

A COMMAND FOR THE SOUL!

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Mark 12:28-34

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I. INTRODUCTION:

In his work, *A Passion for Holiness in the Believer's Life*, Charles Spurgeon writes:

Many people are violent against one sin, but the true saint abhors all sin. You may not allow the sin of drunkenness to have dominion over you, but are you selfish and ungenerous? What have you done? You have only changed your idols. You have dethroned one usurper to set up another. If you were profane and are now hypocritical, you have only changed iniquities. It is a very curious thing how one sin deeds on another: the death of profligacy [which means completely giving into dissipation or licentiousness; going completely wild] may be the resurrection of greed; the flight of pride may be the advent of shameless folly. The man who was lewd, riotous, and brawling has killed those sins, and on their graves he has sown a handful of poisonous weed called pride, and it flourishes amazingly. It may be London pride, country pride, English pride, or American pride, but it is rare stuff to grow, and to grow over the rotting carcasses of other sins. Unbelief may dethrone superstition, but its own reign may be no real improvement upon that of credulity [readiness or willingness to believe especially on slight or uncertain evidence]. If you only throw down Baal to set up Ashtaroth, what progress have you made toward God? Little does it signify which of the false gods is set up in the temple of Jehovah, for He hates them all. The right prayer is, "Let not any iniquity have dominion over me."¹

Well, one area to be sure that we don't want iniquity to have dominion over is our conscious thought-life. In this second part of a 5 part series on what it means to love God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength, we will be focusing on the second aspect of loving God with our entire being—what does it mean to love God with our soul. In fact, the title of this 2nd message is *A Command for the Soul!* Before I do, let me review part I, a Command for the Heart, whereby we examined what it means to love God with all your heart.

This morning I summarized the beginning portion of the Greatest Commandment found in Mark 12:30 by saying that *From out of the control center of your inner life you are to completely love the Lord your God.*

¹ Charles Swindoll, *Tales from the Tardy Oxcart*, 236.

If we are pro-actively seeking to cultivate affections for our God that flow from the deepest reaches of our inner lives, at least three of the following affections or qualities in your life will be evident:

A. Quality # 1: You love without hypocrisy.

1. You love without hypocrisy. To love without hypocrisy is not only to abhor what is evil but to cling to what is good. You cling or hold tightly to what is noble, true, trustworthy, righteous, and worthy of worship before a holy God.
2. See, what God seeks in the believer is not so much a single worthy act of love as it is a continuing quality of life of Christ-centered love-one that loves without hypocrisy by abhorring what is evil and clinging to what honors God

B. Quality # 2: Your affections for Him dominate your life:

1. Second quality is that you have affections for Christ that dominate your life. It is not an ideal but a command to obey. And though there seems to be only a few, there are those saints of God who have this unquenchable passion for Him that permeate every aspect of their lives; they breathe it; they live it. We've been touched by them.

C. Quality # 3: You have Joy in Christ.

1. Third quality is a mindset. Though you may have outward sufferings that are extremely painful, your inward spiritual joys are greater than your sufferings. You are one who is able to say when hit hard, "I'm weak, very weak but God, you are good."

Now let's turn to tonight's message: *A Command for the Soul and remember that on Wednesday we will seek to understand what it means to love God with all your strength (part III). Next Sunday morning we will take up the task regarding what it means to love God with all your mind (part IV). Then on Sunday night I will ask what does it mean to love your neighbor as yourself (part V).*

For those of us who have experienced God's amazing love, who have received His love-gift of eternal salvation in the open arms of faith, let's now turn to Mark 12:28-34 and review what the this passage means again, then we will turn to specifically see what it means to love God with our soul and how we will live out these truths in the moment-by-moment details of our daily lives. We will first review the whole verse again and then turn to the second phrase, "Love God with your soul."

II. SUMMARY OF PASSAGE:

²⁸ And one of the scribes came up and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, asked him, “Which commandment is the most important of all?” ²⁹ Jesus answered, “The most important is, ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. ³⁰ And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ ³¹ The second is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.” ³² And the scribe said to him, “You are right, Teacher. You have truly said that he is one, and there is no other besides him. ³³ And to love him with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the strength, and to love one’s neighbor as oneself, is much more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.” ³⁴ And when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” And after that no one dared to ask him any more questions.²

After beginning with the statement in verse 29 that Israel’s God is the one Yahweh, and there is no other; He is altogether unique, Jesus states:

A. Vs. 30: And you shall love the lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.

1. Notice again how that the conjunction “**and**” separates each phrase, giving equal weight to each phrase. Thus, each statement is equally important.
2. Notice the direction of the statement. Jesus begins with heart, moves to the soul, then to the mind, and finally to strength.
3. Also observe that just prior to each word, heart, soul, mind, and strength, you see the phrase “*With all your*” or depending upon translation it might say, “*out of whole heart, and out of whole soul, and out of whole mind, and out of whole strength.*” Remember, why this is important to note? Because the “*with*” denotes origin, the point from which action or motions proceed.
4. This makes sense because our love for God flows out of an inner life that is filled and controlled by a faith relationship with God through the knowledge of God and the ministry of the Holy Spirit.
5. Now, by referring to these four aspect collectively, the statement is basically stating that one should love God with one’s entire being. In other words, the extent of your love for God is your whole person.

²The Holy Bible : English Standard Version. (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2001), Mk 12:28-34.

- a. The heart emphasizes your affections, your inner desires; it is the control center of your human personality;
 - b. The soul emphasizes self-conscious thought life;
 - c. The mind emphasizes your capacity to think, reason, and make judgments;
 - d. Strength emphasizes your bodily powers.³
5. Now having summarized this first commandment once again, I will now spend the remainder of time examining what it means to love God and what it means to do it with your whole soul.

II. EXPOSITION: YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR SOUL:

Vs. ³⁰ “And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul.”

A. Vs. 30: “You shall love God with all your soul:

1. The word “*soul*.”⁴ In essence, the soul emphasizes the self-conscious thought life.⁵
2. Nevertheless, looking at this word “soul” more carefully we realize that this word has a variety of meanings. Thus, the exact understanding of it is very difficult to pin down. One reason for the difficulty is that “soul” and “spirit” are sometimes used “interchangeably” in Scripture. In fact, sometimes Scripture attributes the same qualities and the same actions to both soul and spirit. For example, Job spoke of the “anguish of my spirit and the bitterness of my soul (Job 7:11). David once wrote, ‘My Soul is in anguish’ (Psalm 6:3) and Asaph described his spirit as “embittered” in Psalm 73:21. The pharaoh’s mind (literally spirit) was troubled” (Gen. 41:8), while the psalmist wrote in Psalm 42:6, “My soul is

³ John Grassmick, “Mark” in *Bible Knowledge Commentary*.

⁴ The *ψυχή* is also the locus of sorrow, Mk. 14:34 = ψ 41:6. Jn. 12:27 has *τετάρακται* for this (→ 640, 14 ff.), which shows that the *καρδία* is not basically differentiated, Jn. 14:1, 27.¹⁴⁹ *ψυχή* should not be overtranslated, since originally ψ 41:6 shaped the formulation.¹⁵⁰ The saying in Mk. 12:30 (quoting Dt. 6:5),¹⁵¹ which demands love with all one’s soul and heart, is a perfect parallel. *ψυχή* here is close to strength of will. This is more strongly so in Mt. 22:37 and par. (→ II, 140, 2 ff.), where the Hebrew-Rabbinic instrumental understanding dominates with *ἐν*, than it is in the LXX version in Mk. 12:30, where the *ἐξ* stresses inwardness. But the fact that Mk. can leave out *ψυχή* in v. 33 shows how little what is distinctive is seen in it. Ac. 4:32 is to be adjudged similarly. This says of the community that it was *καρδία καὶ ψυχή μία*, which corresponds to both Greek and OT usage.¹⁵² On the other hand only *ψυχή* occurs in Lk. 2:35 with its metaphor of the sword of sorrow that pierces the *ψυχή* (→ VI, 995, 12 ff.).¹⁵³⁴

Grassmick, John D. "Mark." In *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*, pp. 95-197. Edited by John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck. Wheaton: Scripture Press Publications, Victor Books, 1983.

downcast within me.” Jesus said that He came to “give his life [literally, ‘soul’] as a ransom for many” (Matt. 20:28), and yet Matthew wrote that Jesus “gave up his spirit (27:50); see also Luke 23:46; John 19:30). Jesus said, “Now my heart [literally, ‘soul’] is troubled” (John 12:27), and John reported that “Jesus was troubled in spirit” (13:21). These and other references suggest that the words “soul” and “spirit” are used interchangeably and refer to the same immaterial nature of mind.

3. Other Scripture verses, particularly in the Pauline epistles, appear to draw a distinction between one's soul and spirit. For example, Paul prayed for the Thessalonian believers, “May your whole spirit, soul, and body be kept blameless at the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thess. 5:23). Hebrews 4:12 states that “the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit. Such passages seem to imply that there is a distinction between spirit and soul.
- B. Notwithstanding these difficulties, it seems that the word “soul”, an immaterial aspect of humanity, is typically divided into three categories: ψυχή (*psychē*), ἦς (*ēs*), ἡ (*hē*): n.fem.
1. LN 26.4 **inner self**, heart, mind; a psychological faculty (Ac 4:32; Eph 6:6; Heb 12:3). Listen to the words of Hebrews 12:3.
 2. **life**, life, soul, the self: It is that which is in someone to give animate life and distinction (Ro 11:3); **3. LN 9.20 person**, as a living being (Ac 2:41; Ro 2:9)⁶
 3. “**Soul**” is often used to refer to the physical life and the self concept. To love God with all our soul or life means to be willing to give one’s life to God and to devote it all to Him. It means total commitment. In the word “soul,” we see the will choosing for God, giving one’s life to Him.
- C. I agree with N.T. scholars like John Grassmick who believes that what Jesus is emphasizing here is our psychological faculty or our conscious thought-life. Notwithstanding, some do say the relationship between heart and soul suggests that soul incorporates the will, the inclination to do something. Fair enough: So, it could involve a dynamic relationship between thought and action and thus the emphasis on the soul reflects this connection between our thought-life and what we do. Moreover, our thought-life informs our mindset or attitude in life. Some go even further and say that this relationship between thought-life and will goes even further than just a mindset-it denotes a willful commitment to something. For our purposes I will focus on thought-life because if we can focus on this issue, then if our will, mindset, and even commitment is linked to the thought-life, we will be the better for it.

LN Louw-Nida Greek-English Lexicon

⁶James Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages With Semantic Domains : Greek (New Testament)*, electronic ed. (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), GGK6034.

- D. So let me attempt retranslate this phrase in view of our study of the soul: “From out of your thought-life you are to completely love the Lord your God. Now let me put this together with what I covered in our first lesson. *You shall love the Lord your God with all your deep-seated affections and with all your conscious thoughts.*”

IV. HOW SHOULD WE THEN LIVE?

- A. What evidences in your life do you have that suggest you are loving God with all your conscious thoughts? If it is the case that there is this linkage between your thought-life, your mindset, and/or unto what or whom you commit yourself, then your activities, interests, and reactions to those things around you reveal quite a bit about your thought-life. What you are attracted to and pursue reveal a lot about what you dwell upon. It is especially evident in what you relish, boast in, or habitually talk about? Power? Wealth? Popularity? Attention, i.e., self-focus? It is also evident if you are a chronic worrier or complainer or always the victim. It is also evident if you are embittered, angry, unforgiving, jealous, perverted, prideful, or apathetic.
- B. So, when you consider your thought-life, where do you find your thoughts going, lingering upon? Where does the Lord fit in those thoughts? Do you find yourself naturally going to him throughout your day?
- C. I’ve put together some ideas on how we may know if our conscious thought-life is one that is loving God:
1. Your thoughts naturally tend to dwell upon intimately know God in your daily activities in contrast to those who infrequently or rarely ponder the glorious beauty of the person and work of the one and only Triune God.
 2. You pro-actively seek the assembly of the saints because the assembly promotes a thought-life that is following hard after Christ in contrast to those who think that they don’t need the church. Individualism promotes pride and elitism whereas participating in a godly community encourages God-ward thoughts.
 3. You don’t entertain or dwell upon thoughts that are abhorrent to Christ for you seek to take every thought captive unto the Lord Jesus Christ in contrast to those who dwell upon those thoughts that are world-driven, stimulating sinful appetites.
 4. You have a tendency to talk about him with others because you think about him so much. In fact, you tend to take conversations back to God. But it is not just for intellectual sense; you are longing to know God.
 5. Your thought-life doesn’t merely think about Him; it boasts in Him. It is one thing to think about God but it can be entirely a different matter to boast or glory in Him.
 6. You seek to protect your thought-life by not allowing yourself to be entertained in those matters that may negatively impact your thought-life in contrast to those who are undisciplined.

7. Your thoughts are preoccupied with the truths of Scripture and when you find yourself in a certain situation, you dwell upon a particular promise or command in Scripture in contrast to those who are at a loss on what to think about or do.

D. What can I do to better improve my thought-life? Consider the following three principles:

First, remember that Satan is going to tell you that it is impossible to have a thought-life that seeks to completely love the Lord. Therefore, you need to continually remind yourself that you are a disciple of Jesus Christ, one who has been united to Him who is the Son of God by means of the Holy Spirit.

Listen to the Words of Oswald Chambers:

“The characteristics of a disciple is not that he does good things, but that he is good in his motives, having been made good by the supernatural grace of God. The only thing that exceeds right-doing is right-being. Jesus Christ came to place within anyone who would let Him a new hereditary that would have a righteousness exceeding that of the scribes and Pharisees. Jesus is saying, ‘If you are My disciple, you must be right not only in your actions, but also in your motives, your aspirations, and in the deep recesses of the thoughts of your mind.’” Your motives must be so pure that God Almighty can see nothing to rebuke. Who can stand in the eternal light of God and having for Him to rebuke? Only the Son of God, and Jesus Christ claims that through His redemption He can place within anyone His own nature and make that person as pure and as simple as a child. The purity that God demands is impossible unless I can be remade within, and that is exactly that Jesus has undertaken to do through His redemption.

No one can make himself pure by obeying laws. Jesus Christ does not give us rules and regulations-He gives us teachings which are truths that can only be interpreted by His nature which he placed within us. The great wonder of Jesus Christ salvation is that he changes our hereditary. He does not change human nature-He changes its source and thereby its motives as well.” 24 June of *My Utmost For His Highest*.

Thus, recognize that you are a new person in Christ. The issue is not are you capable of loving God with your thought-life, but are you willing to discipline your thought-life in order to do it.

Second, purposely seek to boast in the Lord Jesus Christ.

But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world-Galatians 6:14.

6:14. The contrast is vivid as Paul declared his boasting to be **in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ**. For the Judaizers the Cross was an object of shame; for Paul it was the object of glorying. They gloried in the flesh; he gloried in the Savior. The “Cross” speaks of the atonement of Christ with which Paul was identified (cf. 2:20) and by which **the world was crucified to Paul and he to the world**. The world system with all its allurements, fleshly displays, and religions

cf. *confer*, compare

of human effort was cast aside by Paul. He looked at the world as if it were on a cross—and the world looked at Paul as though he were on a cross.⁷

Think about it this way: Is there a certain point you should quick thinking about Him? Listen to these words by Charles Spurgeon:

Would any of you, Paul asks, cast a slur on the cross—you who have been converted—you before whose eyes Jesus Christ has been openly set forth as crucified (Gal. 3:1)? How his eyes flash; how lips quiver; how his heart grows hot within him; with that vehemence he protests: ‘God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.’ Paul spreads his eagle wing and rise into eloquence at once, while still his keen eye looks fiercely upon every enemy of the cross whom he leaves far beneath. Often in his epistles you observe this: He burns, he glows, he mounts, he soars, he is carried clean away as soon as his thoughts are in fellowship with his Lord Jesus, that meek and patient Sufferer, who offered Himself a sacrifice for our sins. When his tongue begins to speak of the glorious work that the Christ of God has done for the sons of men, it finds a sudden liberty. May we have something of that glow within our breast whenever we think of our Lord. God forbid that we should be coldhearted when we come near to Jesus. God forbid that we should ever view with heartless eye and lethargic soul the sweet wonders of that cross on which our Savior loved and died.⁸

Don’t just merely turn your thoughts to the person and work Jesus Christ, glory in the Lord Jesus Christ. One of the best ways I know to begin this process is to meditate upon my sin and God’s remedy. Other ways that have been beneficial is when I share the gospel of Jesus Christ and see others saved. Then other ways this has helped me is when I see what God does in the lives of others. Finally, I don’t know how my thought-life can improve apart from the assembly of the saints where the Word of God is preached.

And third, continually make sure your heart, mind, and will is in harmony with God’s heart, mind, and will. When you exercise your mind toward God to know Him, your heart to love Him, and your will to obey Him, then you are in fellowship with God. You don’t have to get the tendencies of your thought-life squared away before you can fellowship with Him. But by fellowshiping with Christ, being controlled by the Holy Spirit, your thought-life will undergo a transformation, bit-by-bit in conformity to Jesus Christ. I call it the “doing and undergoing.”

⁷John F. Walvoord, Roy B. Zuck and Dallas Theological Seminary, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983-c1985), 2:611.

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IV. CONCLUSION:

If your thought-life has been dominated by those things that are in contrast to God's ways, whereby you know that your thought-life is not where it needs to be, then you need to decisively repent, consecrate your thought-life before Him. Be honest with Him. Tell him what you are thinking about and ask for His assistance. Secondly, remove those factors from your life that feed those abhorrent thoughts, taking you away from relishing in Christ. Remember: Christ is always available. Christ is always necessary. Christ is always present.

A thought-life that follows hard after Christ is one who dwells upon the finished work of Jesus Christ. He is the way, the only way, the sure way: Follow Him and don't let up, don't give up! Lift your thought-life to Him. You are his child.