised Standard Version Bible* is copyright © 1989 Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America.

commandment about love goes to the heart of the matter and provides a coherent principle for appreciating and observing the other commandments.

With the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in A.D. 70 and the loss of Jewish political control in the land of Israel, the Torah became even more significant in Jewish life than ever before. The author of 2 Baruch said it well: "Zion has been taken away from us, and we have nothing now apart from the Mighty One and his Law" (85:3). In 22.34-40 Matthew presents the Christian perspective on the Torah in the form of Jesus' summary statement. It was something to which Jewish Christians could point as expressing their position. The fact that Matthew went out of his way to place Jesus' summary in the context of a hostile debate with the Pharisees indicates that it was used in exactly that way.

The gospel of Matthew / Daniel J. Harrington. – Rev. ed. – Collegeville, Minnesota ; Liturgical Press, 2007. – (Sacra pagina; 1). – 978-0-8146-5964-9. – p.316

Can we say that the idea of 'love' separates Jews and Christians? But Jesus draws the commandments from the Torah! And Matthew indicates that love is the key to making sense of the whole Torah.

Quotations

1

Those who live as though God sets the rules are not going by their own rules. That is the self-sacrifice, or selflessness, that peace more often than not requires. Those who insist on going by their own rules cannot make that sacrifice. They are the steady adherents of (global) conflict because they are forever fighting both themselves and others to do whatever they think that they want to do.

Killosophy / Criss Jami. 2015

2

The law is neither more nor less than an elucidation of the demands of love.

Today's gospel: authentic or synthetic? / Walter J. Chantry. 1970