

## MATHEW 22:36 COMMANDMENT

*“Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the law?”*

**Mathew 22:36**

Note the question, “Which is the greatest commandment in the law?” Through the years, Jewish teachers had set up six hundred commandments. No person could keep them all, so the question was often asked and discussed: Which commandment or commandments must be absolutely obeyed? Which ones are important and which ones are not? Can the failure to obey some be condoned or not? Which commandments are heavy and which are light? If a person keeps the greatest of the precepts, can he be excused for his failure to keep others (Mt. 19:16f)?

Note two things about the tendency to count some of God’s laws important and some not.

1. This was the sin which James attacked.

**James 2:10** *For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.*

2. Christ taught that some laws are all inclusive and broader than others.

**Mat 23:23** *“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices – mint, dill and cummin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law – justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former.”*

The Pharisees were trying to turn the people against Jesus. People differed as to what the greatest commandment was. Some believed that it had to do with circumcision, others with sacrifices, and still others with the Sabbath. The Pharisees hoped that by stating His opinion, Christ would disturb the people who held a position different from His. He would thereby lose their following. There was the strong possibility that a man’s giving his judgment would seem to be lessening the weight of other very important commandments.

**Thought 1.** All of God’s laws are important – equally important. One is first and *weightier* only because it includes and embraces other laws. This means several things.

- 1) We may think in terms of supreme laws and lesser laws – that if we keep the greater laws, we do not have to pay much attention to the lesser. We may think that if we break the lesser laws we can be excused, but such thinking is false.

**James 2:10** *For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.*

- 2) Just because we may deny the importance of some laws does not make them unimportant. Our unbelief and denial do not void the law, not a single one. They still condemn us. Each law, in the force of its pronouncement, strikes out at our violation. It condemns us – no matter how little value we may place upon it.

This is a common deception of man: unbelief makes a thing ineffective and voids it. A man thinks, “If I deny something, ignore it, refuse to accept it, push it out of my mind, it will not be, nor

will it come to pass.” Many treat God’s Word and some commandments in this way, especially if they wish some sensual or stimulating pleasure. Too many conform their religion and their principles, their beliefs and the laws they obey to their behaviour. They want the right to do as they wish, so they make all things fit their wishes, including their principles. They follow only the commandments that allow them to satisfy their desires, and because they obey some standards, they feel acceptable and secure.

**Thought 2.** This passage is a profitable passage for lawyers and for other professionals, in particular if they are open and honest as this man seems to have been. Just a passing thought – in the day of judgment it will be interesting to see if this lawyer is one of the converts mentioned in Acts 6:9. □