Tonight we are going to look at the next two Questions of the Word of Truth Catechism in the section on law- Question 42 and 43.

**Q42. What are the greatest commandments?**

First, to love God. And second, to love our neighbor.

Jesus himself answered the question; what is the greatest commandment? We find it in M**atthew 22:34-40**

But when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”

We see here that the reason these are the greatest commandments is because all the Law and the Prophets depend on them. Law and prophets are widely understood to be the entire Hebrew Bible or the Old Testament.

Jesus is not saying that these two commandments REPLACE the law and the prophets. There are many who want to simplify God’s commands in this way, to say all you need to do is love God and love people, which is true in a sense, but it’s not that simple. The problem with taking this approach to God’s law is that without the rest of scripture filling in our definition and understanding of these two commands, we are left to love God and love our neighbor according to our own understanding of what love is, and when we are being informed by our flesh rather than by the Holy Spirit through the word of God, we will surely get it wrong.

Jesus was not summarizing the entire law in a way that simplified ALL that we need to know about God’s laws. He was not saying “as long as you know these two commandments you don’t need to know anything else.”

He says that the law and the prophets DEPEND on these two commandments. To say that they depended on these two commandments means that they leaned on them for support, were held up by them, or were hung on them. They derive their purpose from them. They exist as an expression of one or the other of these two commandments. To not understand this is to miss the forest for the trees.

Jesus is asked by the Pharisees “what is THE great commandment?” And why is he asked? They were asking to test him…again. Scripture does not give us much commentary on what the Pharisees were thinking here but it makes me wonder how this was a test. This seems like a pretty simple question to answer compared to most if not all of the other questions they had asked to try and trick him or test him.

Jesus’ answer comes right out of Deuteronomy 6:5. In Jewish tradition the Shema was a daily prayer that recited Deuteronomy 6:4-9. It was the most important prayer in Judaism. Shema is the Hebrew word for hear, the first word in the passage. Look with me in your notes or in your bible at verses 4 and 5:

4 "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. 5 You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.

If a Jew knew any portion of the law, they would have known Deuteronomy 6:4&5 and probably would have understood it to be the most important command. Jesus could have left it there and He would have answered their question sufficiently and they would have agreed, but He continues and says “And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

The Pharisees problem was not that they didn’t know what the law said. They knew it very well, they memorized huge sections of the law. And they were considered to be very zealous for keeping the law. They thought they could point to their love for God by pointing to their external obedience to the law. They probably thought that if Jesus answered correctly it would make them appear to be justified in front of the crowd.

Jesus says that to love God is the great and FIRST commandment. When He says it is the first commandment He is talking about the first of the commandments given to the people of Israel at mount Sinai (the Ten Commandments). Do you remember the first commandment? It says “you shall have no other gods before me”. It doesn’t specifically say “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.”

What Jesus says in answer to the Pharisees is a summary of the decalogue. In the Ten Commandments we see a distinction between commands that apply specifically to how we are to love God (commandments 1-4) and commands that apply to how we love our neighbor/other people (commandments 5-10).

By adding that a second command to love our neighbor is like it, Jesus points out the Pharisees’ hypocrisy and shows that our love for God will be revealed in how we love our neighbor. He is making the point that true love of God will be manifested in true love for our neighbor.

Just a little while later in Matthew 23: 23-24 he says "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others. 24 You blind guides, straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel!

They are keeping the letter of the law by tithing as the law requires, but their hearts are not concerned for the things that truly matter to God. All of their law keeping is worthless, it does them no good. They work extra hard at doing things that by themselves are meaningless.

There is a point to God’s command to tithe. The tithe was commanded as a way for the Israelites to learn faithfulness, that they would always fear God. It was also to bless the Levites who received no share of the land, and to care for the sojourner, the widows, and the orphans. God’s desire was for Israel to be a nation of faithfulness, justice, and mercy. This law and ALL the laws God gave were tied directly to His love, they were an expression of His love.

He was not saying you should have been faithful, and merciful, and just, INSTEAD of tithing. He is saying you should have obeyed from your heart. You should have been concerned with my REASONS for telling you to tithe.

In 1 Corinthians 13 1-3 Paul states it this way:

1 If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. 2 And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. 3 If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.

All of the piety, self-discipline, and effort are meaningless if love is not the primary goal and purpose of it.

The Pharisees did not love God. They loved themselves. They loved the attention that came from their status, they loved to boast in their self-righteousness. They worshipped the idol of self. So their obedience to the laws was just something they did to worship their own pride. It gave them a way to look down on others.

What is Love?

So we see that we cannot fulfill any of the law without love, but it is equally important to note that we cannot fulfill the command to love God or our neighbor without the law. Let me repeat that… we cannot fulfill any of the law without love, but neither can we fulfill the command to love God or our neighbor without the law.

That is because the law informs us HOW we are to love. It teaches us what true love really is.

Romans 13:9 says:

9 For the commandments, "You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet," and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

Here again we see the law being summarized, or in this case, being summed up. When Paul says that all of the commands are summed up in the command to love your neighbor as yourself, he is not minimizing the law. To sum something up means to bring it all together in one total. It doesn’t become smaller, it becomes larger. You cannot have the sum without the parts, and the parts only find their completion in the sum. So if we want to truly understand the command to love our neighbor as our self, we need to understand all of the other commands.

**1 John 4:8** Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.

How do we define love? We don’t! God does. God is love.

If we try to understand God through the lens of our own definition of love, we will have a very flawed view of God, we will have a God of our own design.

If we want to know what love is we have to know who God is, and we cannot know God by simply reading a summary statement of who He is. God is infinite and we can never know Him exhaustively, but we can know Him truly, and we can always be growing in our knowledge of God which will result in our growing love of God.

You don’t have to look very far to see what would happen if we were left to ourselves to define true love. The world has it’s own ideas about what true love is and it is sad to see how much pain it has caused in people’s relationships when they seek to find the love that their hearts desire while rejecting the one who IS love.

There are two extreme errors we can go to in regards to love. One is to love just with our emotion and to think of duty or obligation as a conflict to genuine love. This reduces to being a selfish kind of love that really own loves the feeling that we get from other people. That’s why so many people talk about falling out of love. They are talking about the fact that they no longer feel the same emotion toward the other person. It has nothing to do with any selfless giving of themselves to that person.

The other extreme is one that is devoid of emotion and settles for a mental assent to loving only from a sense of duty or obligation. We know that x, y, and z are the loving things to do so we do them. These “loving things” are done in such a way that there is really no skin in the game, I am really not concerned with what it produces. If it helps someone, great! If not… oh well, I did my part.

We are called to love with action that is motivated by an affection that wants to see the one being loved flourish.

With that in mind, think about our topic tonight…the greatest COMMANDMENTS. We are commanded to love. We have an **obligation** to love God, and an **obligation** to love our neighbor as ourselves. Does this mean that we are commanded to feel deep affection and have concern towards God and neighbor? Yes, it does.

We will unpack that more when we answer our question “How should we love God?” For now, I want to focus on WHY loving God is the great and first commandment.

To love God is the great and FIRST commandment

To love God is the great and FIRST commandment.

Again, the first of the ten commandments says, “You shall have no other gods before me.” Sam taught this very clearly a few weeks ago when we covered question 34 What is the sin of idolatry?

We learned that idolatry is misplaced worship. What does Romans say in chapter 1? they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator….

The command to have no other gods and the command to love God are really the same thing. We were created to worship, and we will worship something or someone. But nothing aside from God is truly worthy of our worship. When we love God, we love Him because He is worthy to be loved. He is perfect and good and Holy. We show our love for God by worshipping Him as the one true God who alone is worthy.

It is critically important that we get this right. The great commandments do not read “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind…and love your neighbor equally, in the same way.” No! Remember what we learned about idolatry and the Greek word for “evil desires.” It means over-desire. Those desires are not always evil things that we desire, it can just as easily be good things that we desire too much. To take something that God calls good and right, loving our neighbor, and elevating it to a place where it is now equal with God, is idolatry. This might seem like an unnecessary point, but it is important to bring up because it is a common error in our culture. Many churches have elevated the command to love people to a place of such importance that it has eroded the holiness of God in their worship. They have made man equal to and in many cases even greater than God. This is why our mission statement reads the way it does: We exist to glorify God **through** lives transformed by the gospel of Jesus Christ. We never want to lose sight of the fact that everything we do, including loving others, is driven by our love for God and our desire to see Him glorified.

The way we love our neighbor is different than the way we are to love God. I think that the word used for love towards people in the King James Bible really helps make this point clear. Whether it is love from God to man, or love for one another, the word the KJV uses is charity.

What is charity? Charity is widely understood to mean extending help, kindness, and or mercy to those in need. As sinners saved by grace, we all know and understand the neediness of fallen man. We know that because of our sin we all deserve to suffer the just wrath of God.

But what does God need?

We already learned about the aseity of God – that He is self existent and needs nothing outside of Himself. He doesn’t NEED our worship. Creation is an expression of His infinite overflowing love, not a way for Him to satisfy some unmet desire that we as creatures can give Him.

God is so holy, so perfect, and high above us that it is impossible for our feeble minds to grasp. He is so much more worthy of love than anything or anyone that we cannot comprehend that either. But the words of Jesus at least help us to understand our limitations in comprehending His supremacy.

In Luke 14:26 He said "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.”

We know that Jesus was not contradicting himself here by teaching that we are to literally hate the people in our lives that we are most connected to in loving intimacy. He is teaching us that our dedication, commitment, and affections for God should be so much greater than our dedication, commitment, and affections for ANYONE else that our love for God is literally in a class by itself – it cannot even be equated to our love toward other people.

The love we have for God should be so great that what we think of as love towards others, is in a completely different category.

We cannot love ourselves or others rightly without a proper perspective of who we are in comparison to God.

We cannot rightly obey any of God’s laws if our obedience does not come first from a place of love for God flowing out, secondarily into love for others. The priority of our hearts matters. Our love must begin with the perfect, holy, unchanging God in order for us to love our neighbor well. If we try to love our neighbor by beginning with them, we will burn out because they are not worthy of our love on their own merit. Their worth comes from being created in the image of God, and if we love God, we will love them for His sake.

Look with me at:

**1 John 4:20-21** 20 If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. 21 And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.

Do you see it there? John is not making a point about loving our brother as much as he is about loving God. What you have is instruction on what loving God looks like. IF you love God, you WILL love your brother. If you believe that you love God but see that you do not love your brother, John is saying that your love of God is a lie. It is a lie for at least two reasons, 1. The God you claim to love is not the One true God, (it is a lie about the object of your love) and 2. The love you feel is not true love, it is self serving and is not reflective of the love of God (it’s a lie about the substance of your love).

The person most hurt by this lie is not the people who are not being loved, it’s the one telling the lie. The one telling the lie is the one who is most deceived by the lie. They are missing out on the experience of true love because they are in love with a lie.

Because God is love, we cannot love apart from God. Let’s move now to our next Catechism question. Let’s read it together:

**Q43. How should we love God?**

We love God with all our heart and with all our soul and with all our mind. We do this by trusting in Jesus, enjoying Him, treasuring Him, growing in our knowledge of Him, believing His words, obeying His commands, and showing and telling the world how great He is.

**We are to love God with all our heart**. To love with our heart is a commonly used phrase in the English language. The word heart is associated directly with the word love. We understand the use of the word heart to mean our inner self, our strongest desires, the center of our will. It is that part of us that determines what we want, it is the driving force behind our desires. In other words, it produces desires within us that can only be explained as being a part of who we are as unique individuals. We don’t make conscious decisions to decide what we will like or not like. Look at the way we use the word love to describe our preference for things…”I love dogs, I love cats, I love rap music, I love country music…”

Some of you are sitting there saying “oh, no I don’t!”

The things that one person’s heart is drawn to may be an offense to someone else’s heart. We may learn to enjoy things that we once disliked, but even that does not take place without there coming a point where our hearts respond on their own, in their own time, not as decisive act of our will.

So then how do we choose to love God with our hearts if we are unable to deliberately produce genuine desire if it’s just not there? We have just finished studying the effects of sin on the human race and learned that because of sin fallen man’s heart is enslaved to sin. His desires are corrupted and he will only, always desire that which is evil.

Genesis 6:5

The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

Jeremiah 17:9

The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?

We are incapable of loving God with all our heart unless God has given us a new heart. It is impossible for us to obey this command by sheer determination. It is only by the grace of God that we are able to respond to Him in love.

1 John 4:19

We love because he first loved us.

Romans 5:8

but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

**we love God by trusting in Jesus and believing His words**

Our love for God is an act of faith. It is knowing and believing that God loves me, that Christ died for my sins, that in love He predestined me for adoption as His son before the foundation of the world. It is believing the promises of God and trusting in who He is.

Our love for God is tied directly to our faith in God. If we know and believe, I mean truly believe in who He is, what He has done and what He has said, it is impossible to respond with anything less than all of our heart. To know Him IS to love Him.

If we realize that we are not loving God with all our heart, the root of the problem is not in our affections, it is in our mind. That doesn’t mean that our affections are not wrong and sinful, but if our affections are for something or someone other than God it is because we are believing a lie. We are believing that God cannot and will not satisfy the longing of my heart. We are believing that His ways are not always good, that He does make mistakes, that He doesn’t really know what is best for me.

As our answer says, we love God by trusting in Jesus and believing His words.

It also says that we love God by enjoying Him and treasuring Him. I can’t think of any single created thing that everyone enjoys to the same degree, but imagine for a minute that everyone derived the same amount of pleasure for…fill in the blank… let’s say chocolate ice cream, and there was no downside either, let’s say that every bowl of ice cream you ate added a year to your life and converted fat cells to muscle, it makes you smarter, and on and on - there is NO downside.

God’s command for us to enjoy Him is as burdensome as would be the command for us to enjoy this chocolate ice cream – after we have already discovered how enjoyable it is. In other words, loving God by enjoying and treasuring Him is the result or the by-product of us believing and trusting in Him. It almost seems unnecessary for God to command that we would love Him in this way. But because God loves us He does command this, and because we still battle with sin, we can be tempted to forget the love we have for Him and turn our affections to other created things. We may be tempted in this way several times a day.

The natural disposition of our flesh is to terminate our affections on the good gifts that God has given us. In our flesh we can’t see past the created thing that we can see, feel, hear, smell, and taste. When something satisfys our flesh, our flesh wants to glorify that thing. When we are walking in true love for God and enjoying and treasuring Him as we should, all of the created things that are properly enjoyed by us will stir our affections for Him as the one who created them and gave them to us for our enjoyment and His glory.

When we are seeing the world through a lens that is informed by the truth of God’s word, we will not struggle to enjoy and treasure God. The “work” that we must be doing is to be on guard against all the ways that the world is constantly trying to conform us to its mold. We must work to set our minds on things that are above (Colossians 3:2), that we would not be conformed to this world, but transformed by the renewing of our minds (Romans 12:2).

The way to stir up our affections for God is to be reminded of who He is. And not only to be reminded of what we already know, but to dig through the treasure chest of His word and have His Spirit show us more and more great and wondrous things about Him. This was Paul’s constant prayer for the churches he ministered to.

Ephesians 1:16-19

16 I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, 18 having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, 19 and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe,

Colossians 1:9-10

And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, 10 so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.

Not only does our growing in wisdom and the knowledge of God stir up our affections for God, but it also causes us to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work…

It pleases Him, and we want to please Him. He only commands what brings us joy, and He is pleased when we are experiencing His joy. The love of God is such a wonderful thing!

**We love God by keeping His commands**

**John 14:15** [Jesus said] If you love me, you will keep my commandments.

John 15:10-11 If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.

These things that Jesus spoke about were obedience to His commands by abiding in Him and keeping His word, bearing good fruit. Our joy will be full when we love Him by keeping His commandments.

1 John 5:3

For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome.

His commandments are NOT burdensome. When we are seeing this life through the eyes of faith, it will not be hard to keep the commandments of God.

When Jesus says, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments,” He’s not saying, if you love me you will do things that are burdensome and difficult. He is saying that true love for me is lived out and experienced in obedience to me. There is a cause and effect that takes place. Our love for God necessarily results in obedience to His commands, and at the same time, our obedience to His commands brings us into closer relationship with Him so that our love for Him increases through our obedience.

We should want to obey the commands of God, not as a way of escaping punishment, but as a way of worshipping Him, and loving Him. We should never see obedience to God as giving up something good in order to avoid God’s wrath, we should see it as giving up something that will kill us for something that will bring us everlasting joy.

Our love for God is a response to His love for us. If you have never heeded the call of God to repent of your sin and to trust in Jesus alone for your salvation, you will not be concerned with sin and obedience that comes from a heart of love. It is impossible to fabricate love in our hearts if God does not first give us a new heart. The evidence of that happening is a belief in His word and a growing desire to follow Him and obey Him.

An affection for God without a desire to repent of sin and walk in obedience is a deception. Any warm fuzzy feelings about God you may think you have, are just made up fantasies about a god who doesn’t exist if there is no evidence of genuine repentance, a hatred of sin, and a desire to obey all of His good commandments.

Our good works of obedience do not save us, but we have been saved by God FOR good works which He has prepared for us (Ephesians 2:10). And while God’s commands are not burdensome, that does not mean they are easy. We live in a fallen world where the effects of sin make life difficult every day. Our love for God does not mean that we suddenly find it easy to obey His commands, but it does mean that we find it difficult to disobey Him – meaning that there is sorrow and brokenness when we sin, which results in repentance – a turning away from sin – a genuine effort to fight sin – an invitation for accountability, honesty and openness with others about how we might be struggling with sin.

And ultimately, our love for God is grounded in the obedience of faith. We don’t remain broken over our sin in a way that has us trying to do penance, or believing the lie that our sin is too much for God’s grace. We cling to the gospel and lay our burdens at the feet of Jesus.

**We love God by showing and telling the world how great He is**

And finally, we love God by sharing His gospel with the world. As our answer says: by showing and telling the world how great He is.

Again, this is the natural result of true worship. We cannot help but tell others about that which we love most. How many things in your life that you truly enjoy are you content to keep to yourself. We do not experience full satisfaction of anything we have enjoyed until we experience the satisfaction of seeing others enjoy it the way we have.

Unfortunately, the reverse is also true. When we share our enthusiasm for something we enjoy with others and they reject it, it can be pretty discouraging, to the point that we may lose our enthusiasm for sharing it with others. We might even feel ashamed by the rejection we feel. But that is why we must remember what the gospel is.

Romans 1:16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes…

We love God by showing and telling the world how great He is, not because everyone we tell will embrace that truth, but because WE know it’s true, AND because we know that it is the power of God to save ALL of His elect.

Showing and telling the world how great He is is not only how we love God, it’s also how we love our neighbor. Next week we will study **Q44. How should we love our neighbor?** so I hope to see you here.

PRAY