

# Twenty-First Sunday after Pentecost

**Free From Fretting**

**Mark 12:28-34**

**Twenty-First Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 26)**

**Analysis by Robin Morgan and Ed Schroeder**

28One of the scribes came near and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, he asked him, "Which commandment is the first of all?" 29Jesus answered, "The first is, 'Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; 30you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' 31The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these." 32Then the scribe said to him, "You are right, Teacher; you have truly said that 'he is one, and besides him there is no other'; 33and 'to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the strength,' and 'to love one's neighbor as oneself,'-this is much more important than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices." 34When Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." After that no one dared to ask him any question.

---

## **DIAGNOSIS: Fretting Over the Law**

### **Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem)** – *Tripped Up by Good Intentions*

Earlier in this chapter the temple leaders had been challenging Jesus about vital issues of the day (authority, taxes, resurrection). One scribe who listened and, unlike his colleagues was impressed by Jesus' answers, asked him, "Which commandment is the first of all?" This scribe perceived something Torah-worthy about Jesus, but because of the scribe's mindset he misperceived who Jesus was and what he had to offer.

### **Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem)** – *Bureaucratic Blockage*

The scribe spoke respectfully enough from his position as a temple official, but that position (and the attitude that went with it) kept him from hearing Jesus' words and understanding who he really was. Not only were the scribe's ears blocked, but also his heart was blocked by his commandment-shaped thoughts and the priority he put on fulfilling the law. He looked to the heart of the law rather than the letter, but still he couldn't make sense of the radical nature of Jesus.

### **Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem)** – *Close, But No Cigar*

While the scribe was judging Jesus by commandment standards-however generous-Jesus (and the One who sent him) were judging the scribe by the standard of God's mercy in Christ. Jesus told him: "You are not far from the kingdom"; but "close to" is still not in the kingdom.

## **PROGNOSIS: Freed by the Messiah**

### **Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution)** – *Close to the Father*

With no regard for temple politics, Jesus went to that most unmessiah-like place, Golgotha, on the appointed Friday to

fulfill his messianic destiny. God's own beloved Son, the One for whom the heavens were torn open and on whom the Holy Spirit descended like a dove (Mark 1:10), died for the crowds left outside the temple and for that scribe, the other temple officials, and us that day. But we know that isn't the end of the story-it's not even the end of the weekend. Because the Son was close to the Father-obedient even when it meant his death-mercy did indeed change the world forever come Sunday morning.

**Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution)** – *“Hear, O Israel!” (and Us, Too!)*

Because the Son not only died on Friday, but rose from the grave on Sunday we can confess: “The Lord our God is the one and only Lord.” We can approach the table trusting that Jesus of Nazareth was sent by the God of our salvation; that's what faith is all about. Our relationship with God now rests on the foundation of Jesus' work on our behalf; and because of that work we have the high and holy privilege of calling Jesus Lord.

**Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution)** – *Freed for the Neighbor*

Living in our Lord Jesus allows us-frees us-to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength and to love our neighbor as ourselves. No longer do we need to fret over the letter or the heart of the law, we are free to embrace God's will for our lives-to live love, sharing the good news of our Lord with everyone we meet.