

WHAT IS MAN? A Study in Biblical Psychology*

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Introduction

The late Herbert C. Link, a counseling psychologist, was once asked by a clergyman what book he would recommend as best for a minister to study in the field of psychology. Dr. Link replied, “the Bible.”

In recent years much has been made of “depth psychology” as conceived by the late Sigmund Freud; but through milleniums before Freud’s day, “the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God” (Eph. 6:17) had been probing the soul depths of man, as is so vividly portrayed in this passage from the Bible:

For the Word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And before him no creature is hidden, but all are laid bare to the eyes of him with whom we have to do (Hebrews 4:12, 13 RSV).

Although the Bible is not a systematic treatise on psychology, now and again from its pages one glimpses an illuminating insight into the complexities of human personality. One of the clearest of such disclosures is found in Luke 10:27.

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*The psychology reflected in this essay does not claim to be empirical, but to relate to reality a rational interpretation of man as represented in the Scriptures. Empirical psychology has its place, but generally it ignores or denies any transcendental quality peculiar to man.

—The author

The Primacy of Love

Familiar is the account of the lawyer, well versed in Jewish law, who would test Jesus with a question by which to involve him in controversy and display his own skill as a lawyer. He asked Jesus, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" Discerning the questioner's motive, Jesus in turn asked a question pertinent to the man's profession, "How do you read the law?"

The reply was a terse, comprehensive summary of the demand of the Hebrew Scriptures that one love God with the entire **heart, soul, strength, and mind**, and love one's neighbor as one's self. Jesus responded, "You have answered right," and pointedly added, "Do this and you will live." No doubt, embarrassed by the Master's implication that he had not met love's requirements, the lawyer quibbled by asking, "But who is my neighbor?" Jesus then told him of the Jew who fell among thieves, but was rescued by the compassion and courage of a foreigner of Samaria's despised sub-culture. He pressed the embarrassed lawyer to tell him who was the neighbor to the unfortunate Jew. Only one answer was possible, but the lawyer so chose his words as to avoid naming the Samaritan by conceding grudgingly that the neighbor was the one who showed mercy. Jesus commanded him to do as the Samaritan had done, thus emphasizing the lawyer's failure to live by the truth he acknowledged in words, but denied in his heart.

This encounter highlights the skill of Jesus in probing the depths of one's being. It confirms also the lawyer's knowledge of the conditions to be met if one is to gain eternal life. So forthrightly did Jesus endorse the lawyer's analysis of those conditions that one must conclude that every essential was included. But this question arises: are **heart, soul, strength, and mind** four differing and independent factors, or does some unifying agent relate them as a functioning whole?

The Heart as the Center of Life

In his *Explanatory Notes on the New Testament* John Wesley suggested that the heart in Luke 10:27 is a general term which includes **soul, strength, and mind**. Quoting Wesley,

. . . Perhaps **the heart**, which is a general expression, may be explained by the three following. **With all thy soul**, with the warmest affection; **with all thy strength**, the most vigorous efforts of thy will; and **with all thy mind**, or understanding . . . p. 240.

However, in the *New Testament in Modern Speech*, Weymouth definitely makes the **heart** both the source and the control of **soul**, **strength**, and **mind**. He does this on the basis of a more literal translation of the Greek prepositions in Luke 10:27 than the usual versions provide. In fact, Weymouth's own translation follows the usual versions, but his critique appears in a footnote which reads:

27. With] Lit. 'out of,' the heart standing for the center of the whole mental life in all its varied range; then the preposition changes to a thrice repeated 'in.' The love flows out from its central source into three channels, manifesting itself in the several spheres of feeling, will, and intellect (pp. 166, 167).

Therefore the **heart**, a term employed a thousand times in the Scriptures, may be regarded as man's inmost, utmost being; it is the dynamic, creative center of human existence; it forms the seat of conscience and the source of spiritual capacity and purposeful action. Most pertinent, therefore is the admonition of Proverbs 4:23, "Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life."

The Outflowings of the Heart

The term **soul** at times is employed in the Scriptures quite synonymously with **heart**, but often connotes the dynamic strivings of man's emotional and temperamental nature. As quoted by Wesley above, "with all thy soul" means "with the warmest affection." The adjective "soulful" today points to deep feeling or emotion, but repulsion as well as yearning may be the soul's response.

Strength suggests readiness for action. It applies to one's motivation to pursue and to achieve difficult ends, whether physical, intellectual, moral or spiritual.

Mind involves the intellectual powers and capacities involved in acquiring knowledge through experience, formal learning, and rational thought. The **mind** achieves its ultimate in wisdom, which is the ability to discern the appropriate use of the knowledge acquired by the **mind**.

The Pattern of Luke 10:27 in Other Scriptures

The following words of Jesus convey clearly the concept of the **heart** as the central source of man's being, from which flow the issues of life:

For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, fornication, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, foolishness (Mark 7:21, 22).

It requires no psychologist or psychiatrist to discern in this shameful list the pollutions of the **soul** by foul desires, the perversions of **strength** to wicked deeds, the corruptions of the **mind** by evil thoughts—all of these the outflowings of an unclean heart! But our Lord set in sharp contrast with such defilements of human nature the outflowings of a righteous life:

A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things (Matt. 12:35).

And elsewhere in the Scriptures are found sketchy but legible brushstrokes that suggest some of the features of man portrayed in Luke 10:27. For example, again in the words of Jesus:

If any man's will [the disposition of that central source of moral and spiritual energy, the heart] is to do [by the exercise of his strength] his will, he shall know [be convinced in his mind] whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority (John 7:17 RSV).

The pattern of Luke 10:27 likewise appears in the writings of the Apostle Paul. Note his words of encouragement and challenge to Timothy:

For God hath not given us the spirit of fear [an affection of the **soul**], but of power [**strength** for conquest], and of love [the outflowing of the heart], and of a sound **mind** [or disciplined judgment] (2 Tim. 1:7).

The foregoing selections, and many other portions of the Bible, provide a panorama of the river of Christian love, flowing out of redeemed man's central being, the **heart**. This is channeled through all his relationships of feeling, action, and thought; it saturates his **soul** with pure affections and holy desires; it directs his **strength** in full obedience to God in sacrificial service; and it disciplines his **mind** in sound moral judgments and illuminates it with spiritual wisdom.