

# Follow – Walking in the Way of Jesus

Love First

Mark 12:35-40

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**Love is the interpretive center of the kingdom.** Not performative religion. Not ideological certainty. Not institutional preservation. Everything God does is from love and for love. Jesus is the ultimate picture of that.

## **Mark 12:28-40 CSB**

- **“Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength.”** - God does not want a compartment of your life. He wants your whole life oriented toward Him.
- **“Love your neighbor as yourself”** - Treat people with the same care, dignity, patience, and concern that you naturally give yourself.

**V.34 “You Are Not Far from the Kingdom”** - This is one of the most fascinating statements in Mark. Jesus does not say: *“You are in the kingdom.”* He says: **“You are not far.”**

The scribe:

- Understands truth INTELLECTUALLY,
- Perceives something SPIRITUALLY,
- But the tension is UNRESOLVED.

He is near. But PROXIMITY is not PARTICIPATION.

**V.35** The MESSIAH would INAUGURATE and REALIZE God’s Kingdom and bring people into it.

**V.38 “He also said in his teaching, “Beware of the scribes””** - The warning progresses from: Visible Status TO Hidden Corruption: Image – Appetite – Abuse

Therefore: To know the law is to be accountable for LOVING God by LOVING others.

## RELIGION vs. GOSPEL

- RELIGION: God loves the better version of me.  
GOSPEL: God loved me while I was still broken.
- RELIGION: Obedience earns closeness with God.  
GOSPEL: Obedience flows from closeness with God.
- RELIGION: I hide failure to preserve my image.  
GOSPEL: I confess failure because my identity is secure.

Ask:

1. Where am I content with being “near” the kingdom rather than fully surrendered to the King?
2. What currently receives the deepest affection and allegiance of my heart?
3. In what ways am I tempted to use spirituality, knowledge, influence, or visibility to protect or elevate myself?
4. Does my treatment of people reflect the love of God I profess?

**Ephesians 2:4–5 “But God, who is rich in mercy, because of his great love that he had for us, made us alive with Christ even though we were dead in trespasses.”**

God’s love acts first, awakens first, and restores first.

**Date:** May 17<sup>th</sup>, 2026

**Series:** Follow – Walking in the Way of Jesus

**Title:** Love First

**Primary Passage:** Mark 12:35-40

**Secondary Passage:** Eph. 2:4-5, 1 Jn. 4:19, Rom. 5:8

**Big Question:** What does genuine devotion to God actually look like?

**Big Idea:** Genuine devotion happens when the gospel moves from external performance to internal surrender as a declaration of love.

**Keywords:** Religion, Relationship, Law, Love, Sincerity, Admiration, Proximity, Messiah, Kingdom, Performance, Devotion, Gospel.

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## **GOING DEEPER – Life Application Questions**

What did love cost you this week? When were you reminded of God's love for you?

Read Mark 12:28–40, what contrasts do you notice between the scribe in verses 28–34 and the scribes Jesus warns about in verses 38–40?

- What does Jesus affirm in the first scribe?
- What corruption does He expose in the others?
- How do these two encounters help define genuine devotion to God?

Jesus says the greatest commandment is to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. What currently competes for your deepest affection, trust, or allegiance?

- What tends to consume your emotional energy or mental attention?
- Where are you most tempted to compartmentalize your faith rather than orient your whole life around God?

Which of the “Religion vs. Gospel” comparisons most exposes a tendency in your own heart right now?

- Do you find yourself trying to earn closeness with God, preserve an image, or hide failure?
- How does the gospel free us from performative spirituality and self-protection?

Jesus connects loving God directly to loving people. In what relationships is God currently calling you to demonstrate patience, dignity, humility, forgiveness, or sacrificial care?

- Is there someone difficult to love right now?
- What practical step of obedience or reconciliation might reflect the love of God this week?

Spend some time praying honestly before God.

- Ask Him to reveal areas where you are merely “near” the kingdom instead of fully surrendered.
- Thank Him that His love acts first, awakens first, and restores first.
- Pray that the love you have received in Christ would increasingly shape the way you see and treat others.