

With Heart and Soul

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Scripture reading: Deuteronomy 30

God knows you and sees you. He sees not only the things you do, but He sees straight into your heart.

God reminds us of that several times in Deuteronomy 30. Verse 10 says, “If thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to keep his commandments and his statutes which are written in this book of the law, and if thou turn unto the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul.” Much could be said about Deuteronomy 30, about God’s promises and how they are inseparable from obedience. However, what does it mean to turn to God *with heart and soul*? By considering six aspects of what it means to live with heart and soul, we will understand the level of relationship God is calling us to, and realize that only in obedience to Him will we find true blessing.

1. The Definition

I don’t know about you, but growing up I was often confused by the biblical language of heart. Often when we think about the heart, we think of the organ that is beating in our chest, pumping blood. We know that the heart sometimes means more than that, because depictions of romance constantly use the heart as a symbol.

I was also confused about what the soul was. If your soul is the hidden, abstract, undying part of you, how could you love the Lord with your soul now? How could I know I was saved, if my soul was still thirsting for God?

We need to begin by putting away cultural and personal definitions of what these words mean, and try to understand what the Old Testament means when it speaks of “heart and soul.” So the first question we want to ask is: What does “with heart and soul” mean?

Let’s begin by taking each word individually and coming up with a biblical definition.

Heart is mentioned more than eight hundred times in the Bible. A very few times it does refer to the organ inside of someone’s chest, and a few more times it refers to a place of hiding or a place deep or far away, like the heart of the deep (oceans). But most often, including in Deuteronomy, heart is the center of one’s emotional, intellectual, or moral being. What we think of our brain doing, the Bible describes as coming from the heart. It understands, discerns, and gives insight. The heart thinks, remembers, reflects, and meditates. It is the most frequent word used for one’s personality.

For example, in Judges 16, Delilah complains Samson’s heart is not with her, that his emotions and will are far from her. In 2 Samuel 15:6, Absalom gains the loyalty of people by stealing their hearts—their emotions and will.

We must also consider the soul with the same biblical understanding. Before we do that, understand that the theological definition of “soul” is the undying, nonphysical aspect of man. But we need to understand that when the Old Testament speaks of soul, it generally is not using that definition.

In the Old Testament, the word translated as soul (*nephesh*) is used more than 750 times. In the Old Testament, animals have *nephesh*, God has *nephesh*, *nephesh* die. So, as we come to many verses that use the word “soul,” it is not about the immortal soul, but about

the breath, or the principle of life that God has given. And in that sense, the soul referred to in Deuteronomy is your essence, the whole you. For example, in Genesis 27, Esau prepares venison for Isaac, that Isaac's soul would bless Esau. In Numbers, after eating manna, the soul of the people—their inner selves—becomes discouraged. Their souls begin to loathe that bread. In 1 Samuel 1:15, Hannah says she poured out her soul before the Lord—her desires, her life.

So, as far as the Old Testament describes people, it does not have the same contrast of body and soul that we think of today. It always describes people in terms of their inner self and outer appearance. And both the heart and soul are inner-self words. And yet, you cannot think of them as two separate things that are inside your body. No, you are a person, described as having heart and soul. You *are* heart and soul rather than just having a heart and soul attached to your physical body.

2. The Purpose

The second question we want to ask is: Why do you have a heart and soul? Let me ask it a different way. Why are you here, and why have you been given a mind, a personality, energy? God has made you a complete, integrated person. He asks that you would give that heart and soul to Him.

His command is that you turn to Him with heart and soul! This command comes as a summary of the law: “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD: and thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might” (Deut. 6:4–5). That is the essence of God's law.

The reason you have a heart and soul is to be singularly devoted to God. You have a heart and soul so

that you can obey the Lord with your heart and soul, so that you can love the Lord with heart and soul, so that you can turn to Him with heart and soul. “And now, Israel, what doth the LORD thy God require of thee, but to fear the LORD thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the LORD thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul?” (Deut. 10:12).

As the people of Israel are about to go into the promised land, God makes clear to them the level of commitment that will be required. If they want to be blessed, they cannot just stand on the sidelines. God does not just want spectators or even benchwarmers. He wants active lives for His glory. “My son, give me thine heart” (Prov. 23:26). Give Him your whole life!

Despite this clear command, if you scan all the Scriptures regarding heart and soul, you will see there is something in the way.

3. The Impossibility

By nature we cannot love God with our heart and soul. Because of the sin in the garden of Eden, we love ourselves. We live for ourselves. It only took until Genesis 6 for the conclusion to be: “And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (v. 5). “The imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth” (Gen. 8:21). The wise preacher’s conclusion is this: “God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions” (Eccl. 7:29).

As you are born on earth your soul is spiritually dead; your heart is spiritually evil. Do you realize how all-encompassing that is? This is not just about one organ within you. None of these passages say that if you just cut

out the one corrupted pound of flesh you will be good. No, the whole person, the inward person, the center of who you are, is unable to turn to the Lord your God with all your heart and soul. It seeks out its own inventions.

The natural heart pours out rebellion: “The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God” (Ps. 14:1).

The natural heart pours out selfishness: “He did evil, because he prepared not his heart to seek the LORD” (2 Chron. 12:14). Apart from grace, the natural heart will pursue rebellion and selfishness forever. Solomon’s conclusion in Ecclesiastes is: “The heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness is in their heart while they live, and after that they go to the dead” (Eccl. 9:3).

We almost instinctively know that, so we try to convince ourselves otherwise. We hear, believe, and maybe even teach it. We may say things like, “Man is naturally good; it is his environment that makes him do such bad things.” Or, “He was such a good person. He loved his grandkids so much.”

Even in church, we try to cover up our evil insides with externals. Instead of turning to the Lord with all our heart, all our being, all our energy, we change what people see about us; we hide our past, wear different clothes, mutter prayers and thanksgivings, come to church and think religious things one day a week, hoping God will be merciful.

But if that is your life, instead of looking at you and seeing you serve Him with all of your heart and all of your soul, God sees you hiding from Him, ignoring Him, diminishing Him. He sees you making excuses about how busy you are, or how tired you are, or how everybody else has it wrong. He sees you trying to cover that up with some pious words. We cannot serve God with just a fraction of ourselves.

We cannot turn to the Lord through mere memorization. Today people talk about learning by heart, and they mean rote memory. But learning by heart according to the Bible is not like memorizing the multiplication tables. Learning by heart should be learning with energy, desire, and purpose.

When will we admit we are not serving God with all of our heart, all of our soul? When will unbelievers admit they do not seek God with all of their heart? When will backsliders admit they do not love God with all of their heart?

Every time Israel wanders, they are reminded they must love the Lord with their heart. For example, Joshua reminds the people, “But take diligent heed to do the commandment and the law, which Moses the servant of the LORD charged you, to love the LORD your God, and to walk in all his ways, and to keep his commandments, and to cleave unto him, and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul” (Josh. 22:5).

Samuel reminds them, “Serve the LORD with all your heart, and turn ye not aside” (1 Sam. 12:20–21).

Solomon says, “Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding” (Prov. 3:5).

And the prophet Joel reminds the people, “Therefore also now, saith the LORD, turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting” (Joel 2:12).

Whether you are lost or backsliding, the question must become: How can I turn to the Lord with heart and soul?

Scripture gives us the answer. Moses tells the people, “This commandment which I command thee this day, it is not hidden from thee, neither is it far off” (Deut. 30:11). It is right here, simple to understand. You know what it is to give your energy, your zeal, yourself to something.

And don't begin with the excuses: "The word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it" (v. 14). You know what is right—why are you not doing it?

God's command is this: "Turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning: and rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the LORD your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness" (Joel 2:12–13). Repent with your whole being. Rend your hearts, not your garments!

This shows us again it is not about external things. Will you humble your heart, your mind, your will, your being, to say, "Lord, I am proud—humble me. Lord, I am living for myself—stop me. Lord, I am making excuses—teach me. Lord, I want to serve Thee with my whole heart—help me"?

This is the promise to those who seek: "And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart. And I will be found of you, saith the LORD" (Jer. 29:13–14). There is hope for those who turn with all their heart.

4. The Hope

The hope that people have is not in themselves, for their hearts are evil. The hope is in the One who reminds the Pharisees: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment" (Matt. 22:37–38).

When Christ came, He humbled himself, took on the form of a man, and lived perfectly for thirty-three years. He accomplished redemption by keeping that commandment: He loved the Lord His God with all of His

heart, soul, and mind. His energy, His will, His mind, His zeal were all in, and were never against His Father's.

It is only when you are united to Him by faith that you can have any hope of loving the Lord as you are required. Realize the change of heart that happens then. The Westminster Larger Catechism Question and Answer 67 puts it this way:

God savingly enlightens their minds, renewing and powerfully determining their wills, so as they (although in themselves dead in sin) are hereby made willing and able freely to answer his call, and to accept and embrace the grace offered and conveyed therein.

It is God who gives the new heart. As the prophet Ezekiel says: "Then [after being brought back from idolatry] will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them.... Ye shall be my people, and I will be your God" (Ezek. 36:25–28).

This new heart is the transformation of the whole inner man—a new mind, new emotions, and new desires. The new spirit is the new principle of life to animate one's personality. And that is to lead to new, holy living.

Imagine a hunter in the woods. To be continually successful, his whole person needs to be engaged. He cannot just march through the woods, thinking that as soon as he sees a deer it is going to go down. He prepares and approaches with care, his senses are aware, he shoots

with precision. Why would you call yourself a hunter if you do not approach your task with intention?

5. The Action

So what is it to live with “heart and soul”? To live with heart and soul begins with realizing how connected your inner person is with your actions. To live with heart and soul is to live totally and wholly for God, completely and honestly. Then living with heart and soul reflects a love of God.

That doesn't mean some people don't try to live with a shell around them that is not reflective of their heart. We all do that sometimes, especially if we are uncomfortable. But God sees past all of that into our hearts.

Yet other people try to splinter their heart up, giving parts of it to God and things of the church, and other parts to themselves and things of material pleasures, and other parts to the world.

But if we really are to live with heart and soul, there should be no acceptable ratio other than 100 to 0. Every ounce of you ought to be living for God's glory.

We live with heart and soul when we give our minds to God, when we study so that we would know Him and His world more, when we worship Him with greater awe.

We live with heart and soul when we allow our emotions to be impacted by spiritual truth, when we admit our desire and need of God, when we admit the joy and peace of knowing God, when we bask in His promises and allow them to overwhelm us, when we trust the providence of God in spite of the trial.

We live with heart and soul when we realize every part of our lives is subject to His authority; not just Sunday, but Monday through Saturday as well; not just

church, but also our career performance, our marriages, our parenting, our recreation; not just our tithes, but all of our financial, material, and emotional resources and energy.

We live with heart and soul when we desire to serve the kingdom of God, to live under His authority, to the benefit of our neighbors.

We live with heart and soul when we follow through on serving others, when we follow through the Spirit's prompting, when we follow biblical instruction.

We live with heart and soul when we worship with energy, with honest, sincere prayers, with songs that reflect the message of God, with confession and dependence— every day.

We live with heart and soul when we don't try to hide who God has made us, when we realize and use what He has given us, when we don't try to be two different people, and by feeding our minds good and true and lovely things.

If you really want to be a musician, you cannot sing just quarter notes half-heartedly. That is not music, nor musicianship. Real musicians need to think music, imagine music. They need to be able to sing fast notes, as well as really long, slow notes. They need the emotional involvement to be able to sing with zeal when singing loudly or softly. They need to make it real, not halfhearted or sloppy or careless. They need to put their whole being into making music.

Christians are not called just to know what Christianity is; they are called to live to God from within, from the heart. To live this way does not require a certain age, or a certain education, or a certain experience. It is possible for both young and old, for people from every walk of life.

Believers who live with heart and soul are a warning to others. “If thine heart turn away, so that thou wilt not hear, but shalt be drawn away, and worship other gods, and serve them; I denounce unto you this day, that ye shall surely perish, and that ye shall not prolong your days upon the land” (Deut. 30:17–18).

When you consider how God asks for total commitment, it is no wonder the church in North America asks for blessing. Our commitment has often been so halfhearted, so hypocritical.

Do you really love God? Do you really want to live a holy life for Him? “Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience.... Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering” (Heb. 10:22–23). Because to those who honor Him by living with heart and soul, God promises rich reward.

6. The Results

Deuteronomy makes the results and rewards clear. “I command thee this day to love the LORD thy God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commandments and his statutes and his judgments, that thou mayest live and multiply: and the LORD thy God shall bless thee in the land whither thou goest to possess it” (Deut. 30:16).

Or, as the psalmist puts it, “Delight thyself also in the LORD: and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart” (Ps. 37:4).

If we want to experience blessing as families, as churches, as nations, we need to learn this very basic lesson. We are to turn to God, to serve God, and to love God, with heart and soul.

Those who do turn to the Lord with their lives, their emotions, their wills, their understanding, and their personality receive the blessings: “Choose life, that both

thou and thy seed may live: that thou mayest love the LORD thy God, and that thou mayest obey his voice, and that thou mayest cleave unto him: for he is thy life, and the length of thy days: that thou mayest dwell in the land” (Deut. 30:19–20).

It is those who learn by the Holy Spirit to live for God with heart and soul who will dwell in the land of eternal promise and truly and completely live. Don’t waste your heart; don’t waste your soul. “For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” (Matt. 16:26). Hear Jesus’s words: “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me” (v. 24).