

COMMENTARY - MARK - Hurtado

Larry W. Hurtado. Mark. A Good News Commentary (NY: Harper & Row Publishers, Inc., 1983),

Mark 12: 28-44

This question comes from a member of the "scribe," a class of people trained to interpret the OT Law for the life of the people. The OT Law included 613 commandments, it is understandable that there was a desire to try to organize this body of material around a basic commandment so as to give a fundamental premise on which to hang all the individual commandments. For example, the great Jewish teacher Hillel, whose career is dated in the decades just before Jesus' ministry, is quoted as having replied to a Gentile who asked for a concise summary of Jewish law, "What you yourself hate, do not do to your neighbor; this is the whole Law, the rest is commentary. Go and learn it." Hillel clearly did not mean that all other commandments were irrelevant and could be ignored but that his summary gave the overall drift and character of the Law; and the scribe in the story would certainly not have intended to imply by his question that he felt that some commandments could be ignored if other, more important ones were kept. Rather, he was probably Jesus for his view of what he understood to be the fundamental purpose and character of the OT Law. The BNB translation in verse 28, **the most important of all**, should be rendered more correctly as "the chief commandment of all," **meaning the commandment on which the others hang**.¹

In comparing the Markan form of the incident with the parallels in Matthew 22:34-40 and Luke 10:25-28, where scribes were rather hostile toward Jesus, in Mark 12:28, the scribe is presented as favorably impressed with Jesus' previous answer, and Mark alone has Jesus commend the scribe, declaring him **not far from the Kingdom of God** (v. 34). Why? Mark probably wanted to show that the conflict between Jesus and the Jewish establishment was not based on a rejection of the OT or a complete disavowal of the Law by Jesus but instead on the refusal of the Jewish authorities to accept Jesus as the final interpreter of the OT Law.²

Mark meant this passage to show that Jesus should not properly be seen as a Jewish heretic, and that in fact his grasp of what the Law really represented was quite profound. To make this point here, Mark has the scribe respond favorably to Jesus' reply to his question (v.32-3), and he shows Jesus commenting favorably on the scribe's response (v. 34). He and Jesus recognize that they are not totally at odds. Thus, one is given the impression that the rejection of Jesus by the Jewish leaders was based more on ill will and spiritual blindness on their part than on a justifiable claim of heresy against Jesus.³

Temple ritual P. 190-191.

¹ Larry W. Hurtado. Mark. A Good News Commentary (NY: Harper & Row Publishers, Inc., 1983), 189.

² Larry W. Hurtado. Mark. A Good News Commentary (NY: Harper & Row Publishers, Inc., 1983), 189.

³ Larry W. Hurtado. Mark. A Good News Commentary (NY: Harper & Row Publishers, Inc., 1983), 190/