

Give Me an Undivided Heart

Various Scriptures

B. I.: How to keep our minds engaged and hearts aflame when the worship service is over.

This morning we are prepared to share the Lord's Super together. But before we do, I want to take just a few minutes to offer some Pastoral counsel for the purpose of your encouragement.

I suspect every true believer knows the sense of frustration that comes when you realize how quickly our hearts can become dull and cold after a service of worship where the Lord seemed to have moved and spoken to us with unusual clarity and power. His Spirit brings the word to bear upon our souls in ways that either humble us in the dust or lift them to the heights, but soon after seem to have little abiding effect.

As we read the OT, it seems clear that David knew this tendency even in his own life. That's why in Psalm 86:11, we find him praying *"Teach me Your way, O LORD; I will walk in Your truth; Unite my heart to fear Your name."* Actually, some translations render it, *"give me an undivided heart, that I may fear your name."*

You see, David knew what every honest Christian knows; namely that our hearts are fickle and inconsistent. Our affections for the things of God are too often like a morning cloud or the early dew. We come to a service like this one where we worship around the Lord's Table and our hearts are deeply affected. We are smitten by our own unworthiness as the Spirit of God exposes the sinfulness of our hearts. We are struck by God's graciousness as we are reminded how sure He is to forgive by the blood of His Son. Our minds are engaged with the truth of God's word and our hearts are set aflame with holy affections toward the Lord, but then, hardly an hour passes after the service before the flame goes out and our minds return to the spiritually dull and listless state there were at first.

You know what I am talking about? Have you ever wondered what can be done to maintain an "undivided heart" before the Lord, how to continue abiding in Christ after the fellowship and the singing and the prayer and the message from the word? How do you keep the flame burning? How do you maintain an undivided heart.

Can I make a few practical suggestions from the word?

First of all, if we are to keep our minds engaged and hearts aflame we must...

I. Examine Our Heart's Affections:

1. Somewhere along the way I think many of us came to the conclusion that thoughts are good but emotions are bad, at least when it comes to worship. We can't keep from having them because we're human, but they need to be kept subdued at all costs because they are nothing but trouble.
2. But do you realize that that kind of thinking is unbiblical? Throughout the Bible we are

commanded to not only have emotions but to express them as well. For example:

A. Phil. 4:4 “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!” The word “rejoice” is used 151 times in the Bible. It means to be “glad or happy” in the Lord. We are not to be a bunch of dead-pan theologians - the frozen chosen. We’re called to be enthusiastic children who enjoy the inexpressible delights of having God as our Father and Jesus as our brother. We are commanded to have this emotion - this affection - as a common attribute of our lives.

B. Psalm 37:4 “Delight yourself in the LORD; And He will give you the desires of your heart.” Here we are not just commanded to *know* about God, but to take *delight* in knowing Him. Fellowship with God is not supposed to be boring. It’s supposed to be exhilarating. We should cultivate delight in our hearts

C. Nehemiah 8:10 “The joy of the LORD is your strength.”

D. Psalm 51:11-12 “Do not cast me away from Your presence And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the *joy* of Your salvation And sustain me with a willing spirit.” This was really important to David!

E. Col. 3:15 “Let the *peace* of Christ rule in your hearts.”

F. Sometime the opposite is called for. James 4:8-9 says “Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be *miserable* and *mourn* and *weep*; let your laughter be turned into *mourning* and your joy to *gloom*.” Sometimes, God wants us to cultivate sorrow for our sin.

G. On other occasions God forbids us from tolerating certain emotions. Josh 1:9 tells us we are not to tolerate fear in our hearts or depression because the Lord is with us wherever we go.

3. The point is, the Bible is full of commands about our emotions - our affections. We need to take them seriously and examine them carefully. Like it or not they tend to have a powerful influence upon whether we are drawing closer to God or whether we are falling away.

4. Why are we commanded to sing to the Lord about His glory and grace? Is it not to fan our hearts into flame over the glorious person of Christ whom we adore? Jonathan Edwards once wrote: "The duty of singing praises to God seems to be appointed wholly to excite and express religious affections. No other reason can be assigned why we shall express ourselves to God in verse rather than in prose." ("Jonathan Edwards: A New Biography;

p. 87)

5. The problem is, our hearts are so quickly cooled and stricken with dullness toward the things of God. We have all experienced holy affections from time to time, but it is a rare person who is so unaffected by the world that their lives seem deeply and consistently in the sway of the wonder of knowing Christ.

6. Puritan Pastor, Jeremiah Burroughs, once wrote:

"It is possible to keep the heart so close to God as to be fit for prayer, and the hearing of the Word, and for receiving the Sacrament every day, or any hour in the day, but this needs a very closing walking with God and communion with God, and, the truth is, this is very rare. Most men let out their hearts so much to other things, as their consciences cannot but tell them, that if God called them to prayer at such a time in the day, they would be altogether unfit for it. But it is not so with those that walk closely with God, even though they are in the world. (Gospel Worship; p. 89)

7. If we are to keep our minds engaged and our hearts aflame when the worship service is over, we need to learn to Examine our hearts carefully. We need to be aware of the condition of our hearts at any given moment.

A. Before we make the decision to watch a certain movie, we need to ask ourselves, "What will this do to my affections? Will it fan the flame of my passion for God, or will it cause me to delight in stupidity, or sensuality, or feed some fleshly appetite that will leave me unfit to worship, or pray, or joyfully point someone to Christ?"

B. Before we enter into conversation with our friends at school or in the church yard, we need to ask ourselves, "Am I prepared to guard my heart so that my holy affections will be assisted rather than harmed by what is said and done?"

C. Before we turn on the radio or make another click on the internet, we need to ask ourselves, "what effect will this have upon my heart?"

8. How many times have we been able to come to church and hear the word preached only to leave absolutely unaffected by what has been said, and sung, and prayed about. Why does that happen? My only answer is that somehow over the last week, or month, or year we allowed our hearts to become hardened so that the seed of the word of God which is cast upon it has no place to sink its roots.

9. How was your heart when you came to worship this morning. Was it prepared to worship and sing for joy to the Lord? Was it full of anticipation for hearing some word of encouragement or tender rebuke from the Scriptures? Was it ready for prayer or to glory in some excellency of Christ in conversation with a brother or sister in Christ? Or was it just dull, and hard, and

virtually unfit for communion with God.

10. O that we would have the heart of young David Brainerd who wrote in his journal one day: "Spent about two hours this morning in reading and prayer by turns. Was in a watchful tender frame, afraid of everything that might cool my affections and draw away my heart from God... Was watchful, tender, and jealous of my own heart, lest I should admit carelessness and vain thoughts, and grieve the blessed Spirit, so that He should withdraw his sweet, kind, and tender influences. (p. 171)"

11. If we want to keep our minds engaged and hearts aflame, we must start by taking seriously the condition of our hearts.