

When we began to follow the Great Teacher, we could sense that we had the chance to become part of something truly great, something that would make a wondrous mark on the world. But we thought only of this present world, and it took some time as a follower to realize that what we were involved in would grow beyond anything that we had imagined.

Jesus told us the parables of the mustard seed and the yeast<sup>1</sup>, and we understood (or thought we did) that the kingdom of heaven would grow from the few of us to a great and powerful nation. We were to find, rather, that this growth (like the kingdom itself<sup>2</sup>) was to be within our hearts and souls.

With me, it started when one of the experts in the law tried to test Christ with the question, "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" Jesus did the unexpected, as usual, and explained the actual foundation for the laws that had caused many to be so misdirected. Too many Jewish leaders had lost track of the real reason that the laws were given to us. But Jesus could not forget.

He gave as the greatest law the great Shema, which stated that one must "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind<sup>3</sup>." He then followed up with the second greatest: "Love your neighbor as yourself<sup>4</sup>." Jesus folds in another "command", not much emphasized by the Jews because it was taken from a rather obscure part of the scripture, where it appeared in the lists of seemingly disconnected rules.

He was not talking just about how we act<sup>5</sup>, either, but how we feel about people. All those who are hypocrites, whether they realize it or not, are able to act differently from their true feelings<sup>6</sup>.

His summary, "All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments," showed that these great laws were a foundation for great growth. And those who focused on the ten commandments as the "Great Law" had missed the real point. It was just too much for his listeners to absorb at once<sup>7</sup>.

The great growth that the Teacher was trying to get us to see was about love, and how He was leading us to have great Love like the Love that God has for us. Looking back, I see how He was not limiting us to love to the degree we love ourselves, but to grow far beyond that. Perhaps to love others with all of our being as well, but the greatest goal would be to love others like God does.

Paul in his writings covered this idea well, as he urged us to value others more than we do ourselves<sup>8</sup>. And he stated that we must have the same mind (or heart) that the Christ had when he emptied himself to save us<sup>9</sup>. He (and His Father) loved us all that much<sup>10</sup>! Generally, these words inspire us to love God more. But it should cause us to love others more as well!

So, the theme of growth is now a key theme for me as I struggle to deal with other people (who do not always appear to be lovable). The two "Great" laws are the foundation for building our souls to become like God<sup>11</sup> (as much as possible with our sinful nature). When we see the power of God's love through Christ, we should be stirred to emulate Him<sup>12</sup>, and to try to love others even beyond our love of self.

1. Matthew 13:31-33
2. Luke 17:21 (KJV)
3. Matthew 22:37, from Deuteronomy 6:5
4. Matthew 22:39, from Leviticus 19:18
5. consider the "Golden Rule", Matthew 7:12
6. see several references in Matthew 6
7. read the book Jesus Creed, by Scot McKnight
8. Philippians 2:3
9. Philippians 2:5-8
10. John 3:16
11. Matthew 5:48

12. Jesus transforms us so that we really begin to love like he does so that we move toward perfection that we finally obtain in heaven. John Piper

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