

# Matthew 22:35

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked him a question, tempting him, and saying,

## Analysis

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**Then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked him a question, tempting him** (καὶ ἐπηρώτησεν εἷς ἐξ αὐτῶν νομικὸς πειράζων αὐτόν/kai epērōtēsen heis ex autōn nomikos peirazōn auton). A νομικός (nomikos, lawyer or scribe) was an expert in Mosaic Law and rabbinic interpretation—professional theologian and legal scholar. **Tempting** (πειράζων/peirazōn) means testing with malicious intent, seeking to trap or expose fault. This is the same verb used of Satan tempting Jesus (Matthew 4:1), exposing the spiritual warfare dimension of this encounter.

The lawyer's question about the greatest commandment (verse 36) appears innocent but was designed to trap Jesus. If He elevated one command above others, He could be accused of diminishing Torah's authority or negating other commands. If He refused to prioritize, He'd appear indecisive or unable to answer, discrediting His authority as teacher. This pattern of hostile questioning disguised as sincere inquiry marks religious hypocrisy—using theological discussion as weapon rather than truth-seeking. Jesus transcends the trap by identifying love for God as foundational to all other commands.

## Historical Context

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First-century Judaism debated endlessly about legal priority. With 613 commandments in Torah (248 positive, 365 negative according to rabbinic counting), questions of hierarchy were inevitable. Which commands were 'heavy' (important) versus 'light' (less significant)? Could one principle summarize all

others? This wasn't merely academic—determining priority affected practical decisions when commands appeared to conflict. The lawyer's question, though malicious in intent, addressed legitimate theological issue. Jesus's answer (citing Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18) was revolutionary in combining vertical love for God with horizontal love for neighbor as the comprehensive summary of Torah, showing all law flows from love.

## Related Passages

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**Ephesians 2:8** — Salvation by grace through faith

**Romans 10:9** — Confession and belief for salvation

## Study Questions

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1. How does asking theological questions to trap or discredit others differ from genuinely seeking truth and wisdom?
2. What does it reveal about someone's heart when they approach Scripture and Jesus's teaching with hostile suspicion rather than humble receptivity?
3. In what ways might modern theological debates reflect the lawyer's spirit—seeking to win arguments rather than know God?

## Interlinear Text

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καὶ ἐπηρώτησεν εἷς ἐξ αὐτόν, νομικὸς  
Then        asked        one        of        him        which was a lawyer  
G2532        G1905        G1520        G1537        G846        G3544

πειράζων αὐτόν, καὶ λέγων  
him a question tempting        him        Then        saying  
G3985        G846        G2532        G3004

## Additional Cross-References

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**Luke 7:30** (Word): But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized of him.

**Luke 14:3** (Word): And Jesus answering spake unto the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath day?

**Luke 11:52** (Word): Woe unto you, lawyers! for ye have taken away the key of knowledge: ye entered not in yourselves, and them that were entering in ye hindered.

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