

SERVING GOD IN LOVE

Jeremiah Sim

In the Bible, we are taught that love is a most fundamental aspect in our relationship to God and service for Him. God demands and commands believers to love Him “with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: (for) this is the first commandment” (Mark 12:30), so that we may be able to serve Him truly and genuinely.

Wholehearted Love Renders True Service

The apostle Paul exhorts believers to “walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us” by bringing to his readers’ remembrance of the Lord’s love towards them in giving “himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour” (Ephesians 5:2). Christ lovingly and willingly laid down His life for us as the only acceptable “offering” for the remission of our sins, so that our conscience is “purge(d) ... from dead works to serve the

living God” (Hebrews 9:14). Christ’s active and passive obedience has fully satisfied the demands of God’s law and justice. For that reason, God was pleased to accept His offering and forgive us of our sins when we come to God through Christ. Christ’s love towards us reflects His perfect love in serving God the Father. He held nothing back but gave His all wholeheartedly. His is a perfect model and pattern for believers to emulate in serving God. Therefore, following the Lord’s example, and having been purged from the misery and bondage of sin, believers ought to totally submit and render their lives to obey and serve God with a truthful, loving spirit.

In order for us to serve God with wholehearted love, we cannot have any other master than the Lord. Our single-minded service to Jesus can only be possible if we hate all other things that would be at cross purposes with God’s will, which is clearly laid out in the



Scriptures. In other words, we should not allow anyone or anything to hinder or distract us from our earnest desire to do all His will as His faithful servant. Hence, the commandment to “love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, ... soul, ... mind, and ... strength” (Mark 12:30). This would surely entail the use of all of our faculties to serve our Lord with devotion. “If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be” (John 12:26). As we express our wholehearted love towards God in our service to Him and His people, the express desire of our Lord Jesus’ loving heart will also be made manifest in our lives and relationships – that by our love “shall all men know that (we) are (His) disciples” (John 13:35).

Divided Love Renders False Service

Any attempt to love the world more than God is unacceptable and abominable before Him. However, a more subtle danger lies

in trying to love both the world and God. In Luke 16:13, we observe Jesus addressing His disciples (cf. v. 1a) by saying, “No servant can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.” Dear brethren, who commands your love: God or mammon? This may be an easy intellectual question to answer, but not so easy a practical choice to continually make. That is the gist of Jesus’ warning – He was concerned about the danger of Christians being sucked into the world by craving for material wealth. This undue desire for riches will inevitably cause a person to make decisions and channel his energies accordingly. In making money his yardstick for success and happiness, he has just made mammon his master.

Therefore, Luke 16:13 is a solemn warning to all believers from our Lord Jesus that we cannot serve God and the

world; the pursuit of both entails opposing interests. The exclusive conditions for serving God would require every believer to never attempt to balance his service in these two areas. Any attempt to serve both is actually serving mammon. The word “servant” used here means “servant of the master’s household”; this tells us that no believer can be a servant taking care of and doing well in two different households!

Incidentally, the disciples were not the only hearers present, for we read in v. 14, “And the Pharisees also, who were covetous, heard all these things: and they derided him.” The Pharisees were a group of religious teachers who loved to portray themselves as “real zealous servants” of God, but whom Jesus exposed as “covetous”. They took on their roles as teachers of the law and rulers of Israel not because of their sincere and wholehearted love for God, but for love of money, fame and personal ambition. Their service was false, because it was rendered for the wrong motives.

Divided Love Manifested by Love for Material Gain

Though appearing as caring and religious, the Pharisees in reality were covetous and took advantage of the people’s wealth for their own benefit and gain. Their love and service to God were just a front for soliciting money from the people. They were a group of ferocious and covetous people who used feigned words to flatter, and by fair speeches defraud the hearts of the simple and gullible so as to derive material advantage from them. No wonder Jesus openly and firmly rebuked them, saying, “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows’ houses, and for a pretence make

long prayer: therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation” (Matthew 23:14).

Their lust for material things was further exposed by Jesus in Matthew 23:16-19 – “Woe unto you, ye blind guides, which say, Whosoever shall swear by the temple, it is nothing; but whosoever shall swear by the gold of the temple, he is a debtor! Ye fools and blind: for whether is greater, the gold, or the temple that sanctifieth the gold? And, Whosoever shall swear by the altar, it is nothing; but whosoever sweareth by the gift that is upon it, he is guilty. Ye fools and blind: for whether is greater, the gift, or the altar that sanctifieth the gift?” Apparently, their preoccupation with “gold” and “gift” instead of the temple and its altar betrayed their divided hearts’ love for material things in their so-called religious service. Outwardly, they pretended to serve God lovingly by finding favour in people’s eyes, but inwardly, they were hypocrites having a double standard! They took the Lord’s name in vain for their own materialistic enrichment. With their minds being clouded by mammon, the god of materialism, they were incompetent and unfit to guide the people, let alone to be God’s servants. May we always be circumspect and careful not to be influenced by the greed for wealth lest we be found harbouring a divided love.

Divided Love Manifested by Cherishing Selfish Ambition

Divided love can further manifest itself in the form of self-centred ambitions. That is why the apostle Paul warns that “nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves” (Philippians 2:3). Scripture is firmly against serving with ulterior motives and secret agenda. Some,

in doing so, can become ruthless and vicious, and will even go to the extent of “selling out” their souls and betraying the Lord!

A tragic case in point is Judas Iscariot, who followed Jesus more for political ambition than spiritual reasons. He saw Christ as a means to advance his own conceited and self-serving ideas of God’s kingdom. He harboured selfish agenda in his heart though he professed love to Jesus and concern for the poor. The apostle John exposed Judas’ true colours when he wrote of him: “This he said, not that he cared for the poor; but because he was a thief, and had the bag, and bare what was put therein” (John 12:6). Though Judas had been with the Lord for three years, he was not wholehearted in following Christ. Unlike Peter and the other disciples who had forsaken all (cf. Matthew 19:27), he did not leave all but followed with a divided allegiance. He ended up conspiring with the chief priests to betray Jesus! Dear believers, may we be warned against serving the living and true God with a partially consecrated heart.

Divided Love Manifested by Love for Fame

Furthermore, yet another way divided love is manifested is the yearning for status and high position, as was reflected in the Jewish religious leaders’ conduct. Matthew 23:2-7 highlights this vividly: “The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat ... But all their works they do for to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments, and love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues, and greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi.” To be seated in Moses’ seat means to be an authoritative

figure of the law and judge of God’s people. In enforcing the law, these false teachers made a great show to draw public recognition and get accolades from people. In other words, they craved for power and fame.

This was contrary to what Jesus taught His disciples: “Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them ... do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do ... that they may have glory of men ... And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites ... that they may be seen of men” (Matthew 6:1-5). Dear Christians, may we be warned that love for the praise of men can render us unfit to serve God. As the apostle Paul exhorts, “do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ” (Galatians 1:10).

Conclusion

Dear Christians, in our service for God, we must guard against being choked by materialism, fame and ambition, which will result in divided love for God. We must constantly remind ourselves of this overwhelming truth that “We love (God), because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19). As the apostle John tellingly puts it, “Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins” (1 John 4:10). We are what we are only by God’s loving grace. Being saved “by grace ... through faith”, we are then to walk in “good works, which God hath before ordained” (Ephesians 2:8, 10). This “walking in good works” is our reasonable service – service rendered not out of compulsion or obligation, but out of grateful, wholehearted love.