

## The Last Full Measure of Devotion, or The Measure of Love

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### How do you measure your love?

Remember when you play a little game with your children where you demonstrate how much you love each other? You hold out your hands as wide as you can. I remember Jack Exum talking about giving, and he showed a spoon, and then some kind of scoop. He was discussing Luke 6:38, where we read:

*Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.*

When it comes to our love, how do we measure it out? Do we use a teaspoon, or do we use a snow shovel? Do we put in just a pinch for flavor, or do we use double handfuls?

### With all my heart

The greatest commandment, as Jesus states in Matthew 22:37, is to “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” This is a great challenge to us all. When I talk to God, I would like to be able to say that I love Him with all of my heart. This is how we should be measuring out our love. But it just doesn’t feel right. If I love God with all of my heart, then how can I love anyone else? I would really like to be able to say this, but when I think about how selfish I am I find it hard to do.

God presented this idea of “loving Him with all of our heart” in the Old Testament at the same time that he gave the ten commandments. How we are supposed to do it is never explained, however. Was it so obvious to them? And were they successful at it? I did a search for the phrase “all of my (or his or her or their) heart” in the NIV and I found several instances of people seeking, obeying, or turning to God with all of their heart. But there is no one who claims to have loved God with all of their heart. So is it even possible?

Perhaps I am not thinking about it in the right way. It is important to note that the second commandment is to love others as we do ourselves. Therefore it must be consistent to be able to love God with all of our hearts and love others as well. The word “all” then is something that we should think more about. God did not mean this to be used as an approximation. We mentioned earlier that there was no specific mention of anyone obeying the greatest commandment. But we know that Christ must have, for he was sinless. And he loved us so deeply that he died on the cross for us! “Love with all our heart” then must mean to be completely filled with God-like love. We will love others better because of the depth of this love. This is sometimes hard for people who are close to us to see. We might say that the love of our family and friends (and enemies) is a subset of an all-encompassing true love. It is as though we were a sponge that has been soaked in love until everything that touches it becomes “damp” with that love. Love is like the ground that supports the flowers and provides them nourishment. It is like fabric or canvas that everything else is painted on to create a beautiful picture.

I have said many times that God as the personification of all Goodness. I believe that I can love Goodness with all of my heart; this means being Good and showing love to everyone. In the opposite sense it means that we cannot love evil at all, not even a little bit. As Amos says, we should love good and hate evil. This makes it much simpler. But it does mean that we must love our enemies as well as our friends.

Well, I still have a little bit of a problem saying that I love God with all of my heart. But I think I understand better now how it can be done. We must all learn to love Goodness with every fiber of our being. And they will know we are Christians by our love.

### How big was Christ’s heart?

How big was Christ’s heart? This is an interesting question to think about. It had to be big enough to love every person that has ever lived on earth. Think about how much larger that is than ours. We can love a few people very deeply, but Christ has the capacity to love billions of people. And he can love them each with a special one-on-one relationship. This is just incredible

to think about. And it shows how far we really have to go. Oh, we can love mankind in general, in the abstract. I am reminded of the Peanuts cartoon where Lucy shouts, "I love humanity, it's people I can't stand." Unfortunately, many of us hold the same sentiment.

The prophet Malachi showed the size of God's heart when he wrote in Malachi 3:10:

*Test me in this," says the LORD Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it.*

A couple of more practical examples of this have to do with poor widows and their stores of oil. In 1 Kings 17:14 we see the work of God during a great famine, and He sends Elijah to a widow who has only a handful of flour in a jar and a little oil in a jug. She is ready to cook her last meal and then die. Elijah asks her to share this last bit of food. But with this request he makes a great promise:

*For this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'The jar of flour will not be used up and the jug of oil will not run dry until the day the LORD gives rain on the land.'*

Thus the blessings from the heart of God kept flowing. A similar story has to do with a widow who was about to be forced to sell her children into slavery so that they could all stay alive. God's love poured out to her so that she was able to fill all the vessels that she could find with oil. She sold it and was able to keep her family going. This is a great demonstration of the unfailing love that God bathes us in. He wants us to have the full measure of his joy, as well. We read in John 17:13; "I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them."

### **The Last Full Measure of Devotion**

We have just experienced another Presidential election. I did my duty, but I got so tired of campaign commercials that I began to mute the TV whenever one of them came on. I wish I could have voted for Abraham Lincoln. He was a man who could stick to the essentials, to the things that were important. He loved this country and was totally committed to the preservation of the Union. After the battle of Gettysburg, which was a turning point in the invasion of the North and thus a signal of the nearing end of the Civil War, he was asked to deliver a dedication address for the cemetery where so many who had lost their lives were buried.

Unlike most politicians (especially those of today) he did not concern himself with his own political glory; he was touched by the sacrifice of the lives of so many men for what they believed in. The other speaker spoke for two hours and was much lauded by the press. Lincoln spoke only a few minutes and was pretty much ignored. But the only thing that he said in his speech that wasn't true was that it would not be remembered. To me it is one of the greatest speeches of all time.

What makes it so memorable? Because it flowed from the heart of a true patriot. Lincoln had seen so many die for the cause. The last sentence of the speech reads, "It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us -- that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave **the last full measure of devotion** -- that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain, that this nation under God shall have a new birth of freedom, and that government of the people, by the people, for the people shall not perish from the earth." The phrase "the last full measure of devotion" is my favorite. They gave their all; there was no more to give. And Lincoln knew that he must not allow their deaths to have been in vain.

Mr. Lincoln was a Bible reader, and perhaps he drew this phrase from the words of Christ in John 13:1, "he now showed them the full extent of his love." This was on the occasion when he washed his disciples' feet; more importantly, it was just hours before he was crucified. Christ indeed showed the full extent of his love, for he gave until the last drop of blood was shed. Why did he do this? His words are recorded in John 15:13, "Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends." You and I are the reason that Jesus was so filled with devotion! How can we measure such a thing? Remember talking about how we ask our children how much they love us and they hold their hands far apart? Someone has written: "I asked Christ how much

he loved me... and he opened his hands out wide... and died!" Christ on the cross truly showed the full extent of his love.

Lincoln in his great speech commemorated a cemetery; we worship a risen Savior. But we both honor the "last full measure of devotion." Thanks be to God for His inexpressible gift!

### **What is the measure of our love?**

What then is the measure of our love in response? How big is our heart and do we fill it up in our attention to God? In Mark 10:35-40 we read of James and John, who came to Jesus to ask Him if they could sit at his right and left hand in his glory.

*"You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said. "Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?"*

*"We can," they answered.*

*Jesus said to them, "You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared."*

This idea of drinking the cup that Jesus had to drink relates to the degree of love that we have for Him. James and John wanted to be so close to Christ; in power, obviously, but also because of their love for Him. Jesus warns them that the measure of their love will soon be tested. And they will be able to show their own "last full measure of devotion."

The centerpiece of our worship is the cup that Jesus uses to describe his suffering and commitment. He would have sought another way, if it had been useful, for we read in Matthew 26:37-39:

*He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me." Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will."*

But he would not run from the responsibility generated by his love for mankind. We read in John 18:10-11:

*Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant, cutting off his right ear. (The servant's name was Malchus.) Jesus commanded Peter, "Put your sword away! Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?"*

Christ was more than ready to take our punishment and our sin on his back. The cup was used as a memorial, as we know, of this event. We should participate in it as often as possible to show our returning love. We read in 1 Corinthians 11:25-28:

*In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup.*

We find that so many of the early Christians rejoiced that they could share in the sufferings of Christ. Paul writes in Colossians 1:24:

*Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church.*

### **Commitment**

Christ asks of each of us that we are able to give the last full measure of devotion. This means that we must be totally committed to Him and the Goodness that He stands for. If you remember the Old Testament describes the special act that is performed for the slave that wants to stay with his master forever. In Deuteronomy 15:16-17 we read:

*But if your servant says to you, "I do not want to leave you," because he loves you and your family and is well off with you, then take an awl and push it through his ear lobe into the door, and he will become your servant for life. Do the same for your maidservant.*

What is the sign that you are committed to Christ? Where are the scars that you wear for Him? When I think of Christ's commitment I think of the fact that he was nailed to the cross. This is the imprint of the awl, in a sense, that shows his dedication and love for us. Are we committed enough to put our life on the line? Are we committed enough to put our life into His service for ever and ever?

The Gettysburg address is one of the greatest short speeches that has ever been uttered. Abraham Lincoln was in awe of the sacrifice of men who believed in their cause. With a few changes these words could describe God, Christ, and the church. Let's look at the last part of it in this way:

*The world will little note nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what Christ did here. It is for us the living rather to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which He who died here has thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us -- that from Christ's death and glorious resurrection we take increased devotion to that cause for which He gave the last full measure of devotion -- that we here highly resolve that He shall not have died in vain, that this church under God shall have a new birth of spirit, and that God's beloved family shall not perish from the earth.*

Let us pledge our full devotion to Christ so that we can live with Him eternally.