

Treatise on Devotion

Augustine once said, "For though hast made us for thee and our heart is unquiet till it finds its rest in thee." We all strive after something. We grope in the dark trying to find peace, trying to find meaning, trying to find happiness, but instead we find a sword, hopelessness and pain. Then we become a Christian. Our burden of sin is relieved. We have a hope for the future but we still live mediocre, defeated, pointless lives because of all the excess baggage we bring into Christianity. Three things need to be realized before we can experience the fullness of our salvation: Christ came to destroy the works of the Devil; Christ came that we might have life abundantly; and Christ came to give up purpose.

Christ came to destroy the works of the Devil (1 John 3:8). He did not just come to forgive us our sins, He came to rescue us from our sin predicament. We cannot be content in our sin and at the same time experience God's fullness. We must see sin as an evil cancer that needs to be rooted out. A deception of the Devil is to get us to believe that sin is the "don'ts" on God's list of "do's" and "don'ts". We feel that if we stay away from murder, sex, stealing, lying, etc. Then we are good. Jesus taught that sin is an attitude of the heart. This would include pride, selfishness, jealousy, envy, hatred, etc.

Augustine believed pride was the worst of all sins because it keeps man from God, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble" (Proverbs 3:34). If we have a smug attitude about our own self-achievement, if we strive for the attention of the world, if we consider ourselves of a better class or breed than even the worst of sinners we cannot please God. We must see as Charles Spurgeon did, that "There, but for the grace of God, go I."

Selfishness is probably the fountain of all sin. When we take our eyes off of Jesus and place them on our self, we **will** sin. This is why the "Sunday only" Christian cannot experience the fullness of God. He thinks of God Sunday morning but his thoughts and desires are on himself and the world the rest of the week. We must die to our self. We must do everything out of love for God – not for selfish motives. He who is last shall be first; when we forget about our self we will be most blessed (Matthew 16:24-25). This is Scriptural but unless our life exemplifies selflessness, we really don't believe what God has said is true. By our life we either call God a liar or we show that we believe Him. Selfishness and pride are two evil handmaidens that cannot be tolerated if we want to experience God's fullness for our life.

It must be admitted that perfection will not come in this life, though we can experience victory over sin on a moment by moment basis. The real test is where our heart is. Only God knows our heart and this is why we should not judge each other. We must ask our self, "Where are my desires?" "Do I desire to love and serve God with all my heart?" We must be honest with our self at this point. We cannot experience God's fullness and be satisfied with mediocrity and sin.

Christ came that we might have life abundantly (John 10:10). Abundant life is wrapped up in our relationship with God primarily and with people secondarily. Abundant life is relational; it has nothing whatsoever to do with acquiring things. The millionaire and the pauper stand on level ground so far as abundant life is concerned. The first question we must ask our self is, "Do I want abundant life?" The second question is, "Do I believe God wants me to have abundant life?" If our answer to each question is yes, then we can begin to seek God. Notice, I did not say we should seek abundant life, because abundant life is the bi-product of our relationship with God. Bernard of Clairvaux said there are four degrees of love. The first degree is man's love of himself for his own sake. The second degree is man's love for God for his own sake. This is how most of us come to salvation. We love God because of what He has done for us. This is natural but we must grow into the third stage to fully experience abundant life. The third stage is

man's love for God for God's sake. We must learn to see God for who He is, then we will fall deeply in love with Him. We love Him for who He is, not just for what He has done for us. This love comes from spending time with Him and devoting our whole life to Him – a complete self-abandon for His sake. This is a daily love, a moment by moment love where we learn to recognize that he is present always. We practice the presence of God throughout the day even during the trivial matters of our routine existence. We talk to God throughout the day, never ceasing to worship, love and adore Him. It is a Walter Clark says,

But just as the lover longs to pour out praise to his beloved, or the mother delights to babble sweet nonsense to her child, so the worshiper, if he is a true worshiper and not just a play-acting one, burns with the desire to praise God, to know Him and to do His will.

Clairvaux's fourth love is to love oneself for God's sake. He is talking about a total self-abandon and union with God; this will be achieved at the resurrection, but we can experience momentary glimpses of this perfect union even now. God desires to meet us. He desires to speak to us. He desires to hold us close and touch us with His merciful hands of love. But do we believe, and do we want this last love? It must be admitted by all that none of us have arrived completely at the third or fourth stage of love, but we can experience them in ever increasing degrees. The big questions again are, "Where is my heart" "Where are my desires?" "Do I, like the Psalmist, pant and thirst for the living God (Psalm 42)?" "What direction is my heart heading?"

Once we begin to experience this abundant life with God, it will enhance our relationships with people. We will begin to love people for who they are, not for what they have done, or what they can do for me. We will see the person who slanders our name as a person Christ loves, a person of value, a person of potential. We will say with Therese of Lisieux, "Now I know that true charity [love] consists in bearing all my neighbor's defects, in not being surprised at mistakes, but in being edified at the smallest virtues." Our relationships with family and friends will bloom into beautiful flowers of love due to our self-sacrifice. Our relationships with those who are also seeking to know and experience God in ever increasing love and self-denial will burst into an inexpressible and ineffable love. Doesn't this sound wonderful? It is God's desire for us. "For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you a hope and a future" (Jeremiah 29:11). Our part is only to seek Him, as He says in verse 13, "You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart."

The final truth we must realize before we will experience the fullness of our salvation is that Christ came to give us purpose (Ephesians 1:11-12). The writer of Ecclesiastes says, "Vanity, vanity, all is vanity." Most of the world is wandering this earth aimlessly without a clue as to where they are going and why they are there. The sad truth is that many Christians reflect this same meaninglessness. God has a reason for our existence. God has a purpose for our life. Augustine said, "God loves each one of us as if there is only one of us to love." If God loves us so much, He must have a plan for our life. First of all, it is a plan to relate to Him in intimate communion. He created us for fellowship. Second, it is a plan for service. He has chosen to do His work through feeble clay, but remember, He is the Master Potter. We will only truly be happy when we are aligned with the Master's design. We need to hear from Him to find out our part in life. We need to know and use the spiritual gifts He has bestowed upon us. However, it comes back to the same questions asked before: "Where is my heart?" "Do I want to know God's will, plan, and desires for my life?" "Do I want to serve Him no matter what the cost?" The answer to these questions is the answer to our devotion. We must recognize that Christ came to destroy the works of the devil. We must recognize that Christ came so that we could have abundant life. We must recognize that Christ came to give us purpose, then we can experience the fullness of salvation (Isaiah 58:11; John 7:38; Revelation 7:17; 21:6).