

Having a Heart for God - Mark 12:30; John 4:24

Introduction: When John Bisagno came to the First Baptist Church of Houston as a candidate for pastor, he entered a dimly lit auditorium, with just a few people huddled together. They were singing old, slow songs. He said the atmosphere was generally depressing. Later that day he took a walk in downtown Houston and came upon a grand opening of a new jewelry store. He said there was a celebration going on. The store had a greeter at the door, bright lights on, and lively music playing over the intercom. . They offered him refreshments, and as he mingled, people were talking and laughing and having a good time. He said that after attending both the church and the jewelry store, if the jewelry store had offered, he would have joined the jewelry store!

Vance Havner once said, *"Most church members live so far below the standard, you'd have to backslide to be in fellowship. We are so subnormal that if we were to become normal, people would think we were abnormal."* I'm glad that not all churches are in this bad a shape, and I pray that ours will never become that way.

The point is, for a church to be really alive, it must be healthy. And for a church to be healthy, the members must be healthy. For a church to be growing, Christians must be growing spiritually.

But what are the characteristics of a healthy Christian life? We're going to examine some tonight. For if we are going to be healthy Christians, we must develop and maintain a real heart for God. First, that will involve our attitude:

1. Loving God Passionately (Mark 12:30)

If we have a real heart for God, we'll want to really love Him and worship Him with everything we've got. Now how can that happen? Jesus gives us four ways. It is found in His reply to the question of someone asking Him what was the greatest commandment. He said, *"And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength."* (Mark 12:30).

What does that mean? It means not just giving Jesus one of the places in our hearts, but all of it. It means loving Him with pure devotion. When you love the Lord with all of your heart, you think about Him all of the time. You long to be with Him. You are devoted to Him. You are faithful to Him. He becomes the most important thing in your life.

But the commandment also says we are to love Him *“with all your soul.”* The soul speaks of our emotions. So, to love God with all our soul means that our love for God ought to be passionate and emotional.

Sadly, a lot of people either never had, or have lost their passion for the Lord. They’ve become apathetic. The word apathetic literally means *“without passion.”* I remember a Peanuts cartoon in which Charlie Brown was talking to Lucy. He was talking about there being so much apathy in the world today. Lucy responded, *“Yeah, it’s terrible. But who cares?”*

Well, as followers of Christ, we’d better care about the Lord and His church! We’d better be excited about our relationship with Him. I’m not talking about shouting and jumping benches, but simply being involved with all our emotions in our relationship to the Lord. Having a hunger and thirst for His Word; having a desire to please Him and serve Him, and getting excited about following Him.

But there’s another element. Jesus says that you are to love the Lord your *God “with all your mind.”* Now, this is not talking about using one’s intellect to figure God out. You will always come up short if you try. God can’t be figured out anyway.

But God fully wants our minds to be involved in our love for Him. Romans 12 speaks of our minds being renewed. 1 Peter tells us to prepare our minds for work. And here, we are told to love God with all our mind. A committed and transformed mind can be used by God to communicate His truth. But a mind that is cluttered and clouded with the garbage of this world, is actually a hindrance. But when all of our mental ability is dedicated to God, our thinking will become clear, and our spiritual side will prosper.

But we are also to love Him *“with all your strength.”* In other words, all this heart, soul, and mind devotion must be fully lived out. To love God with all our strength means to love God in all that we do.

Col. 3:17 says, *“And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.”* And, vs. 23 says, *“Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men....”* For Christianity to really be alive, it must be lived out. This is what makes the Christian faith so powerful and life-changing. Otherwise, it doesn’t make any difference at all.

To truly love God, you must love Him in all you do - the way you live your life, conduct your business, work your job, and deal with your relationships. This brings us to the second characteristic of a healthy Christian life. It has to do with our expressions.

2. Worshipping God Enthusiastically

Christians who really love God with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength will express that love in their worship of God. In other words, their worship will be enthusiastic.

Jesus said in John 4:24, "*God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.*" That means that we worship God in honesty and integrity, and with passion and with purpose.

It really makes a difference when people worship enthusiastically; and are praising the Lord and celebrating the Lord's goodness and mercy and His mighty works. It tends to rub off on everyone. To quote Vance Havner again, he said: "*It's about time we quit playing church in these services that start at eleven o'clock sharp and end at twelve o'clock dull.*"

The word enthusiasm in the Greek is a compound word: *en* (meaning "in") and *theos* (meaning "God"). So enthusiasm means that we are "*in God*" or "*filled with God.*" And someone who is filled with God is also filled with life, love, joy, hope, faith, peace, and power. You can't be filled with those things and be dead! No, you'd be fully alive!

If you go to a ball game or a party, you are usually excited and enthusiastic. Some even turn into raving lunatics. Well, we ought to feel that way about the Lord in church.

We should be enthusiastic in our praise to God because there is much to be excited about. We serve a Savior who loves us, a God who forgives us, and a Lord who provides for our needs. When we think of all He has done, how can we not be excited about Him? How can we not "*Enter His gates with thanksgiving and His courts with praise?*"

The world needs to see that we are excited about Jesus. But what they see a lot of the time is a people who just go through the motions. But when we prepare our hearts to worship, when we pray for the worship service, when we pray for the preacher, when we focus on the goodness of God, when we make Christ our priority, then

we will be ready for worship. And that is when people will leave feeling as though they have really had an experience with the living God.

As Christians our lives should be marked by a genuine love for God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, and our gatherings should be marked by enthusiastic worship that comes from a heart full of Jesus' presence and grace. These are two of the marks of a healthy Christian life. I pray that we will exhibit this kind of attitude in our love for God, and express it in our actions toward Him.