

# Devotion

## **Deut 10:12-13**

“And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul,<sup>13</sup> and to keep the commandments and statutes of the LORD, which I am commanding you today for your good?

## **Mt 22:37–40**

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.<sup>38</sup> This is the great and first commandment.<sup>39</sup> And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.<sup>40</sup> On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”

Loving God = Obeying Him

Setting our hearts to love God means loving Him with ALL our heart, with ALL our soul and with ALL our strength

It means loving Him with devotion

Let us begin by exploring this devotion that is implied in the call to love God

Setting our hearts to love God with ALL our heart, with ALL our soul and with ALL our soul.

In other words, loving God with everything we are and have:

Devotion speaks of:

- Fervour
- Zeal
- being fully committed to something or someone
- willing to sacrifice for what we are devoted to
- Devotion is costly but we are willing to pay the price
- willing to give time, energy and resources to...

- Devotion means putting who/what we are devoted to before ourselves – and anything else
- putting our agendas and comfort aside in order to pursue wholeheartedly,
- persevering
- never giving up
- believing in – putting our faith in
- being loyal to...

### **Bondservants**

In one way we are like bondservants

Like slaves who have been set free but choose to stay with their master because of love

#### **Dt 15:12–17**

<sup>12</sup> “If your brother, a Hebrew man or a Hebrew woman, is sold to you, he shall serve you six years, and in the seventh year you shall let him go free from you. <sup>13</sup> And when you let him go free from you, you shall not let him go empty-handed. <sup>14</sup> You shall furnish him liberally out of your flock, out of your threshing floor, and out of your winepress. As the LORD your God has blessed you, you shall give to him. <sup>15</sup> You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God redeemed you; therefore I command you this today. <sup>16</sup> But if he says to you, ‘I will not go out from you,’ because he loves you and your household, since he is well-off with you, <sup>17</sup> then you shall take an awl, and put it through his ear into the door, and he shall be your slave forever. And to your female slave you shall do the same.

#### **See also Ex 21:1–6**

Have the same duties as before but they are performed willingly

Are still ‘duties’

- obligations that are not optional
- but are done with a sense of loving devotion to the master.

So, this is one way to think about our devotion to God

But there is more to it than this...

## **Sons & Daughters – heirs of God**

We are not merely bondservants:

### **Gal 3:23 – 4:7**

<sup>23</sup> Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. <sup>24</sup> So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. <sup>25</sup> But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, <sup>26</sup> for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. <sup>27</sup> For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. <sup>28</sup> There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. <sup>29</sup> And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

### **Sons and Heirs**

**4** I mean that the heir, as long as he is a child, is no different from a slave, though he is the owner of everything, <sup>2</sup> but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by his father. <sup>3</sup> In the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world. <sup>4</sup> But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, <sup>5</sup> to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. <sup>6</sup> And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" <sup>7</sup> So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.

We were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world as 'children' who could not yet receive their inheritance

Enslaved to sin but are now set free by God's grace alone

Set free from a bondage we could never free ourselves from

AND

Now we are adopted as sons and daughters because of His love for us – have become heirs

Do not serve as slaves or with the attitude of the older son in the parable of the prodigal

We serve God as sons and daughters

When we come as the prodigal to be hired as a servant we are given sonship

Serve in love, serve with a sense of gratefulness, with joy

With devotion

So, when we contemplate our devotion to God, we should do so in the light of:

- His love for us
- What He done for us in setting us free
- Him adopting us as sons and daughters
- Him making us heirs with Christ

There is **delight** in our **devotion** even though there is the **discipline** of the commitment that devotion brings

Devotion speaks of:

- Fervour
- Zeal
- being fully committed to something or someone
- willing to sacrifice for what we are devoted to
- Devotion is costly but we are willing to pay the price
- willing to give time, energy and resources to...
- Devotion means putting who/what we are devoted to before ourselves – and anything else
- putting our agendas and comfort aside in order to pursue wholeheartedly,
- persevering
- never giving up
- believing in – putting our faith in
- being loyal to...

What then are some of the ways of that devotion – some of the disciplines of devotion?

**Ac 1:14**

<sup>14</sup> All these with one accord were **devoting** themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.

### Ac 2:42–47

<sup>42</sup> And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. <sup>43</sup> And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. <sup>44</sup> And all who believed were together and had all things in common. <sup>45</sup> And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. <sup>46</sup> And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, <sup>47</sup> praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

Acts 1:14 & 2:42 & 46 – Greek: *proskartereo* /pros·kar·ter·eh·o, which is a strengthened form of *kartereō* – *to be strong*

**Therefore translated as be 'devoted' to or to 'continue steadfastly' in**

**'Continue'** means that:

- We are constantly thinking about and doing what we are devoted to (or pleasing the one we are devoted to)
- We are always looking for an opportunity do the things we are devoted to
- In other words – there is a devotion of both thought and effort involved in continuing steadfastly

**Steadfastly** has a sense of:

- Persevering
- Being persistent in
- Intensely focussed on
- Being resolute toward
- unwavering
- not easily swayed or distracted from, not easily side-tracked or put off

There are **three options** for interpreting the things that Luke says the early believers were devoted to:

- Four things (apostolic doctrine, the fellowship, breaking of bread and the prayers)
- Three things (apostolic doctrine, the fellowship (which included the breaking of bread and the prayers))
- Two things – the construct of the sentence seems to favour this one:

Here is a quote from *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*:

“The activity of this early church was twofold. The believers first continued steadfastly ...in **the apostles’ teaching** or doctrine. The second was **fellowship**, which is defined as **the breaking of bread and ... prayer**. The omission of “and” between “fellowship” and “to the breaking of bread and to prayer” indicates the last two activities are appositional to fellowship.”<sup>1</sup>

We could therefore put a colon between “the fellowship” and “to the breaking of bread and the prayers.”

It is, however, very much worth our while to explore all four of the things that are highlighted

### **Apostle’s teaching or doctrine**

What are we to understand by the teaching of the apostles – apostolic doctrine?

In one sense this is simply the instruction of the apostles

But in the context of our relationship with God, doctrine is what we believe and act on

We would expect the apostle’s doctrine to be focused on:

- The person and work of Christ
- The Kingdom of God
- The gospel and all that underpins and flows from that

---

<sup>1</sup> Toussaint, S. D. (1985). [Acts](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 360). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

Apostolic doctrine tells us:

- Who God is:
  - Creator – God made us
  - God is love
  - God is Holy
- It also tells us that we are separated from Him because of sin
- That sin is the problem with the world – with humanity
- That sin is real and has real, eternal consequences
  - It is not a psychological construct
  - it is not a mere concept made up to make people feel bad
  - This vitally important for us to see if we are to be saved
- God has not ever changed His mind about sin
  - Because it is a condition
  - Not a set of ethics to be debated or that can change with every age or context
  - It is not merely about right and wrong
  - It is about life and death
- Apostolic doctrine tells us **why** sin is a problem – because of what it produces
  - Separation from God
  - Judgement – eternal death
  - and because of the bondage of sin – an enslavement we cannot set ourselves free from
  - And of course, the distortion and perversion that sin brings into the world
- Sin is not merely a moral problem we have that we can get out of if we have the right set of ethics.
  - We are enslaved to it and cannot set ourselves free.
- Apostolic doctrine teaches that the **ONLY** answer is what God has done through Jesus
  - Our only hope is in the death and resurrection of Jesus
  - not in anything we can do
- Apostolic doctrine teaches us the amazing grace of God
  - How we are saved by grace alone
  - Through faith

- Apostolic doctrine teaches us to be confident and bold about the gospel
  - We are not ashamed of the gospel...
  - We have good news
  - It is about what God has done and not what we must do
- Anything other than apostolic doctrine does not save us
- Giving expression to the gospel is part of our devotion to God
- We are saved for good works

What does it mean to continue steadfastly (be devoted to) apostolic doctrine:

- Know it (study, meditate)
- Spend time and effort with the scriptures
  - Both on our own and in corporate contexts
  - Actively participating in searching the scriptures
- Believe it
- Do it
- Hold unswervingly to it
- Be confident in it
- Are able to resist every wind of doctrine
- Share it confidently and uncompromisingly.

Apostolic doctrine also tells us:

- About how to be the church
- How live in the world
- How to not be of the world but overcome it (the devil is also real)
- And how to show God's love (in the gospel – in proclamation and demonstration) to the world.

**Taking every thought captive** in order to bring it into the service of the knowledge of Christ is part of our devotion to apostolic doctrine

That means we are careful about / jealous of:

- The teaching we listen to
- the sayings / quotes we embrace
- The songs we sing

Know how to discern between that which merely appeals to us (to our sentiments) and that which accurately reflects God's Truth

Not that ways to find songs that show a devotion to apostolic doctrine. Used to find these more easily

E.g. the old hymn by Isaac Watts illustrates some of what we are speaking of today with accurate doctrine

*When I survey the wondrous cross  
On which the Prince of Glory died,  
My richest gain I count but loss,  
And pour contempt on all my pride.*

Then he describes the conviction of sin that comes in seeing the cross for what it truly is, then he speaks of the reason for the cross:

*Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,  
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?*

And this bring him to the reason for our devotion:

*Were the whole realm of glory mine,  
That were an offering far too small;  
Love so amazing, so divine,  
Demands my soul, my life, my all.*

This song expresses the devotion that comes with living out what the gospel has accomplished in us

Apostolic doctrine teaches us that that will primarily be expressed in loving God and others.

Loving each other firstly and then in showing God love in the world

The following passages capture some of this:

**1 Jn 3:14–18**

<sup>14</sup>We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death. <sup>15</sup>Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. <sup>16</sup>By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. <sup>17</sup>But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? <sup>18</sup>Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.

**Ga 5:13–14**

<sup>13</sup>For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. <sup>14</sup>For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

Loving the brothers and loving our neighbor as ourselves are evidence of the new life we have in Jesus

In his letter to Titus, Paul urges him to stir up 'devotion' in the church in Crete in the context of what we have received from God:

**Tt 2:11–15**

<sup>11</sup>For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, <sup>12</sup>training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, <sup>13</sup>waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, <sup>14</sup>who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are **zealous** for good works. <sup>15</sup>Declare these things; exhort and rebuke with all authority. Let no one disregard you.

**Tt 3:1-8**

Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, <sup>2</sup>to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people. <sup>3</sup>For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led

astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. <sup>4</sup>But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, <sup>5</sup>he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, <sup>6</sup>whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, <sup>7</sup>so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. <sup>8</sup>The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to **devote** themselves to good works. These things are excellent and profitable for people.

### **Tt 3:14**

<sup>14</sup> And let our people learn to **devote** themselves to good works, so as to help cases of urgent need, and not be unfruitful.

‘Devote’ here is not the same word as the one used in acts but the thought is still:

- That we live with a zeal for the things of God
- because of what He has done
  - **For us** – saved us according to His mercy, justified us by His grace
  - **In us** – the washing of regeneration (new birth) and renewal (sanctification) of the Holy Spirit
- And because He has
  - Purified us for himself a people for his own possession
  - And made us heirs according to the hope of eternal life
- We are devoted to these things
  - Because we know they accompany the new life we have in Jesus
  - Because this is what the Holy Spirit stirs up in us
  - And because we love God

Paul instructs Titus to:

- “Declare these things; exhort and rebuke with all authority. Let no one disregard you”
- “Insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works”

Insist on a devotion to apostolic doctrine