

ARE YOU MANY OR ONE?

"Teach me thy way, O Lord; I will walk in thy truth: unite my heart to fear thy name" (Psalm 86:11).

This is a short but comprehensive prayer of a heartbroken penitent who was yearning for God's forgiveness. Stricken with an overwhelming sense of need, due to his own sinfulness, the Psalmist asked God to take note of his need and to have mercy upon his guilty soul. His earnest prayer is appropriate for us.

In this prayer is a recognition of the fact that men ought to love God with all the heart, mind, and strength; and also of the sad fact that they do not so love God. The Psalmist had not been ignorant of the divine precepts, or of God's requirements, but he had failed to render a complete obedience. On various occasions he had surrendered to the momentary dictates of inclination and desire. With his affections set upon various objects, there was a lack of unified purpose as well as a singleness of aim, but the Psalmist had come to realize the tragedy of a divided heart. He felt the shame into which his desires had plunged him.

A proper regard for his own happiness led him to offer this prayer. From experience he had learned that one cannot be happy when his desires and affections are at war with one another. While two antagonistic powers are claiming an authority over a man he is miserable.

Another reason for offering this prayer is the desire to be useful in the Lord's service. To be successful in any pursuit a man's heart must be in what he is doing. A half-hearted person is a failure anywhere and always. Putting one's whole mind and heart into his work, under the guidance and blessing of God, is the secret of success.

A third reason for offering this prayer is that God requires us to have a united heart. If we give the Lord a united heart, and devote our lives to Him, we shall be useful to others and happy in ourselves.

Longing to be delivered from the misery and futility of a divided heart, David prayed: "Teach me thy way, O Lord; I will walk in thy truth: unite my heart to fear thy name." Those words constitute the prayer of a man who was walking in dark and uncertain ways, greatly perplexed and troubled, and hesitating as to which course he should take. His fellows could not help him. Intellectual light was not sufficient. His conscience was not a safe guide. Therefore, he sought direction from God, and prayed that the light from heaven might make his path clear: "Teach me thy way, O Lord."

David was neither conceited nor did he have great confidence in himself. He was afraid of yielding to his own impulses. They had frequently played tricks with him and betrayed him into blunders and crimes. He knew that the human heart is disposed to take that which is pleasant and easy in preference to that which is right and difficult. He knew how easy it is to mistake an ambition for an inspiration, a prejudice for a conscientious conviction, and a torch-light of vanity and self-love for a star of duty. Desiring to be saved from this sort of thing, David looked up to God and said: "Teach me thy way, O Lord."

We, too, are often perplexed about what we should do in our circumstances. Therefore, we need to pray this prayer earnestly and frequently, fully prepared to go in God's way when He reveals to us what that way is.

To offer this prayer successfully two things are indispensable. First, we must believe that prayer is a real thing, offered to One Who really hears and takes the trouble to answer, and Who can answer in ways unknown to us. We must believe that He is willing and able to guide us by touching the heart, shaping the thoughts, and influencing the will through various channels. A sufficiency of God's light will be given to those who truly seek it.

Secondly, if this prayer is to be of any value, we must be prepared to go in God's way when He reveals it to us. If the heart is not united, if one part is looking towards God's light and the other pulling away from it and going to what one likes much better, there is nothing but confusion, indecision, and cross purposes.

At present it is not the trend to pray with the Psalmist: "Unite my heart to fear thy name." Today people break down the complex into its constituents; the universe to its elements, the elements to atoms, the atoms to electrons, protons, etc.; and the mind likewise into its constituent strata -- conscious, subconscious, unconscious, etc. With this mood of breaking down in order to understand, sometimes we find we have broken down merely to destroy.

The range of this modern preoccupation with splitting up things is astonishing. Almost every modern trend, and every fashionable habit, contributes to a frenzy of fragmentation. This tends to obscure life's essential unity, to dissolve social cohesiveness, and to leave only bits and pieces of experiences that we find desperately hard to fit back together into any ordered pattern.

I. The Condition.

This matter of dual personality is a truth set forth in the holy scriptures and a fact in human experience.

Behind David's prayer, "unite my heart," was the realization that his heart was not single, but double. It was the prayer of a man who was conscious of inward strife. The "flesh" and the "spirit" were struggling in his soul.

In the seventh chapter of Romans, in which he discusses in fullest detail this matter of dual personality, Paul tells us that upon analyzing himself he found two opposing principles at work. He found a law of God in which he delighted after the inward man, and also a different law in his members which caused him to sin. Between these two there was incessant warfare. Paul declared: "For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do" (Romans 7:19). Acknowledging that this matter of a dual personality is a fact of experience, Paul referred to the "new man" and the "old man."

Looking out today one sees a world of men of divided hearts. The effects of the divided heart are obvious in the widespread unhappiness and ineffective living.

In "The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde" there is a vivid and arresting discussion of this problem of a divided heart. The hero of the book, Dr. Jekyll, at the time he is introduced to the reader, has won name and position for himself. He is wealthy, learned, and distinguished. But the Dr. Jekyll whom the world saw -- benevolent, brilliant, and irreproachable -- was not all there was of him. There was another being within him -- evil, cruel, sensual, and always craving ugly and debasing pleasures. In the course of his scientific researches Dr. Jekyll

discovered a potion by which he was able to give expression to the evil personality within him in a separate identity. He became literally a changed man, shrunken in figure, deformed in build, and of a countenance so sinister as to fill all who looked upon it with aversion and disgust. And to this changed identity, expressive of the evil principle within him, he gave the name of Edward Hyde. For a time he rejoiced in his discovery, for when the craving for sensual pleasure was strong, all that he had to do was to change himself into Edward Hyde and he was immediately beyond the recognition of all his friends, and when he had had his fill of such debasing pleasure, all he had to do was to resort to the potion and he was at once transformed back again into Henry Jekyll the great scientist, to whose name no breath of slander had ever attached itself. At last evil became dominant, supreme, and irresistible. Edward Hyde, the beastly and the vile, mastered and destroyed Dr. Jekyll, and not all of the potions he could concoct could turn him into the genial, gracious gentleman of other days. In this story, the author, Robert Louis Stevenson, is true to the solemn facts of experience. It is at his peril that any man indulges the lusts and evil desires that seethe in his soul.

Look out upon the world, and everywhere there will be evidence of the divided heart. It is a world filled with people who have divided hearts. The evil principle that fights against the good and disputes its rule takes many a different guise. In the case of some it takes the form of the love of money. In the case of others it takes the form of love of pleasure. Even in cases where the pleasures indulged in are not in themselves sinful, they are allowed to absorb the soul unduly. The prevailing passion for amusement is sterilizing the soul for thousands and robbing God of His due.

The self that Christ is seeking to produce is a unified whole. It is not now a fully grown self, but it should be, and can be, a surrendered self. There is an ambitious self that just will not wait humbly on God for Him to reveal His plan for our lives, and to define success for us as He wants to define it. It clamors for human applause, craves this world's goods, and would justify the use of shady methods to gain a coveted goal. There are tight places in the Christian life where so many try to serve Christ and his their own way at the same time. All of us Christians must choose which pain we want to suffer: that of a crucified self, or that of a divided mind.

II. The Consequences.

1. Lack of perception.

It is good to pray: "Teach me thy way, O Lord," but it is better to pray, "Unite my heart, and bring this utter confusion to an end." Some people sing hymns of dedication at the top of their voices, but at the bottom of their hearts there are locked doors of reservation. They wonder why no more light comes to them on their daily problems. If your eye is focused on God, then your whole being will be flooded with His light. "Teach me thy way, O Lord" is simply another way of saying, make my sense of right and wrong clear and definite. Do not let me grope in moral confusion, but train me in a fine discernment of moral values.

2. Lack of power.

A divided heart means an ineffective life. "Out of the heart are the issues of life." When the heart is divided or discordant, the life that issues from it cannot be strong, positive, vigorous, and aggressive.

t David said: "I will walk in thy truth." Obedience is the natural response to grace. "Walk" as used in the Scriptures signifies our practical living. In their Christian professions some people really "walk" for Christ, and others just wobble. The outer wobble is always evidence of an inner weakness -- a divided heart. As James said: "A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways." God sees his double-mindedness, but the rest of us see the instability of his ways. Reuben is a Bible character of divided heart. He had good emotions and impulses, but a weak will. At one moment he was all on the side of good, and then the next moment he was in the midst of evil.

In World War I the Allies tried the method of multiple control in the handling of their armies, and it failed. Then they made Foch the general-issimo of all the forces, and they got somewhere. In World War II it was decided early that the invasion of Europe could be carried through successfully if, and only if, someone was placed in supreme command. That position was given to General Eisenhower. Had that sort of thing not been done the confusion would have been terrible, due to all the frictions, vacillations, hesitations, and indecisions that invariably grow out of multiple or divided control. If any organization is to succeed, it must have one person at the head.

This principle holds good on the battlefield of your life and mine. Who is to have our unmixed and undistracted loyalty -- Christ or Satan?

The men who have done things, the men who have left their mark on the world, and the men who have counted for righteousness, have been men of united hearts and definite purposes. Paul said: "This one thing I do."

3. Lack of praise.

Only after David had prayed, "Unite my heart," was he able to say: "I will praise thee, O Lord my God, with all my heart." A divided heart is always an unhappy one. If you can truthfully say: "Christ is all and in all to me," your days will "flow in endless praise."

Throughout history every great and noble life has had a unified purpose. No voice could allure, no suffering could frighten, and no bribe could tempt such people. Their purposes clothed them with a courage that was dauntless. They saw what needed to be done and they did it. To achieve anything worthwhile a worthy purpose must control us. A half-hearted man is a failure anywhere and everywhere. The secret of success is that men put their whole beings -- heart, soul, mind, and strength -- into their work, and God enables them to succeed.

A divided heart is unfair to God. He will not share the dominion. He is intolerant of a rival. He demands service with every part of the nature. It is not the affections and emotions alone that He wants. He wants to be served with all the heart, the soul, the mind, and the strength.

III. The Cure.

Do you want the strife within your soul to be ended? Do you really long for release from this confusion of mixed motives, and double purposes, and crossed-up desires? Do you desire a unified command over the empire of your personality? If so, there are certain necessary steps to be taken.

1. Confess your condition.

It has been said that "The most courageous hour in any man's life is the hour in which he honestly faces himself." The clash has been there, deep within your soul, so admit it frankly and humbly. Your eye has not been single. You have looked God's way, but there has always been a side-glance toward yourself also. You have consented to go along with God's will when it has not been too inconvenient. At other times you have gone your own way, so confess it.

2. Call on the Lord.

That is exactly what the Psalmist did. "Unite my heart to fear thy name" is a prayer. The Hebrew word which is translated "unite" means to "make one." Its root is a word which means one, yet never does it mean one alone, but always a composite unit. In other words it is a blending, a coming together, a fusion.

The only real blending of which the soul is capable is the blending with God. We were made for harmony and communion with Him.

3. Commit yourself to the Lord.

Unreservedly, yield your all to Christ. Just turn your case over completely to Him and He will supply your needs. He will see to it that sufficient resources are available when your need arises.