

Balanced Service

You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.
Deut 6:5

Jesus said to him, “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.” This is *the* first and great commandment.’ Matt 22:37-38

“And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.” This *is* the first commandment.’ Mk 12:30

‘You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,’ Lk 10:27

This is an incredibly important command of the Lord spanning both testaments and appearing in all three synoptic Gospels. As such it deserves a good deal of our attention. However, first we must clear up a textual problem.

The NT texts all add ‘with all your mind’ to the list given by Moses, while Matthew ignores ‘strength’. Firstly, such slight discrepancies are common in the Gospels as the writer seeks to emphasise what is important to him. There is no contradiction, just a slight change of emphasis. Jesus clearly sought to add ‘mind’ to the list in compliance with his teaching that actions stem from the choices in the mind; that the internal motivation is what prompts behaviour. Again there is no contradiction; the soul includes the mind in any case. The Lord was simply emphasising the point that the mind controls actions. Apart from that, all these components of human psychology overlap one another and clearly the main point is to emphasise that the whole person must be submitted to loving God.

Having established that there is no contradiction or serious textual difficulty, we proceed to examining the repercussions of this command.

The general principle

Firstly, the fundamental basis of all service to God is loving God properly. Secondly, the fundamental basis of all Christian activity must be love. Thirdly, the believer must love God with all of his faculties, not just some.

The whole man must be devoted to loving God in every area of life. We cannot pick or choose in this matter; the believer has been purchased with a price and his whole life belongs to God by both redemption and creation. God is our Lord who owns us and he demands that we love him with our whole life. This is not an arduous task. If we understood the depth of our sin and the awfulness of hell, we would walk over hot coals in order to obtain salvation; but God, who is rich in mercy, does not demand terrible things of us, merely that we love him fully.

Therefore, if we would serve God aright, we must devote every aspect of our lives to his service, leaving nothing out. Any holding back and loving something more than God is idolatry. Any compartmentalising and serving God in this area but not in that one is disobedience.

The question of balance

If the whole person is to love God fully, then there must be a proper balance in the way that we love God. We must not focus upon one or another part of our personality more than others or our lives are an aberration. How does this work out in practice?

Human psychology

First we must mention something about the psychology of man. The heart is the centre of the man and the springboard of all he does (Prov 4:23). The spirit is the seat of the new life in Christ and it is the heart which has the consciousness of this. The soul is the executor of the human life and the centre of personality, containing the emotions, will and mind. The heart lies at the centre between the spirit and the soul and is the exchange between them (Heb 4:12).

Though Reformed theologians often dislike the division of man into three parts (spirit, soul and body) preferring to talk of merely soul and body, clearly the tripartite division is Biblical and correct (1 Thess 5:23). Indeed, when theologians discuss the nature of man they are forced to talk about a threefold division (trichotomy) by referring to unbiblical labels such as rational soul or higher soul to identify the spiritual nature of man in comparison to human psychology. Scripture repeatedly mentions man as having a separate spirit and soul (Ps 16:10; 31:5) and Jesus likewise examples this (Matt 27:50; Matt 26:38). When God made man he made him a living soul (Ps 66:9), but he also gave him a spirit (Zech 12:1).

In the scriptures at the head of this paper, the psychological nature of man is identified by God who affirms a difference between soul, heart (and thus spirit), and effect in the body. This underlies the need to consider the relative parts of man and the effects they have.

A wrong focus on the heart

Christians must love God with all their heart, but not just with the heart.

The heart is often used as shorthand for the seat of the emotions since it is the source of all things in our life. Though the emotions proper are found in the soul where they are coloured in a variegated way according to the character, the root principle of these emotions are from the heart. For our purposes here we can consider that the heart refers to the emotions. To have no emotion in your relationship with God indicates that there is a problem. Christianity is not dry, academic and cold but is full of glory and should excite the emotions. Thus Peter could say, 'whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory', (1 Pt 1:8).

However, a love for God, which is just emotionalism, is an unbalanced love. This is evidenced throughout history amongst 'Christians' who sought the emotional and mystical rather than the rational and sober. In times past such disciples were derisively called 'enthusiasts' or 'Inspirationists', but today we would call them mystics or Charismatics.

Such people are intently focused upon the subjective, the inner man, upon what we feel about religion rather than the truth. Unless they feel a movement in their feelings then there is no value in the matter under consideration. This is a recipe for disaster, as it has proved. It means that if a man comes along who is a false prophet, who teaches all sorts of heresy and commands all sorts of aberrations, he will be none-the-less believed and obeyed if he can give people an emotional shot in the arm.

Such is the case in the history of Pentecostalism and Charismaticism. The huge amount of heresy found in these movements is staggering beyond belief; every form of historical heresy throughout the ages is now found in these streams. Absolutely nonsensical, and even blasphemous, teaching is accepted from men who can manipulate congregations in a mesmeric manner. Compliant people even give large amounts of money to these men, when they are poor and suffering, because they believe that the man has power.

What all these folk fail to realise is that this form of charlatan minister has been around throughout history going back to ancient times. Even in primitive tribes men who claimed to be able to manipulate spirits, bringing deliverance and healing, had the loyalty and respect of the tribe. We call them witches or shaman. The tactics were very similar to those practised in Charismatic meetings, namely: develop a sense of atmosphere with loud repetitive music and powerful drum rhythms. Then create a feeling of expectation that God will appear and do something unusual. Lead the people into total compliance by suggestibility and hypnotic effects (droning music, haranguing commands, demanding passivity, authoritarianism etc.). Utilise the benefits of corporate tongue speaking and singing in the Spirit to create greater passivity and mental emptiness. Then perform 'miracles' by utilising the raised endorphins and adrenaline in the audience, which act as a natural but temporary painkiller. The event becomes a placebo, which has certain beneficial effects; but this is nothing like the miracle working of Christ or the apostles which needed no extravaganza.

What happens in these events is that temporary benefits are felt in better health or raised feelings of rapture, which quickly pass away and create the need for another similar event. In other words, people get addicted to this form of emotional worship and are no better than a primitive tribesman whose religion is not only superficial, mystical, and emotional, but is the haunt of demons.

But Charismatic emotional aberrations are not restricted to public gatherings. A great deal of damage is done by supposed Charismatic prophets in their teaching, writings, visions and prophecies. What is really happening here is that these men are listening to their own subjective, internal feelings (no doubt stimulated by demonic temptations) which they purport to be from God. Now, no prophet can have any significant assurance that what he feels in his heart is God and not demonic temptation or the effects of a large meal the night before. By focusing on his heart and subjective feelings he loses his moorings, which are to be found in Scripture alone. True prophecy is the exposition of God's word in God's power to God's people.

Another form of excessive emotionalism is seen in the withdrawn, chambered or cloistered mentality. This is where natural endeavour is repudiated, and where fellowship with other Christians is ignored in order to pursue a 'spiritual' course in private. This is the staple diet of the mystics. Fellowship with God becomes based upon the interior stimulation of the feelings rather than objective truth received rationally. In modern times women are particularly prone to this, and indeed many historical mystics were women.¹

The emotions alone must not be the foundation of religious practice or divine service or it will lead to mysticism and deep error.

A wrong focus on the soul

As we mentioned earlier, the soul is the organ at the root of personality in an executive sense. What the man does is determined by his soul. The composition, strengths and

¹ For instance, Madame Guyon, Hildegard of Bingen, Teresa of Avila and Catherine of Siena.

weaknesses of the soul determine the human personality. It consists of the will (volition), emotions and mind or intellect; the balance of these makes up personality. The word 'soul' also means 'life' and often the Bible translates 'soul' in the original text as life (e.g. Gen 19:19). The life of the man is the soul. It is the soul which makes us different from others.

For our purposes here we can consider the soul to be representative of the will, what makes us what we are in comparison to others. We will talk more about the will in the section on strength later, but here I want to emphasise the false idea of serving God by mere wilful effort.

Wilful people are not humble or meek, but the disciple is to be both humble and meek. A meek person is one who has learned to be dependent on God and has reined in his attitudes with divinely given self-control. Wilful people are pushy people, anxious to get the job done. They tend to be stoical, able to keep going through thick and thin once they have started something. Now single-mindedness is not a bad thing, but wilfulness is. We are told not to be like a horse or mule which has to be bridled and forced to go the way its owner desires (Ps 32:9; Jm 3:3). Wilfulness is being set on a course of your choosing and persisting, even when it is found to be wrong. Meekness, is being easily controlled and directed without any pride or resistance.

Wilful people serve God in their way, at their choosing, in their time and with no consideration to others. They are slow to hear the voice of God, being determined to go their own way. They work according to a cold-hearted, determined, ruthless pattern, often pushing on, whomever is trampled on. Some of the great heretics in the past were very wilful people who refused to see the folly of their thinking. A man who makes a sincere mistake can be turned when he submits to the wisdom of others and the truth of God, but a wilful man cannot be changed.

But my people would not heed my voice, and Israel would *have* none of me. So I gave them over to their own stubborn heart, to walk in their own counsels. Oh, that my people would listen to me, that Israel would walk in my ways! Ps 81:11-13

Wilfulness is not restricted to leaders but is common amongst church people. It is seen when folk refuse to accept the truth about a doctrine because they have always been loyal to certain denominational position – despite its error. This is very common in minority groups today. People will die in a ditch rather than reject a long-held erroneous position. The true disciple is someone who follows the Lord even when it costs him. When shown that he is in error, he repents and moves on. This is true humility. The believer is always to be like a child (1 Pt 2:2), always learning, always dependent, always willing to learn – from anyone. Being converted to Christ means becoming child-like (Matt 18:3); we shun our wilful, stubborn self-sufficiency.

Wilfulness is a great evil in the church and is far too common.

A wrong focus on the mind

The mind, a part of the soul, is the intellectual root of the life. The higher mind, called *nous* in Greek (spiritual perception, Eph 4:23) is in the heart as opposed to the *dinanoia* (mind as a faculty for understanding, Col 1:21) which is part of the soul. The rational and intellectual part of man is in the soul. For our consideration here we take this to be referring to intellectualism.

There are those whose religion is purely mental, rational and intellectual. To such, any form of emotion is wrong and is not a part of the Christian life. Thus these men tend to be cloistered, academic, withdrawn, cold and repressed.

There are those who would caricature Puritans and Calvinists this way, but that is just slander. The truth is that the great Calvinists of history were actually very gentle, loving, winsome people who were not above playing games with their children or being passionately in love with their wives. However, they were very prudent and respectable and did not brazenly demonstrate this in public, but were discreet and decent.

There is a difference between a man who works hard in the study in order to better teach his flock and a man whose entire life is centred in book learning and who has little experience of the world. While the Christian life is very rational, it is not only rational. It involves feelings and the will expressed in self-control. It involves great joy in the Lord and a desire to be with the Lord's people, rather than isolated in dry study.

Another aspect of a wrong focus on the mind is the preoccupation with philosophy rather than divine truth. Philosophy, meaning the love of wisdom, is the use of reason and speculation to search for the truth of things, to understand the nature of reality and the causes of what governs existence and human behaviour. This kind of human searching for wisdom outside of God's revelation is condemned by Paul in 1 Cor 1:17-22. This is abandoning the absolute certainty of God's word on issues in favour of human speculation; which is tantamount to throwing away a torch in a darkened room and trying to light a fire with the furniture without matches. Sad to say that committed Christians have fallen away into this kind of fruitless metaphysical debate which stimulates the mind with frivolity and does absolutely no good to anyone.

The intellect is very important in the Christian life, but it is not the sole foundation of our service.

A wrong focus upon might or strength

This is the correlation of the human will, intellect and bodily capacity for energy. It refers to self-effort, self-discipline, and power.

In the first instance this speaks about will-religion; the heretical idea that man plays a significant part in his salvation. This is usually based upon some form of decisionism; that is, where salvation is predicated upon man initiating some unbiblical, general grace by his choosing to believe and repent. Will-religion is the basis of Arminianism and Pelagianism but is also predominant in Semi-Pelagian Roman Catholicism. In all of these, human effort is not only required to initiate salvation but also to continue in it. They all teach that a person will fall away if he does not keep up the strength of his faith and good deeds. In Arminianism and Pelagianism the foci of human strength are the principles, or teachings, of their theology; but in Catholicism the focus is obedience to the teaching and practices of the Roman Church. Catholics must assiduously continue, by human strength, in keeping up confession, rosary praying, obeying papal directives, praying to saints, attending mass, and so forth. Will-religion is a heavy burden, containing no assurance, that ultimately leads to death.

But there is also a danger for Christians to rely upon their own power to serve God. God is not served by human strength but by human weakness, which requires grace (2 Cor 12:9-10). The point of the Christian life is that it is a new creation; it does not function like the world. The believer serves God by denying himself (and thus denying his powers) and humbling himself before God. This produces a sense of utter dependency and reliance upon divine grace to do anything at all. Only then can a man truly serve God by acting in his power, 'if anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen,' (1 Pt 4:11).

People who live the Christian life by their own power tend to be those who are gifted or talented in various ways but who have not learned the basic discipleship truth that our gifts must be submitted to God for use. Thus men who are gifted with a natural flair for leadership and organisation lead churches with great power, and tend to be domineering. But this is not serving God. Those gifted with musical ability tend to become worship / musician leaders, despite there being no such leader in the NT and no bands in apostolic teaching.

People focused upon power instead of Christ tend to be pushy, hasty, urgently set upon the next important thing. They can't wait for the next great move, the next powerful strategy, the next result, and, as such, tend to be motivated by objective results, statistics, numbers and popularity. They make supposedly Biblical excuses to pander to advertising or becoming dominant in their town, region or country. They treat people like employees at the whim of an executive, rather than sheep needing to be nurtured and protected. Thus people are pushed around, moved from pillar to post, promoted and demoted. Families are asked to relocate, with no care about extended family responsibilities in the area. Men are asked to change jobs, or leave a good job to work for the church. In general, such power motivated men act like executives and not shepherds. There will be great judgment from God for such due to their terrible neglect of the flock.

There is another aspect to this focus on human power and that is centring upon signs and wonders. Now this will, no doubt, be defended as a concentration upon God's power not human strength. However, in practice those who are set in the Charismatic signs and wonders ministry do so in order to be able to work miracles; deep down there is the desire to be a great man like an OT prophet who can do great signs. Indeed, those men who perform such things on stage are treated like rock stars, men with great power. People do not pray fervently for their healing in church or at home because they do not expect it; but they go to big meetings when certain men are preaching because they trust in the power of these men. This is seeking to serve God in human power; this is putting faith in a man. As such it is evil.

Again, dependence upon self-power is not restricted to leaders. Every day ordinary churchgoers are trying to live the Christian life in their own strength. Very few understand how to die to the old man and put on the new, instead they patch up the old man and try to reform it in their own power. This is not Christianity at all but more like medieval monkery. [See my paper, *'What is the strength of your life?'*]

We do not serve God by focusing on human strength.

Idolatry

Finally, loving God with *all* our faculties means that there is no room for loving something else to the exclusion of God. Now clearly it is Biblical to love your wife, children, mother, father and wider family. It is also Biblical to love the brethren and in another sense to even love our enemies. Loving these things is part of loving God. As we love God first and foremost, we also love those things he commands us to love. There is no discrepancy between loving God and loving those things he tells us to.

But, sadly, the Lord's people have always had a problem with idolatry; this is the setting up of something unlawful in front of God or alongside God. The worst form of idolatry is serving something else other than God or in preference to God, *'You shall have no other gods before Me'* (Deut 5:7).

The simplest definition of idolatry is to give honour to something above God or in place of God. Know this, the truth is that very many Christians commit this terrible sin. The seriousness of idolatry is seen in the fact that a city guilty of idolatry under the law was considered to be a cancer to the nation and was to be wiped out. Idolaters will be destroyed.

Now how do modern believers commit idolatry?

Christians are to love God with all their heart and serve him with all their faculties and strength. But many believers today serve God in their way, in the time of their choosing, to the level of their choice. There are believers who spend hundreds of hours a year focused upon their beloved football team, cricket team, or some other sporting team and give God very little of their time. They defend this by claiming that they are leading very busy lives and are unable to spend time reading their bible or praying, and need time for r & r on evenings and Saturdays. This is folly.

Then there are those who don't get out much but spend thousands of hours every year committed to a favourite pastime. Often this is watching TV soaps, and other rubbish, or following favourite musical performers, but it also includes hobbies that become obsessions. The list of these is endless. Where these hinder loving God, where these prevent serving God, where these thwart doing the things God commands, then they have become idolatry.

There is also the problem of people who set all their attention on their work. Employment ceases to be a means to live and becomes the centre of one's life. In the worst cases such folk not only work long hours but devote all their spare time, and much of their thought, upon work issues. Attending church meetings or performing daily devotionals is neglected due to the attention spent on their job. In these cases people not only neglect their families but have become idolatrous.

But there is more. There are Christians who have avoided the list so far but who still commit idolatry. It is common to find modern believers who treat church leaders (both alive or dead) with far too much respect that goes beyond the bounds of propriety. Such people have a poor relationship with God, often that is bound up in legalism, but who devote much of their lives concentrating on this or that leader. Some feel that they could not survive if they did not have their favourite preacher to listen to in person or on CD. Such people find praying hard or pray superficially, do not dwell on the word and do not meditate on God's law; indeed some of these do not even mingle much with other believers. But they spend hours listening to this man or that man. They read all he writes, they listen to all he says, they devote themselves to him. This is idolatry.

The worst form of this is when Charismatic folk submit to such a man, with nothing excepted, and who treat this man almost like God. They believe he can manipulate the Holy Spirit by throwing him around the room or blowing him upon people. These men usurp power accredited to the Lord himself, claiming they can raise the dead at will. Some have even publicly stated that the world will soon be so full of powerful leaders and a submitted church that they will rule the world (Christ's prerogative) and thus nullify any need for Christ to return at all. This is blasphemous idolatry of the worst kind. Men who say this know nothing and will go to hell, but 'Christians' have bought their books and DVDs in the millions. The global church is riddled with idolatry. May God forgive us.

A final form of idolatry is covetousness, in disobedience to God's law. Paul tells us that, **'But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints;**

neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God' (Eph 5:3-5). The power of this statement must be meditated upon.

First, it explains that idolaters will not be part of God's kingdom. Second, it shows that a covetous person is an idolater. Now coveting is part and parcel of the modern world; advertising runs on coveting. It undergirds society at all levels. When you urgently desire the latest type of mobile phone so that you can be equal with your friends, you have succumbed to covetousness. When you crave the new models of HD plasma TV you are coveting. Coveting is part of worldliness.

Now coveting is idolatry. It puts the coveted object in the place of God during the period of desire. God has promised us all that we need in this life (Phil 4:19) and will give it to us when he thinks we are ready for it. We will never lack anything we need to serve God; indeed he promises us an abundance for the work we must do (2 Cor 9:8). If we then covet an object and crave for it, we are not acting in faith, we are not trusting God's word and we are being idolatrous. Charismatics who focus upon claiming every desire are teaching idolatry. Worse, many Charismatics teach that visualising the coveted object long enough will 'incubate' faith and ensure the desired object arrives. This is combining idolatry (covetousness) with the eastern occult technique of visualisation. Such teaching is heretical in the extreme.

Covetousness is idolatry, plain and simple. Those who follow the rogue teaching of Charismatics will not be part of God's kingdom. This shows the seriousness of failing to observe God's word.

Balance

The Christian is to be a balanced personality. He loves God with all of his heart, soul, mind and strength. The whole balanced person is submitted in God's service. He does not focus upon one or two aspects of his personality, he does not go off on tangents, he does not play to his human strengths, but submits his whole life to God. Thus he does not just do those things which come naturally to serve God, those things he is naturally good at, but does all that God leads him to do, including those things which he is very weak on naturally.

God often calls a man to do something which he feels totally unqualified for – but that makes the man dependent upon God. God does not play to our strengths but to our weaknesses. The miraculous is seen when God works his grace in us so that we overcome despite our weaknesses. David did not overcome Goliath in his strength but in his faithful weakness. Gideon's army did not use human strategies and strength to defeat the enemy but trusted God in great weakness and few numbers. Focusing on our strength is one of the great problems in the church today.

It is not hard to love God properly; it just requires obedience. To be balanced means that I will obey this command. If I am naturally over-emotional then I must learn to study and be mindful. If I am naturally wilful I must learn to be meek. If I am naturally a strong intellectual I must learn to be more sympathetic and warm. God wants us whole, and the whole man submitted to his service.

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