
Heart and Soul ... A Weekly Meditation

January 10, 2016

*“...and you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your being,
with all your mind, and with all your strength.”*

Mark 12:30 (Common English Bible)

These words are a portion of Jesus' great commandment. Here Jesus emphatically declares that there is a place in the exercise of faith for using our minds. God wants our heads as well as our hearts. Beautiful, compelling worship stirs the heart and encourages the spirit – the organ, the piano and the singing of the great hymns of the church. But what of our minds? God's desire is that our minds be kindled as well. Placing our minds into the service of God is every bit as necessary as private prayer and public worship. What Jesus makes clear is that when God claims a person, God claims the whole person.

When women and men put their minds to work in the service of God things begin to happen. One powerful dynamic is the movement, from one degree to another, of a greater understanding of God and God's purposes within the church and the world. There is a powerful pull within many people of faith to keep belief fixed and static. The pursuit of a deeper understanding of scripture and grasp of truth is threatening. Old, cherished understandings of the faith are familiar and comfortable. Yet, the fear of new discoveries of God's truth may be, in fact, disobedience to God; the choosing to worship a God that fits nicely into our preferred set of beliefs rather than the God who is revealed in the pursuit of truth.

The application of our minds to the exercise of faith also results in an enlarged capacity to discern God's will for our lives. Ephesians 2:10 teaches that God created each person “to do good things.” The quest for each person of faith must be the rich discovery of God's specific purpose for their life; the understanding of what “good things” are expected from a person committed to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. The deep study of scripture and reflection on where God may be in the world gives clarity about the things that matter most. Asking no questions and the refusal to pursue truth wherever truth may lead is a dangerous course. Satan's temptation of Jesus failed, in part, because Jesus applied his mind to knowing God.

Recently, a man sat in my office and declared that the Presbyterian faith of today was, in fact, a large departure from the faith he cherished ten years ago. He was experiencing a mixture of disorientation and anger. The denomination has taken theological positions he simply could not agree with. I found his comment, “The church has left me” to be unsettling. Perhaps the church has left him. If this otherwise intelligent man has chosen to keep his belief fixed and without the exercise of healthy inquiry, the church has moved on. The church does get it wrong from time to time, that is certain. But I celebrate participation in a community of faith that courageously seeks new understandings of a God that continues to surprise us.

Doug Hood