

"Devotions" or Devotion?

By: Charles G. Finney

Scriptures to Read:

"Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God."

- I Corinthians 10:31

"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... whatever you do, do it heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men. - Colossians 3:17,23

"For not one of us lives for himself, and not one dies for himself; for if we live, we live for the Lord, or if we die, we die for the Lord; therefore whether we live or die, we are the Lord's."

- Romans 14:7-8

These Scriptures reveal the true nature of what devotion to God really is. In discussing this subject, I propose to show:

- I. What true devotion to God is not.
- II. What true devotion to God is.
- III. That devotion, and nothing short of devotion, is true Christianity.
- IV. Several mistakes commonly made upon this subject.

I. What True Devotion To God Is Not

1. Devotion does not consist of reading the Bible, nor praying, nor attending meetings. These may or may not be specific instances of devotion, but are not to be regarded as devotion itself.
2. Devotion does not consist of a private or public commitment of our lives to God. These are to be regarded as special acts - pledges or promises of devotion - but not as devotion itself.
3. Devotion does not consist of individual acts or exercises of any kind. These may indeed be devotional acts, that is, "acts of devotion," but let it be remembered that no acts or exercises in themselves constitute devotion.

II. What Devotion To God Is

Devotion is that state of the heart in which everything - our whole life, being, and possessions - are a continual offering to God, that is, they are continually devoted to God. True devotion must be the supreme devotion of the will, extending out to all we have and are - to all times, places, employments, thoughts, and feelings.

Let your own ideas of what a pastor ought to be illustrate my meaning. You most likely believe that a pastor, in preaching the Gospel, should have only one purpose in mind - to glorify God by the salvation (and later the sanctification) of sinners. Since he professes to be a servant of God, you feel that he ought to study, preach, and perform all his ministerial duties, not for himself, not for his salary, not to increase his popularity, but only to glorify God. Now you can easily see that if he does not have this singleness of eye, his service cannot be acceptable to God. For it is not an offering to God, it is not a devotion to God - but a devotion to himself.

Devotion then, in a pastor, is that state of mind in which all his pastoral duties are performed for the glory of God and where his whole life is a continual offering to God. Again, you feel that a minister ought to be as devoted to God in everything else as he is in praying or preaching - and in this you are right! For he not only ought to be, but really is only as devoted in the pulpit as he is out of the pulpit. If he is influenced by selfish and worldly motives during the week, then these same motives are surely in his heart on the Sabbath. If during the week his thoughts are centered upon his own interests, endeavoring to promote himself, you can be sure it's the same on the Sabbath.

You most likely also feel that if a minister's devotion is merely an outward farce - that he preaches, prays, visits, and performs all his duties mainly for the purpose of supporting his family, or to get honor and attention for himself - you would say that he was a wicked man, and unless he is converted he would inevitably lose his soul.

If these are your views on the subject, they are undoubtedly correct. Here, where you have no personal interest, you form a right judgment and decide correctly concerning the character and destiny of such a man. Now remember, nothing short of this standard is devotion in you! Bear it in mind that no particular acts or zeal or gushings of emotion - or resolutions to change, or promises of future obedience - constitute devotion.

For devotion is that state of the will in which the mind is swallowed up in God as the object of its supreme affection - in which we not only live and move in God, but for God. In other words, devotion is that state of mind in which the attention is diverted from self and self-seeking, and is directed to God - the thoughts, purposes, desires, affections, and emotions all hanging upon, and devoted to Him.

III. Devotion, And Nothing Short of True Devotion, is Christianity

Devotion and true religion are identical.

1. It is impossible for us not to be devoted to the object of our supreme affection. If we love God supremely, He will be the reason for which we live. If an individual loves God supremely, he will be as conscious that he lives for God as that he lives at all!
2. Nothing short of this can be acceptable to God. Unless devotion be a habit or a state of mind, unless the whole being be an offering to God, He must have a rival in our hearts. This He will not endure. And to attempt to please Him by isolated acts of devotion (when it is not the habit and state of our minds) is far more abominable than for a wife to attempt to please her husband with an occasional smile, while she lives only to please and gain the affections of another man.
3. A departure from this state is heart-apostasy. Whatever a man's outward behavior may be, the moment he turns aside from sincere devotion to God - from a supreme consecration of his whole being to the service of God - he has, in his heart, renounced true Christianity. He is no longer in the service of God, but is serving the object upon which his heart is set; and this is the object of his devotion - that is, it is his god.

IV. Several Mistakes Commonly Made Upon This Subject

1. Many imagine that there is a real difference between "devotional" and other kinds of duties - as if a man could be "doing his duty" in that which is not devotion to God. The duties of devotion

are generally supposed to be prayer and reading the Scriptures, together with singing and praying in the fellowship of God's House. On the Sabbath, men imagine themselves to be devotional, while on weekdays (except for those few acts they call their "devotions") they are serving themselves and are supremely devoted to their own interests.

Now all such ideas arise out of a total absence of true devotion; and individuals who entertain such views do not yet understand what true Christianity is. Nothing is "duty" if it is performed for God. A man that is truly religious is as devotional in his daily business as he is on the Sabbath. The business of the world is performed by him with the same spirit and purpose as he prays, reads his Bible, and attends worship on the Sabbath. If this is not the case, he has no true religion.

2. Now there are some people who really live for God and are obviously in a devotional state of mind, who do not seem to realize that every act devoted to God is as acceptable to Him as prayer or praise. If by necessary responsibilities they are kept from spending much time in prayer or going to a lot of meetings, Satan takes advantage of their ignorance and brings them into bondage. He tries to persuade them that they are neglecting their duties to God by attending to other things.

Now you who are devoted to God, should understand that if His providence should confine you at home to nurse the sick, or prevents you from observing those hours of secret prayer that you are used to keeping, you are not to be brought into bondage or condemnation by this - if you are conscious that these other duties are being done for the Lord.

3. Others think that devotion can be sincere, but yet extend only to certain duties. That is, that a man may pray sincerely and from right motives, and yet be worldly in the transaction of business. Now a little reflection will convince any honest mind that this is naturally impossible. Devotion to God cannot be sincere any further than it annihilates selfishness. Devotion and selfishness are eternal opposites.

4. Many mistake the religion of emotion for that of the will. You can see this from their lives - they weep and appear to melt and break down. They promise to change and offer entire consecration to God. But attempt to do business with them the very next day, and you will find them supremely selfish - they are not devoted to God at all, but to their own interests. They are ready to take any advantage, even of their brethren, to benefit themselves. Now it is obvious in this case that their melting and breaking down was merely a gushing of their emotions - not a will surrendered and devoted to God.

Some Helpful Remarks

1. A spirit of devotion will turn the most constant cares and the most pressing labors into the deepest and most constant communion with God. The more pressing and tedious our duties - if they are performed for God - the deeper and more continual our communion with Him. For whatever is done in a spirit of devotion is communion with God.

2. They are not Christians, who do not hold communion with God in their ordinary employments. If you do not hold conscious communion with God in your ordinary business, it is because your business is not performed in a spirit of devotion. If not performed in a spirit of devotion, it is sin. For "whatever is not of faith is sin." (Romans 14:23)

3. They are certainly not in a sanctified state, who cannot attend to the ordinary and lawful business of life without being drawn away from God.

4. Whatever cannot be done in a spirit of devotion is unlawful. If you feel the inconsistency of performing it as an act of devotion to God, it is unlawful - you, yourself being the judge.
5. Anything not right or wrong in itself may be either right or wrong, according to whether or not it is done in a spirit of devotion. Therefore...
6. A selfish man may condemn a godly person for doing something that would be sinful if he, himself did it - because the motives of his heart are all wrong. The selfish man assumes that the other person's behavior is also wrongly motivated. On the other hand, a sanctified person may give credit to a selfish person when it is not due, taking it for granted that, "when the act is right, the motive is right."
7. There is no peace of mind but in a state of devotion. No other state of mind is reasonable. In no other state will the powers of the mind harmonize. In any other state than that of devotion to God, there is an inward struggle, and mutiny and strife in the mind itself. The conscience rebukes the heart for selfishness. Hence, "There is no peace for the wicked, 'says the Lord."(Isaiah 48:22)
8. They have "perfect peace whose minds are thus stayed upon God" (Isaiah 26:3) in an attitude of constant devotion. It is impossible that they should not have peace, for devotion implies and includes peace.

And now beloved, do you have the spirit of true devotion? Do not reply, "I hope so," for nothing but a conscious awareness should satisfy you for a moment. If you are devoted to God, you know it - and if you are not conscious of being devoted to God, it is because you are not devoted.

"Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh shall from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit shall from the Spirit reap eternal life." (Galations 6:7-8)

Questions for Discussion:

1. What is the difference between acts of devotion and true devotion?
2. Who or what is most tempting for you to make the object of your devotion?
3. Are you wholly devoted to God or is there anything else that motivates you?

Points of Prayer:

- Pray the prayer of David in Psalm 139:23-24, "Search me, God, and know my heart; know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." When this is the heart of your prayer, the Holy Spirit may reveal to you sins that you need to confess and/or areas you need to be more wholly devoted to God. When these things are revealed, repent and take the steps necessary to make God your supreme affection.
- What would happen to our Life Group, our families, our friends, and our campus if we abandoned selfish interests and were truly and wholly devoted to God? Whose life could be changed by your complete surrender and devotion? Ask God to show you how He would have you express your devotion.