

## **Week 26: Matthew 22:15–46**

### **Hook**



**Main Point: The two great commandments are to love the Lord your God with all you have and to love your neighbor as yourself.**

CliffsNotes has been preparing study guides since 1958. The business started with just 16 study guides on works of Shakespeare and has grown to cover more than 300 pieces of literature.<sup>i</sup> While these guides are written by teachers and professors as intended supplementary pieces, time-pressed students have been known to bypass the original works altogether in favor of these succinct study guides.

Break your LifeGroup into small groups and ask them to try their hand at summarizing one of their favorite novels in one sentence.

**Q: Why are convenience products such as CliffsNotes so popular?**

**Q: Why is brevity a challenge for most?**

**Q: At this point in our study, how would you summarize the book of Matthew?**

**Transition:** Today we observe Jesus' summarizing the Law in two key commandments.

## Week 26: Matthew 22:15–46

### Book

**Main Point: The two great commandments are to love the Lord your God with all you have and to love your neighbor as yourself.**

**Matthew 22:15–33 [Read]**

**Talking Point 1:** You can't stump Jesus!

**Q: Why were the Pharisees trying to trap Jesus in His words?**

**Q: Why were these two particular questions difficult for a teacher to answer?**

This whole chapter is a series of questions the Pharisees and Sadducees posed to Jesus to try to stump Him or get Him to contradict Himself or the Word of God. We've seen this kind of thing happen a lot in political debates or press conferences, haven't we? The press asks questions or tries to trip up the speaker in his words, and if he doesn't think well on his feet, he can accidentally contradict himself or sound really dumb. In the honor/shame culture world of the New Testament, this was not just an intellectual or theological challenge, it was an honor challenge. As we have talked about before, honor was very important in that culture, affecting everything from the kind of job one could have to who would do business with you to whom you could marry – people only associated with others on their same level of honor. Honor was essentially your amount of value in the world.<sup>ii</sup>

Everyone was born into what we call "ascribed honor." If you were born into a wealthy family, you had a higher level of honor; if you were born with a disability, you had a lower level of honor, etc. But you could also gain or lose honor throughout your life, either through things you did or even things that happened to you that were not your fault. If you committed adultery, you lost honor. If you were successful in business, you gained honor. If you became ill with a disease or your husband divorced you, you lost honor. A more important person could give you more honor by inviting you to a meal in his home or asking you to sit in a place of honor that was above your station. Everything that happened to you could affect your honor status, including someone challenging you with a hard question, especially if you were a rabbi. When the Pharisees, scribes and Sadducees asked Jesus these kinds of questions, they weren't just trying to trip Him up or embarrass Him, they were challenging His honor. Scholars call this a *challenge-riposte*. If Jesus answered poorly, He lost honor, and His challengers gained honor. If He answered well, He gained honor and His opponent was put to shame (Luke 13:17).<sup>iii</sup>

It's amazing that His opponents kept trying this tactic, because Jesus always won and always amazed the people – and even them – at His answers. But they kept trying, hoping they would finally catch Him in something, and the people would stop following Him – until this chapter. At the end of this chapter, after they challenged Him three times, Jesus turned it back on them,

challenging them with a theological question – which they could not answer – and “nor from that day did anyone dare to ask him any more questions” (v. 46). In the last week of His life, just before His death, Jesus finally shut them down from even trying to challenge Him when it came to theology. So they had to turn to getting rid of Him in a physical way.

The Pharisees opened with flattery (v. 16) to lower His guard. With the first question, they hoped to catch Him either coming or going. Either He supported paying taxes to Rome, which would make some in His audience question whether He was really the Messiah, since they’re expecting someone who would lead a revolt against Rome, or He didn’t support the tax, which could allow them to charge Him as a revolutionary and have Him executed by Rome.<sup>iv</sup> Part of the problem with the imperial tax was that it required them to use the coin with Caesar’s image on it, which the empire used to promote worship of the emperor (graven images were outlawed by the second commandment). The larger issue was one of worship rather than just paying taxes to a secular government. Jesus’ answer, “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s and to God the things that are God’s,” meant paying taxes was just giving Caesar’s own coin back to him, but our worship and allegiance belong to God alone. These coins belong to Caesar, but the whole universe belongs to God. Paying taxes to a government is fine, but our whole lives belong to God – all that we are and all that we have. Jesus’ challengers marveled at His response and went away. He shut them up; they couldn’t respond to that.

The same day, another group, the Sadducees, challenged Him. While the Pharisees focused on piety and the study of the law, the Sadducees claimed righteousness through birth and social status. The Sadducees had more power and wealth and controlled the temple and priesthood. These two sects were in constant conflict until the destruction of the temple in AD 70. It’s important to know that the Sadducees only believed in the first five books of the Hebrew Bible, the Torah. So, one of the things they did not believe in was the immortality of the soul; they did not believe in a bodily resurrection after death. When they asked Jesus who a woman would be married to in the afterlife if she had had seven husbands, they were intentionally pointing out what they saw as flaws in the concept of a resurrection.<sup>v</sup>

Many widows remarried, especially if they didn’t have children to care for them. The levirate law commanded that upon a man’s death, his brother marry his childless widow and bear children through her, both to provide for her and to honor his brother. The first son would be considered the son of the dead brother, and therefore carried on his name (Deuteronomy 25:5–6). This act allowed him to inherit his brother’s estate. Remarriage was common, but some would consider a woman who had been widowed seven times either cursed or evil, having likely killed the husbands herself. Some rabbis in the Talmud forbade a woman to continue to marry after the second or third husband.<sup>vi</sup>

First, Jesus addressed the specific question – there is no marriage in heaven. Then He addressed the concept of the resurrection in general, which was what they were really challenging. He put together the fact that God is not the God of the dead but of the living with the fact that God calls Himself the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (“I Am,” not “I was”). Therefore, the patriarchs are living; they are alive, not dead. God would not claim to be the God of someone

who no longer existed.<sup>vii</sup> Therefore, there is a resurrection.<sup>viii</sup> Jesus emphasized that the Sadducees understood neither the meaning of the Scriptures nor the power of God. He pointedly said, “You are wrong” (v. 29), but He also used one of His common phrases when talking to the religious leaders, “Have you not read ... ?” (v. 31).

Different sects of Judaism held different interpretations of God’s Word back then just as there are different denominations with different interpretations of God’s Word today. God’s Word is inerrant, but our understanding of it is not. We must remain humble and teachable when it comes to Scripture, constantly striving to learn more and grow deeper in our understanding of it.

Instead of bringing shame to Jesus through their questions, as they intended, the Sadducees brought Him honor. The crowd was astonished at His teaching (v. 33). As it said at the end of the Sermon on the Mount, He wasn’t like any of the other teachers; He taught with real authority (7:29). Jesus completely understood God’s Word because He was God, and He was the Word of God made flesh. Jesus was the image of the invisible God. When we want to know who God is or what God would do or say in any situation, we look to Jesus. We don’t lean on our own understanding or our own interpretation. We look to what Jesus said. He is our ultimate authority.

**Q: In what ways did Jesus challenge the religious leaders’ understanding of the Scriptures and what Messiah and the kingdom were all about?**

**Q: In what ways does the world (or even sometimes the Church) tend to misunderstand what Jesus was really all about and what He taught?**

**Q: Why is it important to keep our theology consistent with who Jesus was and what He taught?**

**Matthew 22:34–40 [Read]**

**Talking Point 2:** All of God’s law can be summed up in: Love God and love your neighbor.

**Q: How do these two commandments sum up the whole law?**

**Q: How are these two commandments related to each other?**

The third person to challenge Jesus was an expert in the law, a Pharisee. The Pharisees had heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees and decided to test Him again. This was a question about which the Pharisees often argued among themselves.<sup>ix</sup> There were 613 commandments in the Law – 248 positive (do) and 365 negative (do not).<sup>x</sup> How could you possibly pick just one as most important? All of God’s law is sacred and equally important in one sense. If you sin in any of them, you are guilty of breaking the whole law (James 2:10). Some rabbis said the command to obey your parents was the most important because it was the only commandment with a blessing attached, some said the law of circumcision because it was the sign of the

covenant, others said the sacrifices because they atoned for sin. Some said the command against idolatry was most important because by it, Israel's kings were measured, and others stressed loving God as being above all.<sup>xi</sup>

First Jesus quoted the *Shema* ("to hear"), named from the first words of it – "Hear, O Israel ... love the Lord your God ...." The *Shema* is the oldest fixed prayer in Judaism, recited every morning and every evening. Every Jew would have had this memorized. From the beginning, Jews considered the *Shema* to be a summary of the law, so this was a very typical answer. But Jesus combined it with the command from Leviticus 19:18 to "love your neighbor as yourself" (also a summary statement) because those two commandments are interdependent. You can't say you love God if you don't love your neighbor (1 John 4:20). If you love God, you *will* love others. The Ten Commandments can be summarized by these two laws: Commandments 1–4 are "love God"; 5–10 are "love others." The rest of the Old Testament just fleshes out these two ideas. If you love God and others, you will follow the rest of the laws.

Jesus could say nothing to the Pharisees about the law that they did not already know *in their heads*. But, as He told us in the Sermon on the Mount, He wasn't concerned about just the external keeping of the law, He was concerned about *the heart* (Matthew 5). The Pharisees were asking Jesus to pick a "rule" that was the most important. Instead, Jesus emphasized the heart condition behind the rules. What really matters to God is not our checking off a to-do list of rules to stay in His good graces but instead a heart that loves Him and loves His people. If we have that, living within God's law naturally follows. In the next chapter (Matthew 23), Jesus pronounced woe on the Pharisees, because even though they were careful to keep every *letter* of the law, they didn't really keep these two greatest commandments. It was all for show; it was not done out of love. As Paul wrote, if we do all the religious stuff in the world but don't have love, it means nothing. It's just noise (1 Corinthians 13:1–3).

On His last night with them, Jesus told His disciples that the world would know they were His followers if they loved one another (John 13:35). Because God is love, and Jesus is God, those who truly know Jesus will love. Love is *the* defining characteristic of being a Christian.

Unconditional, self-sacrificing love. We typically hear about four words for love in Greek (though some scholars give even more), while English only has one word for love that can be used from everything from "I love my mom" to "I love pizza." *Agape* is the unconditional, God kind of love. In Scripture, *agape* is specifically used of the love of God (whom you could never repay) and love for the poor (who could never repay you).<sup>xii</sup> Only *phileo* and *agape* appear in Scripture, and *agape* appears almost five times as much as *phileo*.

*Phileo* is the kind of natural love you have for your "brother" – family, friends, people in your "tribe" – people you like. *Agape* is a harder love. It's choosing to love someone you wouldn't ordinarily get along with, respect, or befriend. This *agape* was radical in Jesus' time. It's a love

focused on the other, a voluntary giving of yourself. No other writings, religion or society gave emphasis to *agape* or other-centered love. The message that “God *is* love” was also a totally radical belief in Jesus’ time. Others may have said that their gods were loving or loved someone, but to say God *is* love was a completely new idea.<sup>xiii</sup> In the New Testament, love is *defined* by God’s self-sacrifice on the Cross (Romans 5:8; 1 John 4:10). The New Testament writers saw everything in its light; it revolutionized their idea of what love is.<sup>xiv</sup> In the Gospels, love *is* sacrifice. The Christian life is not about you. It’s about giving yourself up for others.

*Agape* is the kind of love that can only come from Jesus. It is not natural; it is not human. It is not an impulse generated from feelings. It’s an exercise of the will, a deliberate choice. It is choosing to love people even when they aren’t very lovable. This is what it means to be a follower of Christ – to love God with everything you are and everything you have and love others as He did. *All* others.

**Q: When our communities see us loving each other, the lost, and even our enemies with radical, unconditional, self-sacrificing love, how do they respond?**

**Q: Why is *agape* so hard for us? Why doesn’t it come naturally?**

**Q: Which harder-to-love people in your life is Jesus calling you to love? How can you reach out to them in self-sacrificing, other-focused love this week?**

**Matthew 22:41–46 [Read]**

**Talking Point 3:** Jesus is not just a prophet; He is God Himself.

**Q: Why does this question stump the Pharisees? Weren’t they experts in the law?**

**Q: How do you think this made them feel about Jesus?**

Here Jesus asked them a question – a question that challenged them to explain a part of God’s Word that may seem contradictory to the novice Scripture reader. If Messiah is the son of David, how can David call Him Lord? His series of questions were given in a typical rabbinic style, leading the student to discover the answer for themselves rather than simply telling them.<sup>xv</sup> No one was able to answer Him. His knowledge was simply too high for them (Psalm 139:6).

But Jesus wasn’t just stumping them theologically or intellectually. He was also saying something deeply important about who He was. Though the Jews tended to think of Messiah primarily as the Son of David, “Lord” was a much more appropriate title. He was the son of David; He descended from David’s line. But He was not just a human king. His kingdom was of another world (John 18:36).<sup>xvi</sup> In His final challenge-riposte with His opponents, here in the last

week of His life, just before they would crucify Him, He was claiming to be God Himself in the flesh.<sup>xvii</sup>

In this final challenge-riposte showdown of the book of Matthew, Jesus' authority and wisdom were absolute. *No one* could answer Him. *Not even a word*. From that day on, *no one* ever *dared* to ask Him any more questions again. This doesn't mean His disciples didn't continue to ask Him questions; this is specifically referring to this challenge-riposte kind of questions. No one ever dared to *challenge* Him again.

This shows Jesus as the conquering hero kind of Messiah they had been looking for. Not in a military way but a theological one. In His knowledge of the law and understanding of God, He had vanquished all His foes. It wasn't political power, military might, or physical prowess but this kind of power and authority shown through wisdom that was a common motif in hero stories in the ancient world.<sup>xviii</sup> Very quickly, He showed Himself to be a different kind of hero, one they weren't expecting. Instead of marching into battle, He marched to the Cross. Instead of winning a war, He vanquished His foes through sacrificing His own life. But this chapter ends on a high. Jesus is the Messiah, son of David, the Promised One. But He was even more. He is Lord of all, God Himself. He not only said so, He proved it by His supernatural understanding of the Scriptures. No one could challenge Him.

**Q: Why does it matter that we have a proper understanding of who Jesus is? How does it affect the way we relate to Him?**

**Q: Why do you think Jesus continued to answer the Pharisees challenges? What does this say about Him?**

**Q: How can we better understand God's Word and what it really means?**

## **Week 26: Matthew 22:15–46**

### **Took**

**Main Point: The two great commandments are to love the Lord your God with all you have and to love your neighbor as yourself.**

Teacher, share a story in which you focused on achieving one thing during a season of your life. Perhaps the goal was making a sports team, passing a test, opening a business or wooing your now-spouse. Challenge your LifeGroup to consider what life would be like if they took Jesus' words to heart and focused on the basics: love God, love others. Share with them all of the fruit in your life that has developed when you've been living out these two commandments.

**Q: What is one concrete way in which you can demonstrate your love for God this week?**

**Q: What is one concrete way in which you can demonstrate your love for others this week?**

### **CHALLENGES**

**THINK:** If you could ask Jesus any questions you wanted, what would they be? Not challenge-riposte questions, but real questions. What things do you want to understand better? What things do you need His help to see? How can you find His help? How can you hear His voice? How can you find His answers to your questions?

### **PRAY**

- Praise Jesus for His wisdom, power and sacrifice.
- Praise Jesus for being Lord of all and Messiah, the Son of David and Son of God, sent to save us all from death and sin.
- Ask Jesus to reveal His wisdom to you, give you greater understanding of the Scriptures, give you discernment to filter all the messages you hear in the world every day, and show you ways you need to change.
- Pray for God to reveal to you how better to love Him with your whole heart and your whole life, not just giving Him pieces of you.
- Ask God to show you how to love others better. Not just your family and friends, but strangers, enemies and people who are difficult for you to love.

**ACT:** Love. Choose one person who is often difficult for you to love and love him or her in an intentional way this week. Choose one thing you can do that will help that person meet a need, or make them feel appreciated, seen and valued. One way you can serve him or her in a sacrificial way is to humble yourself and put that person's needs first.



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<sup>i</sup> <https://www.cliffsnotes.com/discover-about>

<sup>ii</sup> Jerome H. Neyrey, *Honor and Shame in the Gospel of Matthew* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998).

<sup>iii</sup> Jerome H. Neyrey, *Honor and Shame in the Gospel of Matthew* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998).

<sup>iv</sup> Oscar Cullmann, *The Early Church* (London: SCM Press, 1956).

<sup>v</sup> William L. Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark, NICONT* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974).

<sup>vi</sup> t. Shab 15:8

Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B Eerdmans, 1999).

<sup>vii</sup> Richard N. Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1975).

<sup>viii</sup> James H. Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha and the New Testament: Prolegomena for the Study of Christian Origins* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

<sup>ix</sup> Donald A. Hagner, Matthew 14–28, *Word Biblical Commentary 33B* (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1995).

<sup>x</sup> For a list of all 613 commandments - [https://www.chabad.org/library/article\\_cdo/aid/756399/jewish/The-613-Commandments-Mitzvot.htm](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/756399/jewish/The-613-Commandments-Mitzvot.htm)

<sup>xi</sup> Geza Vermes, "Pre-mishnaic Jewish worship and the phylacteries from the Dead Sea" *Vetus Testamentum* 9 (1959), 65–72.

<sup>xii</sup> Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940).

C.S. Lewis, in his book, *The Four Loves*, has a slightly different definition of each of the four.

<sup>xiii</sup> Art Lindsley, "Argument from Agape," *Knowing and Doing* (C.S. Lewis Institute, Winter 2007), 2.

<sup>xiv</sup> Art Lindsley, "Argument from Agape," *Knowing and Doing* (C.S. Lewis Institute, Winter 2007).

<sup>xv</sup> Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982).

<sup>xvi</sup> Daniel J. Harrington, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1982).

<sup>xvii</sup> Stig Hanson, *The Unity of the Church in the New Testament: Colossians and Ephesians* (Lexington, KY: The American Theological Library Association, 1963).

<sup>xviii</sup> Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B Eerdmans, 1999).