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*by Erlo Stegen*

Matt 22:34 - 46,

And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets."

There are those who listened gladly to Christ because they sensed a real need and wanted Him to make them whole. However, there were also those who gathered around Him to trap Him. There are still those kind today who hate Christ and seek to teach Him instead of being taught by Him. The lawyer, the expert in God's law, used Scripture to try and corner Jesus. See how our Lord answered with the Word and just how important it is that we should be familiar with the Bible; read it every day and be ready to give a Scriptural answer to those who ask.

Christ's answer was straight from the Word, in all its sharpness and power, and left the lawyer and the other enemies of the Lord without any else to say.

What was it that Christ answered to the lawyer's trick question: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets." It has so much for us and is of fundamental importance to every person. Loving God with everything we have, "heart, soul and mind", is the first commandment. In Exodus 20 where the ten commandments are spelled out, it also clearly condemns the worship of all other gods ("no other gods"). This includes ancestral worship, spiritism and any attempt to get the dead to intercede for us.

Notice that Christ made the second command to be as weighty as the first. That is why, in the New Testament, it declares that we cannot love God and hate our brother. When Jesus defined a "neighbour" He told the story of the Good Samaritan. The priest and the Levite had ignored the half-dead Jew (and by that making themselves as guilty as the perpetrators of the crime against this man), and it was left to a man, of mixed-race, despised by the Jews, who had compassion for the injured Jewish man. He did everything in his power to help him (binding his wounds, transporting him on his donkey, and paying for his medical bills). In our country we need to take this parable to heart and seriously contemplate the implications of what Jesus is saying. If you as a "white" person, see a "black" person injured and in need of help, are you like the priest and Levite, or do you have the heart of compassion which shows love to God and your neighbour? This goes for all nations and races.

Back to the crucial command to love God with heart, soul and mind and our neighbour like ourselves: This law leaves us all condemned. As the Word says, if we break just one of God's laws we have transgressed the whole. Four of the first commandments have to do with God and the other six with our neighbour - showing again just how important it is to love both. If you have a chain to give you support, it needs every link to be together. Whether it's one link or twenty links which are broken, it's all the same. And so too the law, break one law and you have broken the whole law.

The Law is holy and pure and it condemns us all for we have all sinned and broken his commands. The curse and anger of God is upon all of humankind because of transgression against His law. With this knowledge we are made desperate for mercy. The Law pushes us to Christ. It directs us to the only One who can save. In Zulu tradition it is customary to pay 11 cattle for dowry ("iLobolo") for a virgin bride. Some time back, a Zulu man had paid the full dowry and was greatly angered when he discovered, on his wedding night, that his bride was not a virgin. Nothing could placate him; even the intercession of a preacher was to no avail. He sent his bride away and demanded his cattle be returned. In a similar way, Christ paid the full price for His pure Bride, for you and for me. He went to the Cross and paid the redemption price with His precious Blood to buy us back to God. "You were bought with a price". When He returns He will come for his pure bride. Woe to you if you're still found in your sins and you haven't repented.

If the Law has made you conscious of the fact that you stand condemned then run to Jesus in repentance, bowing before Him as a sinner. He forgives and places in us His Holy Spirit to enable us to please God.