

The Most Important Commands

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[0 : 0 0] Well, tonight I'd like us to turn back to the passage that we read in the Gospel of Mark and we read there in chapter 12 and we can read again from verse 28 to verse 31.

And one of the scribes came up and heard them disputing with one another and seeing that he answered them well asked him which commandment is the most important of all. Jesus answered the most important is here O Israel the Lord your God the Lord is one 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. The second is this you shall love your neighbor as yourself there is no other commandment greater than these. I think that over the past years here I've probably been guilty of developing various catchphrases. I think there's things that I say quite often and I suppose it's just without thinking the things you tend to say kind of come out and I think there's two things that I always say probably too often. One is I always say that's amazing and often when we're looking at passages together

I use the word amazing and it was so interesting because Duncan mentioned that word the other night at the prayer meeting and it's my favorite word. I love using the word amazing and there are so many things that prompt us to say that. So I always use that word and I apologize for overusing it but it's an amazing word and there you go I've used it again. So number two is the other catchphrase I always say is it makes perfect sense and I think I've said that lots of times you're probably thinking Thomas you're preaching never makes any sense but I say that or I try to say it because often it's something that I want to highlight but these are phrases that I often have said I think and probably I've used them a bit too much but I think it's important to note that these are not just weird Thomas Davis habits of which there are many and of which you've had to be very patient with. They're also highlighting two very very important truths about Christianity and these are two truths that we never ever want to forget. We never want to forget that Christianity is mind-blowingly amazing and so when you look at the Bible and you look at what it teaches, you look at God, you look at what Jesus has done for us, you look at what we have as Christians, you look at what God promises you, you look at the life that you can share as a church, you look at everything that God changes for the better in your life and it is absolutely amazing. Christianity is amazing, being a Christian is absolutely amazing. That's one thing we must never forget but the other thing that we must never forget is that Christianity makes sense.

In other words it's not irrational and that's one of the things that the world desperately wants to accuse us of just now, wants to accuse us of being irrational and to basically say that believing in God is believing in a fairy tale and the Bible is no different to any other book and it's all irrational, it's all just a leap of faith and it's contrary to evidence. That is complete rubbish. Christianity is totally coherent, totally logical and it fits together perfectly and that's why when we talk about theology we talk about a system of theology. You use that phrase systematic theology, it's a system that fits together and that works and that is coherent and that is logical. Never ever ever let anybody accuse you of having a blind faith. Blind faith is not Christianity, Christianity is totally coherent, it makes sense and so I always want you to remember that, that it is amazing but it's also logical, it makes perfect sense and these are two things that

I want us to notice tonight and I want us to just keep in our minds as we look back at these verses where Jesus highlights the two greatest commandments that the Bible gives us. As we've read Ascribe came up to Jesus and overheard Jesus debating with people and was clearly impressed with the answers that Jesus gave and he seems to be, as we read through the latter verses, he seems to be a man of a healthy understanding, he doesn't seem to be trying to catch Jesus out like the Sadducees were in the previous section there but he asks Jesus a really, really crucial question, he says which commandment is the most important and we don't know but you can imagine maybe he had debated that question with many other people before, maybe it was something that they often spoke about in these religious circles and maybe different people had different views as to what the most commandment, most important commandment was. So he comes to Jesus with this question and Jesus gives a very, very clear answer. He quotes from Deuteronomy 6 first of all and then he quotes from Leviticus 19 and he says the most important is this, here Israel the Lord our God the Lord is one, you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind and with all your strength, that's the first and most important commandment and then the second is this from Leviticus 19, you shall love your neighbour as yourself, there's no other commandment greater than these, these are as I'm sure you all know the two most important commandments to love

[6 : 13] God and to love one another but have you ever asked the question why does Jesus choose these two?

In many ways we're so probably so used to this passage and so familiar with these two commandments we've maybe never asked ourselves well why does Jesus select these ones because there are a lot of commandments and it's interesting none of these are actually taken from the 10 commandments and so you think well why does Jesus choose these and is there any significance in that?

Why is it that these as opposed to others are the greatest two? Well that's what I want us to try and think about for a wee while together tonight and as we do so I want us just to remind ourselves of many of the subject areas that we've been studying together because one of the many brilliant things about the past four years is that we've looked at lots of great topics together in terms of biblical teaching and in so many ways we've only scratched the surface but it's a reminder that the Bible has got so much to teach us and so much for us to learn from so we're going to start off just by sort of summarizing I think seven key headings which are basically subject areas that that we've been looking at together and they're up here so you've got theology proper, anthropology, soteriology, morality, ecclesiology, evangelism, eschatology. Now don't worry if some of those things you're probably thinking what I don't I've never heard of any of these things don't worry if but that we're going to go through them bit by bit but these are actually the subject areas that we've looked at through various things we've done various studies we've looked at various passages of scripture and certainly these are the things I was trying to teach you whether I succeeded or not is another matter but this is what I was certainly trying to be talking about these in many ways are the great areas of biblical teaching that we can study and look at together and let's just go through these and now we've been more detail together tonight and see where it takes us so first of all you've got theology proper that's the phrase that we use to describe the study of God that's really what the word theology means theos is the Greek word for God logi is from the word logos which is related to the whole idea of thinking and study and and communication the idea of word and and all that kind of thing so basically means the study of God now we use the term theology in a general sense so you talk about theology as anything related to Christianity so you go and you study theology and you'll study lots and lots and lots of different things but theology it can be used in a broad sense like that but it can also be used in a narrow sense but it really is actually just focusing on the study of God himself and that's what we call theology proper because that's really the proper use of the word theology the study of God and that's something that we've tried to do many times because our great desire is to learn about God now there's a sense in which God is just way way way way way too big for us to ever have a full grasp of and but the great thing about the Bible is that it does reveal to us many wonderful truths about God so that we can engage in what we call theology proper and at the heart of that theology proper is a key biblical doctrine and that is the doctrine of eternity so when you think of God you want to think Father Son and Holy Spirit these three are one

God three persons one nature it's not a hierarchy it's not that the Father is top and the Son is second and the Spirit is third it's not that the Father was always there and then he created the Son and then they created the Holy Spirit not at all these three equal absolutely equal are God Father Son and Holy Spirit and God is unique only God is God only God has God nature and that nature is made up of three persons Father Son and Holy Spirit and so that's the that's like the grounding and the foundation for the study of God the doctrine of the Trinity theology proper Trinity but then from that you can look at various details and these details of God we call attributes so you look at God and he's got various attributes in a sense we're similar we have various attributes ourselves God himself has many attributes and these are revealed to us in the

Bible so you see that God is a holy God that's one of God's attributes holiness he is set apart that's what holiness means the idea of being set apart God is righteous that means he's got a set of standards that he always maintains and he never compromises on God is good and so in every way God is good and never bad God can never ever ever ever be bad God is true and so everything that God says is the truth God exists in in and of himself the phrase that we use for that is the term aseity and basically means that God doesn't have a source doesn't have a beginning doesn't have a start he exists in and of himself God is wise God is strong God is powerful more powerful than we can ever realize the whole universe is just like a we speck of dust in the palm of his hand and God has these amazing amazing attributes but there's one attribute that's unique there's one attribute that's in a category of its own there's one category that lies at the core of theology proper at the core of who God is what attribute is that well I bet you know the answer love as swan john 4a tells us anyone who does not love does not know God because God is love that attribute of love has a unique status in the nature of God you'll notice that the Bible doesn't say God is power it doesn't say God is holiness it doesn't say God is righteous but it does say God is love and that truth manifests itself so clearly in the doctrine of the trinity from all eternity God has existed in this perfect bond of love between the Father the Son and the Holy Spirit it's not that God existed as this solitary being and and it makes perfect sense I know I keep saying that but it does be perfect sense if something is completely isolated and completely on its own it can't love because love always has an object and so in the doctrine of the trinity you have this perfect doctrine of this perfect God who displays this perfect love

[13 : 51] God has always existed in this beautiful relationship of love at the core of theology proper is the fact that God is love at the core of God's being is the attribute of love so that's theology proper we'll come back to that in a wee while next anthropology and anthropology just means study of us people is the Greek word for man or humanity so anthropology is studying people so when you study the Bible you learn about God you learn about us and John Calvin wrote a very famous book called the Institutes of the Christian Religion and at the very start of that book he says that the more we know about God the more we learn about ourselves and that's so true when we learn about God we also learn about ourselves so you go to the Bible you learn about God and we learn about us as well we we learn about what it means to be a human and ask yourself the question what is it that makes a human a human what makes humanity special what makes us different and I suppose there's lots of different answers to that and some people would answer that question in terms of stages of development and capabilities etc etc and there's an element of truth in that but in a sense that there is a heightened level of competence in the human race but really these answers are inadequate because the the biblical answer to what makes humans human is the fact that we are made in the image of God and that separates us from any other part of creation so when you see that phrase anthropology study of humanity I want you to think image of God because that's what makes humanity different that's what makes us stand out and that's why every single person every single person is precious every single person is equal every single person is made in the image of God that's why humanity is unique from every other aspect of creation we are made like God himself and at the heart of that of who we are even if you were to ask anybody I think if you were to just walk up to people in the community or in the street tonight and you ask them what's the most important thing about being a human I think most people would give you the same answer what's the most important thing about being a human well the most important thing is love I think I think everybody well most people I think would answer something along those terms there is something in us that that recognizes the prominence and importance of love and that makes perfect sense in terms of what we see in the Bible because when God creates humanity immediately he establishes a relationship for humanity to exist in and you see that at the beginning there's one thing that's not good it's not good for man to be alone so God makes a helper for him he makes woman and he unites them in marriage and they are able to grow as a family God wants humanity to exist in this wonderful structure of family whereby we love one another in other words we have been reminded that when you think of anthropology we're made in a way that we're not meant to be alone we're made to live in a relationship with a creator and we are made to live in a relationship with one another and that's why from an anthropological point of view it's the biblical worldview that makes sense because there are many prominent worldviews out there today that try to explain love as some kind of happy coincidence

or some kind of fortunate accident arising out of out of who we are so yes we've done so people with a non-biblical worldview particularly with a naturalistic worldview one that puts the universe in a closed box without anything supernatural we'll basically say well really at the heart of her being is is is chance and processes and all that and etc etc etc and love is just a bonus and in many ways love's not really real that's the logical outcome of that world view and you can believe that if you like but the bible gives you a far better option bible tells us that love is at the very core of who we are at the very core of how we are to live as a human race so anthropology we are made in the image of god made to love him made to love one another next we come to soteriology now i shouldn't i've not really used that word much it basically means it's talking about salvation so soteriology is the study of salvation so when you see that word you're thinking salvation and you're thinking about the work that god has done in order to save us because the bible teaches us two things about humanity that are essential one we're made in the image of god two we're broken and so yes we are made uniquely with this wonderful status but sin has mucked that up sin is incredibly humanity is incredibly precious but humanity is also tragically broken and we've fallen away from our original intention and the image of god in us is broken and we have we've rebelled against our creator as roman one roman's one tells us but the whole of the bible is a glorious revelation of how god has come to rescue us from that brokenness even at the very beginning when adam and eve fell god makes a promise and that that the devil is not going to win this battle and then you look over the next few chapters of genesis you see the devastating damage that sin causes in the world but then you come to chapter 12 of genesis where god comes to one man abraham and makes a promise that through him and through his descendants he is going to work out a plan of salvation that plan of salvation is worked out across the ages of history is what we call redemptive history and you go right through it in the old testament where abraham's family grows it eventually becomes a nation that nation is redeemed out of slavery in egypt that nation is established as a kingdom under david that nation is blessed with god's presence in the temple everything is being restored but all of these things are pointing forward to the ultimate salvation that is going to come through jesus christ and so god works this amazing plan from from genesis right through to revelation whereby he is working to rescue and restore broken people and at the heart of that work of redemption there is one driving motivation in the heart of god and that is love it's because god so loved the world that he gave his son it's because the son so loved his father that he willingly obeyed him it's because the son so loves us that he laid down his life for his sheep god saving what is built on the astounding amazing love that god has for us and of course at the heart of a response is the fact that god wants us to

love him and to trust him so you have this great work of redemption and god's desire for us in terms of responding to that is to love him and to trust him and the result of that is that we're brought into the covenant people of god a family restored by god's amazing grace and so that gospel does an amazing work of reconciliation a relationship with god is restored a relationship with one another is restored next we come to morality morality and that's very simple really the bible gives us lots of ethical instructions and practical directions for our lives so in many ways there are a lot of dos and don'ts people talk about christianity being all about dos and don'ts well there are lots of dos and don'ts but you have to ask yourself why does god tell us to do all of these things is it to boss us around is it to control us is it to restrict us no he tells us to do all these things because he loves us and the moral instruction of scripture is an outworking of god's love towards us just like any parent tells their child do this and don't do that avoid this stick to that god is keeping us from harm because he loves us and he wants to protect us and so the motivation for the ethical instructions of scripture come from the fact that god loves us then we have to ask the question well why do we seek to obey him why do we want to follow his instructions is it to earn god's favor is it to impress him is it to make us seem that we're good enough for him no it's because we love him if you love jesus then you want to obey him as he says himself if anyone loves me he will keep my word and so god's motivation for instructing us is because he loves us our motivation for obeying is because we love him and the grounding principle for all the practical outworking of god's ethical commands in his law is based around love paul highlights that in romans 13 he says oh no one anything except to love each other for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law for the commandments you shall not commit adultery you shall not murder you shall not steal you shall not covet and any other command are summed up in his word you shall love your neighbor as yourself love does no wrong to a neighbor therefore love is the fulfilling of the law the whole of god's law the whole of his ethical and moral instruction is summed up in one very simple principle love each other love one another next we've spent some time looking at ecclesiology ecclesiology is the study of the church which is a really important thing to think about what is the church is it the building is it the denomination no absolutely not the children the church is the people of god i've said many many times god's house is not this building god's house is the people god's church is his people and one of the great images that god uses to describe his church in scripture is that of a family a family where everybody is equal a family where everyone is welcome a family where everyone is special a family where everyone is together through highs and through lows god in establishing his church is establishing a great family of brothers and sisters and of course at the heart of a family is love and so at the heart of our worship is love we come together because we love god and want to worship him and we love

being together that's why god gives a very very very direct instruction in scripture that before you come and worship god you make sure that you put right any hostility that exists between you and a fellow christian it's a very important commandment that again makes perfect sense at the heart of our sacraments is love when we come together for the Lord's supper it's because we love him because we love one another we don't do it on our own we do it together at the heart of discipline is love discipline is something that is very important in church it's not about having a heavy hand and being hard on people it's just about looking after each other guiding us keeping each other right just as a mother and a father will will discipline their children to keep them right because they love them and at the heart of our church government is is love that's really why we are presbyterians not just because we like having meetings it's actually because we love each other and we don't just care about our own congregation here we love our brothers and sisters across the island and across the country and across the world really the whole world should be one big presbyterian church my apologies to any non-presbyterians here but i'm afraid you've lost that argument long since because it's all about loving each other and that's what should lie at the heart of presbyterian presbyterianism the church is a family that's full of love and that's why we should be having lots of fun together lots of laughter together lots of joy together and that's why we also pool together through every hard time because families stick together and I always remember that I've learned many many many things here but always remember that if somebody if somebody mucks up if somebody mucks up and people will muck up really badly just make sure you love them through it all that's how we should always be as a church it doesn't mean we pretend that it doesn't happen it means that we help people through their mistakes and restore them and love them and look after them just leave it to the devil to be hard on people he's the one who likes to do that and we're we're here to be loving towards one another and to bring people back into a close walk and fellowship with the Lord so at the heart of ecclesiology is this great principle of love next we've been trying to learn about evangelism that basically means telling people the good news of Jesus.

Evangel is from the Greek word for gospel for the good news of Jesus that's a key reason why we exist as a church to bring the good news to people and we want to tell people about Jesus we want people to know that Jesus loves them that Jesus provides us with salvation and that for everyone who trusts in him they can have eternal life and that can be a very very hard thing to do you're all going off to work tomorrow morning or many of you are or the rest of you will be going off to your community or your homes and you want to evangelize you want to witness and you think well I don't even know where to start and I don't even know what to say well step one love God and love people so every day you can show the world around you that you love God how do you do that you do it by living his way you do it by being different so don't compromise and do what the rest of the world is doing don't look at the crowd and think well I better just slot in with them show the world that you love God by doing things God's way in every part of your life and don't compromise in any way make sure that what you read in the Sermon on the Mount in terms of the ethical instruction of Paul's letters and Peter and John and James in terms of the 10 commandments stick like glue to these things and you'll show the world that you love God you can do that every day and every day you can show people that you love them and you simply do that by being nice to them no matter how difficult they may be towards you you can show them that you care about them show them that you love them show them that you are interested in them and that's what we want their reputation to be we want people to look at our congregations to look at the church in carloa both churches and to think they are people who love God and there are people who love one another that's what we want our reputation to be that's the cornerstone of all evangelistic work and of course that's why Jesus says that's how people will know you are my disciples if you love one another and then we come to eschatology which refers to the last things so when you see that word eschatology you're thinking future you're thinking what God is going to do in the future and the bible teaches us many great things about that teaching us that Jesus is going to return one day and when Jesus returns there will be a resurrection and so our bodies will be raised and there will be a judgment all those who have put their faith in Jesus Christ are going to be raised to eternal life and to enter into all the blessings that God has prepared for those who love him all those who have rejected Jesus are going to be raised to be condemned because they have not believed in the sun and because their sin leaves them guilty before God and and subject to all of that means and for those who do trust in Jesus there will be a glorification whereby we are sharing in the glory of Jesus Christ and do you know what the result of that is going to be when you're glorified what's going to happen to you well the result of that glorification is that you're going to be conformed to the image of God the Son that's something that we read we've been studying and looking at in Romans chapter chapter 8 we are going to be conformed into his image verse 29 for those who we foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his son in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers so in other words the goal

[32 : 49] of the Christian faith is to make you like God because Jesus God the Son he is God the goal is that we are going to be conformed to be like him and what attribute lies at the heart of who God is we said it at the start love and so at the heart of the eschatological goal of the Christian faith for all believers is that we are going to become as loving as God himself is and so in all of these areas we keep coming back to the same thing don't we so you look at theology proper and you see that at the heart of who God is is love you look at anthropology and we see that we are made to be like him and we are made to exist in relationship of love for our creator and love for one another you look at soteriology the work of salvation you see how all of that is motivated by God's love and God's then the response that God wants from us is for us to love him so that we are reconciled to God and reconcile to one another you look at Christian morality and all the ethical instruction of the Bible at the heart of that lies the same principle that we are to obey God because we love him and we keep all the commandments by loving our neighbor as ourselves you look at ecclesiology you see God is gathering this covenant people together and his great desire is that they will all love him worship him serve him and love one another as a beautiful family you look at evangelism and the key part of that is that that we are to be known to the world around us as those who love God and those who love each other and you look at the eschatological goal we are going to be made like God and so we will love like him and we will be together loving one another for all eternity where all hostility and all brokenness and all horribleness will be gone forever more and when you notice that you realize it is no wonder that when Jesus was asked what are the two most important things that you need to do he says love God and love each other because the whole of theology fits together around these things and so he didn't just pick those two commandments because they're nice they're nice commandments you pick them because everything fits together according to these things everything that the Bible presents to us everything that God asks us to do everything that awaits us in the future is bound up in these two commandments to love God and to love our neighbor and that's why these are the two commandments that we need to ensure that we do it at the heart of our lives we want to keep loving God so we want to keep talking to him and keep learning about him and keep obeying him and keep serving him and keep leaning on him and keep listening to him because that's what God wants us to do to keep on loving him that's the great goal for us and we also need to keep loving each other in every single part of life in church in the community in your work in everything that you do whether it's door duty or communion Sunday or Sunday school or the deacon's court whatever it is keep loving each other even when you don't agree on something that is absolutely never an excuse to be unloving towards each other we are to keep on loving God and loving one another and when you see that that that that at the heart of Christianity is love you realize that it's amazing and it makes perfect sense let's pray together

our father we thank you so so much for what your word teaches us and for what it teaches us about your amazing love that you have for us and and we don't deserve that but we thank you so much for it and it fills our hearts with joy that we can actually say that we are people who are loved by God himself and that's just amazing and we pray that we would always hold on to these two great commandments to love you and to love one another please forgive us for all the times that we are unloving and unloving towards you and unloving towards one another and may that never ever ever be something that we do again we pray that in every way that our hearts would be overflowing with love for you love for your word love for all that you teach us and may our hearts be overflowing with love for one another because it's just so good to be part of your family and to share in these precious things together so we just want to thank you for such an amazing uh gospel we thank you that it all fits together so perfectly we thank you for everything that you have done for us we love you so much and we want to thank you with all our hearts amen