

## Connecting the Old and the New

### *Give Up Control*

#### **I Want Mine!**

Leah and Rachel had a contentious relationship. How could they not? Leah accuses Rachel of 'taking her husband', and Rachel does not even try to deny it. Rachel "rents" Jacob out to Leah for a night in exchange for Reuben's mandrakes! (Mediterranean herb believed to have had aphrodisiac properties) Leah continues to hope that having children will win Jacob over to her, and unfortunately, we never know if Jacob ever honors her as he should. What we do know for certain that the Lord was with Leah, and that He gave her children.

Rachel wants to have a child and grows very jealous of Leah, her sister because she has children with Jacob. It doesn't matter that Jacob loves Rachel more than Leah. All she wants is a child.

*Read Genesis 29:31-35.*

- Why do you think that the Lord intervened for Leah?
- What do you think about Leah's hope that more children would win Jacob's affection?
- What do you think about Leah's statement after she had Judah?

*Read Genesis 30:14-21.*

- What do you think about this episode between Leah and Rachel? What does it tell us about their relationship?
- Why do you think Leah continues to want her husband to honor her? Why is Rachel jealous if it is obvious that Jacob loves her the most?
- What did Rachel do when she realized she would not be able to have children?
- What did Leah do when she had seen what Rachel had done?
- What exchange did Rachel and Leah make, and what was the result?
- What sort of bargains do people try to make with God?
- In what way do our sins catch up with us?
- How do you generally respond to unanswered prayer?
- When is it difficult for you to trust God patiently?

#### **What is the Greatest Commandment?**

The Pharisees expected Jesus to fold under the weight of all the 613 commands in the Law. Instead of buckling under the pressure, Jesus responded immediately by identifying the most important law. Part of His answer comes from the passage in Deuteronomy known as the Shema, which means "hear" or "listen" (see Deut. 6:4-9). These verses served as part of a general confession of faith offered by devout Jewish males every morning and evening.

**Read Deuteronomy 6:4-5, the original law Jesus cited as the greatest commandment. How was the religious climate of Israel different from the religious climate of our community today? In what ways might it be similar?**

The Shema begins, “Hear, O Israel! The LORD our God, the LORD is One!” It emphasizes the united, undivided nature of God. Since God is unique, no other being exists like Him. This fact stands as the foundation for Jewish belief in one God (monotheism).

- What makes loving God the greatest command?
- The Great Commandment emphasizes loving God with all your heart, soul, and might. What do each of those aspects of a person’s being represent?

God’s united, undivided nature (see Deut. 6:4) demands the full allegiance of those who claim Him as their God. Love for God rises as a response to His gracious love for people demonstrated in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Our love for God is to be unconditional and undivided in the way that He and His love for us is unconditional and undivided. This love is to extend from all our heart, soul, and might. The Jews believed human thoughts originate in the heart. From the soul came a person’s will and feelings. The might represented a person’s physical nature. Combined, these words highlight the requirement to love God with all our being—emotion, spirit, and body.

- Why do you think loving God comes before loving others
- What does it look like in practical terms to love God with your heart, soul, and might?

Making God the supreme priority of our lives requires constant attention to Him. As we involve ourselves in day-to-day living, our commitment to God above all else should guide our thoughts and actions. But when asked what the greatest commandment is, Jesus added a second commandment to the first one. The two cannot be separated from each other. We can’t love others well if we don’t love God well.

**Read Matthew 22:39-40.**

- Based on what you know about the Jewish laws of the Old Testament, how do you think the Pharisee expected Jesus to respond to his question?
- What surprises you about Jesus’ response to the Pharisees?
- What specific question did the man ask Jesus?
- How did Jesus answer the Pharisee’s question?
- What important footnote did Jesus add to His answer?
- What kind of love for one’s neighbor did Jesus require?
- Who would Jesus say is your “neighbor”?

Again, Jesus took a command from the Old Testament, this time from Leviticus 19:18, “Do not take revenge or bear a grudge against members of your community, but love your neighbor as yourself; I am Yahweh.”

“The second is like it” is a profound statement that shows the two commands are intrinsically tied together—if people love God then they will love those whom God loves. The way people interact with God affects how they interact with others.

Jesus redefined the Jewish concept of “neighbor.” To the Jews, a neighbor was another Jew to the exclusion of non-Jewish people. Jesus, however, with the parable of the good Samaritan (see Luke 10:25-37), expanded on that definition. According to Jesus, a neighbor was anyone who needed help. Jesus added that a believer should love others as themselves. Certainly Jesus never promoted an egocentric self-love. However, people do watch out for themselves. Love for others should equal or exceed concern one has for oneself.

### **Putting it All Together**

- Why are each of these commands foundational to the life of a Christ follower? What happens if you choose to obey one but not the other?
- What actions and attitudes make it evident that people love their neighbors as themselves?
- How do we treat others when they are getting what we want?