

MARK: OUR PREACHING MANUAL

File Name: 170 Our Preaching Manual: When will he do his work? Now and Then Questions (Mark 12:13-13:2)

The Love Balance, Now and Then

All Scripture quotes are from the ESV unless otherwise noted.

Jesus cleansed the temple towards the end of his three years of ministry and the religious leaders challenged him. They followed up this challenge up by asking him difficult questions to trap him. The stories in the following chart present the flow of these events in the temple as Jesus was questioned.

This layout compares and contrasts the first story and the fifth story (AA'), the second and the fourth (BB'), placing the third in the middle at the apex of the triangle (X). The scribe who asked Jesus about the greatest commandment was "not far from the kingdom of God" because he was focusing on what was really on God's heart, our love for him and for our neighbor. His focus was both on the here and now, as well as, the future, there

<p>A 12:13-17 Tribute The Pharisees and Herodians were sent to trap Jesus.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's. 2) Render to God the things that are God's. 		
	<p>B 12:18-27 Doctrines Sadducees, who denied resurrection, tried to trap Jesus.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) In the life to come we are like the angels. 2) God is God of the living. 	
		<p>X 12: 28-34 Love The two greatest</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) <u>Love</u> God with all your being. 2) <u>Love</u> your neighbor as yourself.
		<p>B' 12:35-40 Teaching</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Christ is both son and Lord of David. Christ's enemies were to become his footstool. 2) The Scribes were thieves and hypocrites and would receive greater condemnation.
<p>A' 12:41-13:2 Offerings</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) The rich gave God their « leftovers »; the poor widow gave all. 2) The temple and its beautiful stones would be torn down. 		

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and then. His focus was not limited to money and material things, and the present earthly life, but to spiritual things and the life to come as well.

In this set of five stories two things are implied very strongly about the religious leaders. Firstly, the religious leaders loved money and their temple buildings, rather than God. Jesus said their buildings would be torn down and history tells us their riches were hauled away. Secondly, the religious leaders loved the present earthly life, rather than eternal resurrection life. Jesus said their subjugation and condemnation was just.

Temple Converted to Coliseum

According to various documentary videos and articles, one which I cite here, the Roman general Vespasian sacked Jerusalem and sold the Jewish temple's religious articles. He used these treasures to construct the Coliseum. Vespasian's son, the Roman general Titus, sent twenty thousand Jewish slaves to Rome. Some of them built the Coliseum; others the Romans sold to finance the construction (<http://www.jewishgen.org/Sephardic/coliseum.htm>, accessed 1 December, 2015).

Everyone Falls Short ... but there is hope!

But lest anyone think we "have it in" for any nation in particular let us be honest and remind ourselves that other spiritual leaders have fallen into the same faults as the Jewish spiritual leaders. Man is man with all his faults whatever the nationality or ethnic origin. The Bible says, *For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23 ESV)*. This includes me. But this quote from Romans has a beautiful context. Let us place this short quote back into that context.

But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: **for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God**, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus (Romans 3:21-26 ESV).

The quote from verse 23 might leave us feeling angry, hopeless, helpless, enraged, frustrated and in denial. But the best way forward is to take a step back. It is far better to accept God's diagnosis of our spiritual condition than to rush forward blindly. Let us not say, "I never robbed a bank or killed anyone!" Let us ask rather if we have loved God with all our being and our neighbor as ourselves. I have to immediately sign up in the group that has to admit that we have not. I am far from obeying these greatest two commands. I have been consistently selfish in all my ways.

Ring with Hope

But then the context of our just condemnation rings with hope. The answer is not to try even harder to obey God's commands in order to be saved, but to receive as a gift the righteousness of God through Jesus Christ as God's gift to whomever will believe in Jesus. Believing this gift exists is like believing God exists. The gift is not a material thing you can touch or measure with a ruler but a spiritual reality. But neither are justice and peace or joy physical realities, but they are non-the-less real. Telling ourselves we need to try even harder to obey God constantly would be like asking a blind man to open his eyes and when he was unable to do that exhort him to try even harder. No, the blind need a miracle to be able to see again. God works a spiritual miracle in us when we are converted to him and to his representative, his one and only Son, from our self centered way of life.

Dead End

Now this approach of placing our trust in God has enormous possibilities but trying to please God on my own is a dead end street. It leads only to death and condemnation ... final condemnation, what the scribes of Jesus' day would be facing (12:38-40) ... what the Messiah's enemies would face (12:35-36). Let us remember when these strong words are used by the psalmist and Jesus, they refer to the fact that I, and all humankind, have made ourselves enemies of God not the other way around.

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A Bit of Spiritual History

When Adam and Eve, our forefathers, rebelled against God's very specific command, they rebelled against his word, not he against them. In response to their rebellion he had to send them out of the very special place he had given them in which to live. They lost both spiritual and physical benefits. But after they sinned he came through the garden looking for them. God searched for Adam and Eve. He did not simply turn his back on them. In fact, when he pronounced judgment on them he included a word of hope, that the seed of the woman would crush the head of the Serpent, the one who led them away from God. But he also said something else about the Serpent. The Serpent would crush the heel of the seed of the woman. The seed of the woman would suffer terribly but that suffering would mean the Serpent's head would be crushed. He would be destroyed forever. There would arrive a day in which people would no longer suffer his temptations and cruelty.

The seed of the woman refers to the Messiah, Jesus Christ, for he was born of a virgin, of her seed, not that of the man, or their combined seeds, as is usually the case. His birth would be unique. The Holy Spirit would work a wonder in his birth causing the seed of the woman to produce a unique human being, the Messiah, who was both God and man (v. 23 of Matthew 1:18-25). Furthermore, this Son born of the virgin would be called Jesus because he would save his people from their sins (v. 21 of Matthew 1:18-25). How could Jesus be part of "a people" if he were not truly man, and how could he be born of only the woman's seed if he were not truly God in the flesh?

Someone might say, "But there is a case of spirit beings, the sons of God, of Genesis 6:4, who cohabited with the daughters of men, and produced giants. Has not this taken place before, the seed of these daughters of men used by spirit beings to produce offspring?" Commentators will admit the passage is unclear as to whether the sons of God refer to spirit beings or to the sons of the family of Seth, which appears at the end of chapter 4 and throughout chapter 5. If "sons of God" refers to them, as it might well, it does so because with Seth people began to call on the Lord (Genesis 4:25-26). However, with time these who called on the Lord saw that the daughters of others were beautiful and were tempted to intermarry with them. This intermarriage did not lead to greater holiness but to greater degradation, because they were marrying those who did not call on the Lord. It produced giants physically but midgets spiritually. The violence in the earth grew so horrific God decided to rid the earth of that generation through a great world wide flood (Genesis 6:5-7).

Two Condemnations and Salvations? Physical and Immediate; Spiritual and Eternal?

Some might see God's judgment through the flood as very cruel of him, but he finally and only sent the flood because the world was so full of violence, and people only devised evil in their hearts continually. Let us also remember that this judgment was passed by an all knowing and all seeing God, not a limited human being, warped in his thinking by sin. Noah was not the one sending the judgment. He was the one being saved from it. Furthermore, the violence and evil was not done in a corner, hidden from sight. The violence and evil were rampant. They were obvious to all, both to God and to all peoples.

While the Bible doesn't seem to give us every detail about the flood (it would take a larger volume than the present Bible to accomplish that) someday God may tell us. When the flood waters rushed across the earth, were there those who finally recognized that what Noah, the preacher of righteousness had been telling them was true and that their judgment was from God, and repented of their sins even as they died, calling upon the Lord? Would I be going too far to say there may have come a division in mankind at the very moment when they died in the flood? Some may have continued to "spit in the face" of God while others recognized God's hand in the disaster that was upon them and turned in their hearts to him, calling upon him for salvation.

Like the criminal who died next to Jesus on the cross they would not be delivered from physical death but they would be with God in paradise (Luke 23:43). They would never enjoy calling upon the Lord and knowing him in this life. They would never be able to see that wonderful change God brings to our lives morally, often referred to by the expression "clean up their lives" before they died, but neither did the thief on the cross, and yet because he trusted the person of Christ he would enjoy his presence in paradise. Christ "cleaned up his life" as a gift. He certainly could never boast that he himself had "cleaned up his life" and that God was grudgingly forced to allow

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him into paradise. No, Christ welcomed him into paradise because the man had placed in Christ's hands his misspent life on earth and his eternal future.

Someone might protest that it is unfair of God to allow someone into God's eternal home who had consistently done wrong, and not allow another to be with God in heaven forever who had done just as much evil. The Scripture says God does not want any to perish (2 Peter 3:9), and a line is drawn between two people who have consistently done wrong, because one is willing to admit his wrong and cast himself on God's mercy, and the other rejects God and his mercy to the very end. The Lord gives both of them the opportunity to repent of their sins at any point along life's road before they die. God's love, mercy and grace is available to both of them at any point. The decision belongs to both. What will be my attitude towards God? Would I want to be in eternity with the God I hate and reject, no. I would want to be with the God I love and accept, because he has simply loved and accepted me?

"Return to Me and I will Return to You" (Zechariah 1:4)

Let us not make this complicated. Isn't it amazing that all this takes us back to the two greatest commandments? We must love God with all our being and our neighbor as ourselves, and that the command to do this lasts even to the last moments of our lives. The criminal on the cross loved Jesus and called on him, even exhorting the other criminal next to him not to curse the Christ but accept who he was. He loved God in the person of Christ, and loved his neighbor, the other criminal, exhorting him regarding Jesus.

One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!" But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong." And he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." And he said to him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise (Luke 23:39-43).

The generation of Israel that came out of slavery in Egypt was the first generation to receive this command to love the Lord their God with all their being, and their neighbor as themselves. They had seen the mighty works that the Lord performed against the gods of Egypt and their king and army, delivering them from a furnace of slavery. But they turned away from the Lord in their hearts and back to Egypt. They complained consistently about the lack of provisions in the desert. They tempted the Lord again and again. The Lord finally condemned that generation who came out of Egypt to wandering for 40 years in the desert until all that generation from 20 years and older died. At that point God was about to wipe them all out but Moses pleaded for them, that God would forgive them. God said he did forgive them but they must die in the wilderness and never enjoy the land of promise.

13 Moses said to the Lord, "When the Egyptians hear it- for you brought up this people by your power from among them- 14 then they will tell it to the inhabitants of this land. They have heard that you, Lord, are among this people, that you, Lord, are seen face to face, that your cloud stands over them, and that you go before them by day in a pillar of cloud and in a pillar of fire by night. 15 If you kill this entire people at once, then the nations that have heard of your fame will say, 16 'Because the Lord was not able to bring this people into the land that he swore to them, he killed them in the wilderness.' 17 So now, let the power of my Lord be great, just as you have said, 18 'The Lord is slow to anger and abounding in loyal love, forgiving iniquity and transgression, but by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children until the third and fourth generations.' 19 Please forgive the iniquity of this people according to your great loyal love, just as you have forgiven this people from Egypt even until now."

20 Then the Lord said, "I have forgiven them as you asked. 21 But truly, as I live, all the earth will be filled with the glory of the Lord. 22 For all the people have seen my glory and my signs that I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and yet have tempted me now these ten times, and have not obeyed me, 23 they will by no means see the land that I swore to their fathers, nor will any of them who despised me see it. 24 Only my servant Caleb, because he had a different spirit and has followed me fully- I will bring him into the land where he had gone, and his descendants will possess it (Numbers 14:13-24).

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It is apparent that God is a forgiving God and showed his people mercy by forgiving them. Forgiveness is eternal, but the consequences of our sins may have a very negative effect on our life on earth as it did with that generation. Caleb eventually possessed and enjoyed the land of inheritance because he had a different spirit and followed the Lord fully. For Caleb following the Lord fully led to both eternal forgiveness and present earthly blessing. The rest of Caleb's generation received the Lord's forgiveness but forfeited their promised blessing on earth. This was also the case of Noah, who found grace in the eyes of the Lord and enjoyed the benefits the earth afforded him and his family after the flood.

In any case both Noah and Caleb had to go through a long trying period because of the sins of those around them. Noah was preparing the ark (*... God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared 1 Peter 3:20*), and Caleb had to wander in the wilderness until his generation died off before he could enter his inheritance. What is amazing was that neither of the two of them complained. Noah preached and Caleb exhorted and waited. They did not murmur against God nor against their fellow man. Are there people around you who seem to be keeping you from being blessed? Take the examples of Noah and Caleb to heart. God has his time for everything. During the present God may be teaching you something about what he himself has gone through trying to encourage people to repent and change their ways. I might well ask myself if I am hindering God, and hindering others to move forward and grow in their spiritual lives and blessings. Am I at fault? Do I need to search my own heart?

Sweet Balance

Loving God and loving our neighbor also brings a balance to our thinking, which includes the invisible God and the visible neighbor. The other stories in this group of five give balance between the spiritual and material, monies for God and Caesar; and the here and now (the present age) as well as the then and there (the future age), marriage now and marriage then, judgment now and judgment then.

The Dynamo of 1 Corinthians 13

One of the most powerful chapters of the Bible is 1 Corinthians 13 on the theme of love. Each time I read it I have a spiritual and emotional meltdown. We are guided by the hand on a sublime upward path of glorious instruction. We have an overwhelming sense, as we read that chapter, that it did not originate with man, but with God!

First Love

When the Lord speaks to the angel of the church at Ephesus he commends them for many of their actions, but he does have something against them. In Revelation 2:4 he says, *But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first.* In all our getting and rushing about in this busy life do we stop from time to time to refocus on love, love for God and love for our neighbor?

Refocusing on My First Love

In the fall of 1970 I invested a day refocusing on my first love. Your immediate reaction might be, "But surely you have refocused on your first love since that time?" Yes, I have, and often that occurs almost daily as I read the Bible and meditate on the Lord and my relationships with others. These are moments of incredible refreshment! As the end of 1970 approached however, I was in a downward spiral, becoming more discouraged and numbed spiritually and emotionally. During that decade OM celebrated what was called the Fall Training Conference each year in September.

One morning mid conference the leadership announced a day to be alone with the Lord. We were to lay aside all activity and dedicate that time to the Lord. That one day revolutionized my next two years. I realized I needed to make a list of all that was bothering me, areas in which I was failing and things I was holding against others, maybe even against the Lord. My list came to 45 items. It was so refreshing to present all those aches and pains to the Lord, ask him for forgiveness, forgive others, admit my failures, regrouping spiritually and emotionally. I then looked up Scripture passages that corresponded to each of the areas that troubled me. For example, I realized that I was putting myself first, others second and the Lord last in my life. So, I wrote down the first two greatest commandments next to this area of failure. I also realized I was trying to accomplish things in my own strength and

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needed to recognize that this was crooked thinking, and rely on him. Next to this point I placed verses like John 15:5, *I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.* I finished the day in thanksgiving and a growing sense of joy and peace. I was ready to return to the ministry the Lord had given me.

Phileo Love and Agape Love

In our spiritual growth we are to move from brotherly love to unconditional love.

Peter was quite proficient at expressing phileo love, and was probably very popular because of his dynamic character. However, God wants us to express both phileo love *and* agape love. Peter expressed this idea in his first epistle: *Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love [phileo] of the brethren, fervently love [agape] one another from the heart, (1 Peter 1:22).*

Believers in the churches of Asia Minor had already expressed phileo love, but Peter was encouraging them to fervently express agape love as well. If you are a Christian, you are encouraged to express both soulful, familiar love and spirit-led unconditional love. The goal of the Christian is to become "partakers of the divine nature."⁹ In Peter's second epistle, he says that we are to behave with moral excellence. However, this is not enough. Christians tend to be characterized by non-believers as telling other people how they ought to behave. However, the Christian life should not be restricted to just moral excellence, but, above all else, should include both phileo and agape love:

Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge, and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness, and in your godliness, brotherly kindness [phileo], and in your brotherly kindness, love [agape]. (2 Peter 1:5-7) (http://www.godandscience.org/love/what_is_love.html, accessed December 3, 2015).