



Peninsula City Church

Making First Things First

Core Values for Living: The Heart

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Making First Things First

Core Values for Living: The Heart

Introduction

Q. Have you ever had heart problems and needed to have a heart check-up?

Well the heart foundation has recommended that,

“The best thing you can do to find out about your risk of heart disease is to see your doctor for a heart health check. You may not be aware you have risk factors of heart disease early enough. Often there are no symptoms. So it’s really important to get your doctor to check your risks frequently, to ensure your heart is healthy.”¹

So, do you have a healthy heart? One thing that reveals that you have a healthy heart is if you love God with all your heart. But, why are we to love Him with all our heart? This is the topic of this paper. It will look at three areas: 1. a historical and theological context; 2. what kind of love should we love God with; and 3. aligning our heart with God’s heart.

Q. Do you have as a core value the alignment of your heart with God for living as Christ-follower?

1. A historical and theological context

a. Love God with all your heart

Q. What does it mean to love God with all your heart?

To love God, would have to be the greatest thing that any person can do. On this it has been said that,

“Love should first be directed to God. This is commandment is first in time, first in rank, the most important. This is the greatest commandment upon which all other commandments will hang.”²

However, many (Christ-followers included) do not seem to give much thought or effort to loving God, and then wonder why things are the way they are in their life. The importance of this becomes obvious as the Scripture is checked within its context. For example, Jesus in Matthew’s gospel in response to a question as to the greatest commandment of all said,

³⁷ “**You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind** ³⁸ This is **the first and greatest commandment**. ³⁹ A second is equally important: Love your neighbour as yourself. The entire Law and all the demands of the Prophets are based on these two commandments” (Matt 22:37-40 NLT; cf. also Mk 12:28-33; Lk 10:25-28).

On this matter it has rightly been said that,

“It is the Lord our God who is to be loved with a completeness of devotion which is defined by the repeated ‘all.’”³

¹ “Heart health check.” <http://heartfoundation.org.au/your-heart/know-your-risks/heart-health-check> (20th April 2016).

² Damazio, Frank. *The Power of Spiritual Alignment: Living According to the Seven Firsts of Jesus*. (Portland, OR: City Christian Publishing, 2002), 86.

³ Lane, W.L. *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Gospel of Mark*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984), 432.

However, as one reads this Scripture, they will be struck by somewhat by the fact that, this commandment is not part of the Ten Commandments. (Although, having said this, these two Commandments could be a summary of the Ten Commandments). This first and greatest commandment (according to Jesus) is actually from Deuteronomy (the second reading of the Law to a new generation preparing to enter the Promise Land) and not from the book of Exodus where the Law and commandments are first recorded. It forms part of what is called the 'Shema' from Deut 6:4-5 and has become an important prayer within the Jewish prayer book. It is actually the first piece of Scripture that a Jewish child learns. The title Shema comes from the first strong verb in the section of Scripture, because the word 'hear' or 'Listen' in Hebrew is Shema.

"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one! ⁵ And **you must love the LORD your God** with all your heart, all your soul, and all your strength" (Deut 6:4-5 NLT).

However, the Greek translation (the Septuagint i.e. the LXX) of verse five, uses five terms instead of the three used in the Hebrew translation for example,

"And you must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, all your strength, and all your power (*δυναμις*)" (Deut 6:5 LXX).⁴

But, this was also stated in the following passages,

"And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love Him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, (Deut 10:12 ESV).

"And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live" (Deut 30:6 ESV).

It does not appear in this form in Scripture before this reference in Deuteronomy. It has been stated that,

"The command to love is central because the whole book (Deuteronomy) is concerned with the renewing the covenant with God, and although the renewal demanded obedience, that obedience would be possible only when it was a response of love to the God who had brought the people (Israel) out of Egypt and was leading them into the promise land... The injunction to love was **based on the precedent of God's love**, which had been shown to the Israelites principally in the Exodus, and in a larger context, in their election and calling from the time of Abraham."⁵

On this matter Patrick Miller has pointed out,

"With this chapter we come to the pivot around which everything else in Deuteronomy revolves, the Shema or Great Commandment, as it has also come to be known (6:4-5)... In turn, the statutes and ordinances explicate in specific and concrete ways the meaning of Deuteronomy 6:4-5 for the life of Israel. That is why Jesus can later say that all the law and the prophets hang on this commandment (Matt 22:40)."⁶

⁴ Brenton, Sir Lancelot C.L. *The Septuagint with the Apocrypha: Greek and English*. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1986), 239. Cf. Bock, Darrell L. *Luke Volume 2: 9:51-24:53*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2000), n. 9, 1025. "The Septuagint (Greek Old Testament, translated before our gospels) had problems with this passage and some versions rendered it 'heart (kardia), soul (psuchê) and power (dunamis)', others 'mind (dianoia), soul and power.'" *Difficult Sayings: Love the lord your God with all of your what? Deuteronomy 6:5*. <http://new.studylight.org/ls/ds/index.cgi?a=520> (18th April 2016).

⁵ Cragie, P.C. *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament: The Book of Deuteronomy*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), 169-170.

⁶ Miller, P.D. *Deuteronomy*. Interpretation Series. (Louisville, KN: John Knox Press, 1990), 97.

Solomon also encouraged Israel to love the Lord with the heart, when he prayed at the dedication of the temple in Jerusalem,

²² “Then Solomon stood before the altar of the LORD in front of the entire community of Israel. He lifted his hands toward heaven, ²³ and he prayed, ‘O LORD, God of Israel, there is no God like You in all of heaven above or on the earth below. You keep Your covenant and show unfailing love to all who walk before you in wholehearted devotion’” (1 Kings 8:22-23 NLT; see also 2 Chron 6:14).

But, why are we to love Him with all our heart? The context of the biblical usages of the heart is that they primarily sum up the nucleus of your physical life, i.e. the epicentre and source of your inner existence. So, it is the very centre of your, will and emotions not merely the muscle in your chest to pump blood around your body. Even though, it can influence your physical heart. Where it is located is not the issue, but what it is, it is the center and source of the whole inner life.

So, have you ever stopped and wondered what regulates the devotion of your heart? It is whatever you find as your greatest treasure that will regulate the devotion of your heart. By way of example of this biblical principle, Jesus pointed out that,

“...where your treasure is, there your heart will also be” (Matt 6:21 NLT)

So, Jesus presented the answer on how to love God with all our hearts, i.e. your heart will love what it treasures. “What happens in the heart is essential. The external behaviours will be pleasing to God when they flow from a heart that freely treasures God above all else.”⁷ That is why it needs to be the ‘Most essentially, valuing, cherishing, admiring and desiring Him as our supreme treasure and pleasure.’ So, in order for you to love God with all your heart, you need to treasure Him above all else. So, to say that one should desire to love the Lord your God with all your heart and let this regulate the devotion of your heart would mean that,

“...you shall love Him with all you faculties or powers. You shall love Him supremely, more than all other beings and things, and with all the ardour possible. To love Him with all the heart is to fix the affections supremely on Him, more strongly than on anything else, and to be willing to give up all that we hold dear at his command.”⁸

b. Circumcision of the heart

It is at this point in the discussion that, I would like to introduce another element to the facet to loving God. That is, the circumcision of the heart. However,

Q. If someone were to ask you, “What has circumcision of the heart got to do with loving God” what would you say to them?

Firstly, physical circumcision is the,

“A religious rite performed on male children of Jews on the eighth day after birth; also on their slaves, whether born in the house or not.”⁹

However, Paul in the letter to the Romans made an unusual statement regarding circumcision when he said,

²⁸ “For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical.

²⁹ But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God” (Rom 2:28-29 ESV).

⁷ Piper, John. “The Life of the Mind and the Love of God.” <http://www.desiringgod.org/messages/the-life-of-the-mind-and-the-love-of-god> (14th May 2016).

⁸ “Matthew 22:37: Barnes’ Bible Notes.” <http://bible.cc/matthew/22-37.htm> (20th April 2016).

⁹ “Circumcision.” <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/4391-circumcision> (27th April 2016).

On this matter, Paul also said that, this is not a circumcision done by a person, and it was in fact confirmed through baptism,

¹¹ “In Him (Jesus Christ) also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, ¹² having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised with Him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised Him from the dead” (Col 2:11-12 ESV).

In the Old Testament, we have the first mention of circumcision in the Bible with Abraham being circumcised. This was a sign of the covenant that, God made with him and then flowing on to Israel (Gen 17:2,4,7,9-14,23-27). The message of circumcision was a physical reminder that, Abraham and his offspring (later to become Israel) were in reality cut off from the world, and cut into the promises of another world, a heavenly world.¹⁰ So, if this is the case then there is a powerful truth to be found in circumcision. That is,

“Circumcision began with Abraham, but this token was evidence of the righteousness he had obtained through faith (Gen 15:6; Rom 4:11). This righteousness could not come from following the commandments in the Law because Abraham had been declared righteous over 400 years before the Law was given (Gal 3:17). His righteousness came from faith because he believed God’s promise to Him. So his circumcision was a reminder of that promise and of Abraham’s resolve to believe God. It was a symbol of their covenant.”¹¹

However, is the circumcision of the heart only a New Testament understanding of the meaning of circumcision? No, since, God made similar statements to Israel in the Old Testament, as Paul had made to the church at Rome,

⁴⁰ “But if they confess their sin and the sin of their fathers in their treachery that they committed against Me, and also in walking contrary to Me, ⁴¹ so that I walked contrary to them and brought them into the land of their enemies, if then their uncircumcised heart is humbled and they make amends for their sin, ⁴² then I will remember My covenant with Jacob, and I will remember My covenant with Isaac and My covenant with Abraham, and I will remember the land” (Lev 26:40-42 ESV).

Again God said to Israel to,

“Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn” (Deut 10:16 ESV)

Or to state it literally Israel was to, “cut away the thickening around their hearts and not stiffen their necks anymore.”¹²

Jeremiah also dealt with this as part of Judah’s repentance and their turning from their idolatry,

“Circumcise yourselves to the LORD; remove the foreskin of your hearts, O men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem; lest My wrath go forth like fire, and burn with none to quench it, because of the evil of your deeds” (Jer 4:4 ESV).

However, I could be asked, what has this got to do with loving God? Well, the idea circumcision was dealt with in the book of Deuteronomy where Moses drew out some theological and practical aspects. In doing so, he in fact joined the two aspects of circumcision of the heart and loving the LORD your God with all your heart together. He pointed out that, these two need to work together.

¹⁰ “Circumcision of the Heart.” <http://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/circumcision-heart/> (27th April 2016).

¹¹ “Circumcision of the Heart, the True Mark of a Child of God—Romans 2:28-29.” <http://www.jcblog.net/romans/2/208-romans-228-29-circumcision-of-the-heart-the-true-mark-of-a-child-of-god> (27th April 2016).

¹² “Circumcise your hearts: (Deuteronomy 7:12-11:25).”

http://www.jewishjournal.com/torah/portion/article/circumcise_your_hearts_20120808 (27th April 2016).

“And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live” (Deut 30:6 ESV).

A great example of the joining of these two aspects of circumcision of the heart and loving the LORD your God with all your heart was given by Rabbi Dan Moskovitz when he said,

“Consider the artichoke for a moment. It is an odd but instructive vegetable. An artichoke is prickly and surrounded by an armour of leaves protecting the soft center, the heart of the food. Boiling or steaming it loosens the protective leaves, permitting you to pick them off one by one, unwrapping the delicious gift that lies inside.

Each leaf contains a hint, a sampling of the delicious center. But even if you combined all of the tastes provided by all of the leaves on an artichoke, it would never equal the delicate green heart; only by cutting or pulling away its protective layers can one get to the treasure that lies within.”¹³

So, it is clearly highlighted that, for one to love the LORD their God with all their heart, their heart needs to be circumcised. Therefore, circumcision has a spiritual meaning when it is connected to the heart.¹⁴ Once the heart has been circumcised then this love can flow from one’s heart to God. But, what kind of love is being spoken of in this case? His people needed an open and reachable heart to be able to love Him as they should. They were to demonstrate their love for Him through their hearing and obedience to God’s Word, Deut 30:7-10.

2. What kind of love?

Q. So, what kind of love of love are we talking about here?

In English, we use the one word love in various ways, but is this the case in the original language of the New Testament (NT)? Well actually, there are four words for love, but only three are used in the NT. The four words are *storge*, *philia*, *eros* and finally *agape*. C.S. Lewis in his book *The Four Loves* suggests that storge can be understood as affection the humblest of all loves,¹⁵ philia as tender affection, friendship, or cherish¹⁶ eros as part of the sexual, sensual and romance experience, or passionate love¹⁷ and finally agape as charity and a vulnerable and unconditional love, but above all divine gift love.¹⁸ However, the most used are the verb *agapao* or agape a noun, which is used approx. 216 times.

Jesus used the word *agape* in this first command, but what does it look like in action? This is, the supremely open and divine gift love that has its origin with God. A couple of things need to be said here in the qualification of this kind of love. Firstly, though a person could love using *agape*, it is not of human origin. Secondly, a person needs to have been born again to be able to love with *agape*. The reason for this second point is that, when a person is born anew, they receive this love from God as a fruit of their life, see Gal 5:22.

¹³ “Circumcise your hearts: (Deuteronomy 7:12-11:25).”

http://www.jewishjournal.com/torah_portion/article/circumcise_your_hearts_20120808 (27th April 2016).

¹⁴ “Circumcision.” <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/4391-circumcision> (27th April 2016).

¹⁵ Lewis, C.S. *The Four Loves*. (Glasgow, UK: Collins, 1987), 33, 35.

¹⁶ Lewis, *The Four Loves*, 55. Barclay, W. *New Testament Words*. (London: SCM Press LTD, 1983), 18.

¹⁷ Lewis, *The Four Loves*, 85, 100. Cf. also Barclay, *New Testament Words*, 17-18.

¹⁸ Lewis, *The Four Loves*, 107, 111, 117-119.

Attempts have been made to try to define this divine gift love some of them are as follows:

- Martin Luther King Jr., defined *agape* as “means nothing sentimental or basically affectionate; it means understanding, redeeming good will for all men.”¹⁹
- John Piper has defined *agape* as making a conscious attempt to “...express the heartfelt fullness of treasuring God above all things... love for God is most essentially an experience of the affection, not mere thought or mere behaviour.”²⁰ In another place, Piper went on to say that, “...God is our supreme treasure and pleasure... **So I take loving God in the Great Commandment to mean most essentially *treasuring God – valuing Him, cherishing him, admiring him, desiring him.***”²¹
- William Lane has stated “The love which determines the whole disposition of one’s life and places one’s whole personality in the service of God reflects a commitment to God which springs from divine sonship.”²²
- It has been called the “supreme Christian virtue (quality),” which is love or esteem of God to people and person to person.²³
- Kenneth Wuest in his translation has called it “a divine and self-sacrificial love.”²⁴
- It could be said that *agape* is; ‘Seeking the highest good of another, regardless of whether there is any response or not.’

A person cannot love God in this way, unless they have come to know Him. The only way that a person can know Him is through His Holy Spirit bringing us into a relationship with Him. That is, a person needs to be born anew by the Spirit of God and know this love firsthand to be able to love like this.

3. Aligning your heart with God’s heart

Q. How can you align your heart with God’s heart?

What is a helpful biblical example of aligning one’s heart with this kind of love? That is, an example of this kind of love is that, God first loved us by sending His Son Jesus Christ into the world on His mission.

⁷ “Dear friends, let us continually love (*ἀγαπῶμεν*) one another, for love (*ἀγάπη*) comes from God. Everyone who is in this manner continually one loving (*ἀγαπάω*) out of God has been born with the present and continual result that they are regenerated and knows God in an experiential way. ⁸ Whoever is not continually one loving (*ἀγαπάω*) in this manner has not come to know God, because this forementioned love (*ἀγάπη*) is out of God as a source (and is His nature). ⁹ This is how God once and for all clearly revealed, demonstrated His love (*ἀγάπη*) in our case: He sent off His one and only unique Son (of a single kind) into the world on a mission in order that we may *enjoy the blessing of living through Him*. ¹⁰ In this is the selfless true love (*ἀγάπη*): not that (the focus should be on that) we have loved (*ἠγαπήκαμεν*) God, but

¹⁹ Miller, Keith D. *The Voice of Deliverance: The Language of Martin Luther King Jr., & Its Sources*. (Athens, GO: University of Georgia Press, 1998), 60. See also, King Jr., Martin Luther. “Nonviolence and Racial Justice.” *The Martin Luther King, Jr. Papers Project* (6 February 1957): 121.

²⁰ Piper, John. *Think: The Life of the Mind and the Love of God*. (Nottingham, England: IVP, 2010), 83, 85-86.

²¹ Piper, John. “Conclusion: Thinking for the Sake of Joy: The Life of the Mind and the Love of God.” In *Thinking, Loving, Doing. A Call to Glorify God with Heart and Mind*. eds. John Piper & David Mathis. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 129-130, 131.

²² Lane, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Gospel of Mark*, 433.

²³ Wigram-Green. *The New Englishman’s Greek Concordance and Lexicon*. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1982), 26.

²⁴ Wuest, K.S. *The New Testament: An Expanded Translation*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 572.

rather that He Himself once and for all loved (ἡγάπησεν) us, and sent off once and for all His Son (once and for all historically revealing the Father's love) atoning sacrifice (of propitiation) for our sins...¹⁹ As for us, let us be continually loving (ἀγαπάω), because He Himself first once and for all loved (ἀγαπάω) us" (1 Jn 4:7-10,19).

In applying this to your current life situation, Piper has suggested,

"Something changes inside of you, and as a result he becomes compellingly attractive. His glory – His beauty – compels your admiration and delight. He becomes your supreme treasure. You love Him."²⁵

Do you essentially treasure God, valuing Him, cherishing Him, admiring Him, loving Him passionately, and desiring Him above all else? It has been pointed out that,

"The first commandment is a passion commandment. We are not only told to love but we are also told to love passionately, with all our being."²⁶

The privilege of loving God is worth much more than this. It really is priceless! Yet, have you aligned your heart with God's heart? Francis Chan has said,

"A person who is obsessed thinks about heaven frequently. Obsessed people orient their lives around eternity; they are not fixed on what is here in front of them... A person who is obsessed is characterised by committed, settled, passionate love for God, above and before every other thing and every other being."²⁷

Some Concluding Thoughts

Q. Do you have as a core value the alignment of your heart with God for living as Christ-follower?

It is important to stop every now and then and see how aligned our heart is with God's. That is, to stop and together with the Spirit of God, identify if we are keeping this first and greatest commandment. Do you have a God directed love; are you loving Him passionately right now at this moment in your life? If not, what do you need to do to either come to a place of loving Him this way, or come back into a place of doing so? You may be thinking why is it so important to have such a passionate love for God? Well, "Passion is what motives people to action."²⁸

Jesus made a sobering statement within the context of the of His coming and the end of the age,

"Sin will be rampant everywhere, and the love (ἀγάπη) of many will grow cold (go out, be extinguished) (Matt 24:12 NLT).

So, let me encourage you to desire to love the Lord your God with all your heart and let this continual monitoring vigilance influence the devotion of your heart,

"Guard or keep vigilant watch over your heart above all else, from it flow the springs of life for it determines the course of your life" (Prov 4:23).

²⁵ Piper, *Think*, 87.

²⁶ Damazio, *The Power of Spiritual Alignment*, 88.

²⁷ Chan, Francis. *Crazy Love: Overwhelmed by a Restless God*. (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2008), 140, 141.

²⁸ Damazio, *The Power of Spiritual Alignment*, 88.

How would you know if your love for God had grown cold? Following are some helpful searching queries to guide you in this process,

“Do you have people in your life who feel free to share their concerns with you when they see you departing from your love relationship with God? If not, what might you do to enlist a friend to help you guard your heart?”²⁹

So, how have things been between you and your heavenly Father? If you could some things over again would this have been one area of your relationship you would have worked on? Do you need to cleanse your heart and mind; has it grown callused, become hard towards God your Father?

“Test me, O LORD, and try me, examine my heart and my mind” (Ps 26:2 NIV).

Why not let the Holy Spirit cut away the insensitive and callused parts of your heart? That is, remember that circumcision is a matter of the heart, which is done by the Spirit as He wields the Word of God against our heart.

“For the Word of God is alive and powerful. It is sharper than the sharpest two-edged sword, cutting between soul and spirit, between joint and marrow. It exposes our innermost thoughts and desires” (Heb 4:12 NLT).

So, how has your love of the Father been this year? Have you given it much thought and effort, or has it gone under the radar (so to speak)? Well it is not too late; in fact, it is never too late to start loving Him in the way that has been described here.

To love the Lord your God with all your heart, could be summarised as,

It is the divine and self-sacrificial love of the Father for His own and their mutual love, which is the deliberate principle of the whole being. It is an expression of the heartfelt fullness of treasuring God above all things and most essentially valuing Him, cherishing Him, admiring Him and desiring Him as our supreme treasure and pleasure. It is seeking the highest good of another, regardless of whether there is any response or not.

Why do we need to do this, because He first loved us in the same way? The love for God is first, but it does not end there... John Piper declares,

“The fires of love for God need fuel. And the fires of love for God drive the engines of thought and deed. There is a circle. Thinking feeds the fire, and the fire fuels more thinking and doing. I love God because I know him. And I want to know him more because I love him.”³⁰

²⁹ Blackaby, Henry, Blackaby, Richard & King Claude. *Experiencing God: Knowing and Doing the Will of God*. (Nashville, TN: B & N Publishing Group, 2008), 171.

³⁰ Piper, *Think*, 89.