



Loving God with All of You_(Part 2)

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"If you will here stop and ask yourself why you are not as pious as the primitive Christians were, your own heart will tell you that it is neither through ignorance nor inability, but because you never thoroughly intended it." These are the words of William Law, theological professor and writer in the 18th century.

If we ponder this, the word "intend" carries with it a powerful conviction. It speaks of a part of ourselves that is often relaxed with un-intention, though it is always busy making everyday routine choices.

I am talking about the "will," which is sometimes translated as "heart" in the New Testament. When Jesus says to love the Lord your God with all of your "heart," according to theological philosopher Dallas Willard, he is speaking precisely of the human will itself.

As noted in the previous Slice, love is wrapped up in

the will. The will must be exercised in order for love to happen. The good of the other must be willed.

But to be intentional, as William Law suggests, is one of the hardest things to do in our spiritual growth. I suspect many of us believe that if we simply desire to love God or desire to become more holy, we will grow into it eventually. This is deeply untrue. Desire for a thing is not the thing itself. It is not an end. It is a beginning. And no races are won desiring a blue ribbon while remaining on the starting line.

In a conversation last month with a friend, this question arose, "Why are all of these Christian books that promise to unravel the secret to spiritual success so popular?" It's a puzzling question. Humans have always been fascinated with secrets. Christian humans are no different. But I'm afraid the issue goes deeper. I believe Christians are hungering for the new secrets of spiritual renewal because of what many Christian slogans have promised but not fulfilled. Many people have turned from Christ simply because they were told Christ would offer abundant life, but the abundant life didn't show up. Many have become discouraged in their Christian lives because they were told, "You'd have victory over sin," all the

while struggling with the sins they had before they came to Christ. Meanwhile, the unbelieving world still finds it unbelievable that many so-called Christians behave the way most unbelievers do. Something has gone awry. But what is it?

I think William Law has struck the nerve that the God-Man of Galilee was saying all along. We must be intentional in our spiritual development. We must make choices to shape the way we think and what we desire. We must stop slacking and begin working out our salvation, for it is God who works in us (Phil 2). We cannot simply "hope" that our desires to lust, lie on our taxes, think badly of our co-worker, gossip, or overeat, will simply vanish because we are tired of them. We must will ourselves to stop giving attention to the things that evoke lust so that we can grow stronger in our resistance. If it is sexual lust, we must will ourselves to talk to spiritual mentors, and will ourselves to avoid places that lead us astray. If it is food lust, we must will ourselves to make rules on what to buy, how much, when to open the refrigerator, and to plan what we eat. These are just a couple of examples that should illustrate what our will must do to find wholeness and love God. We must will a strategy to shape our appetites because brute force is not enough. This process of change will

not happen overnight. Progress in changing our habits and sinful desires usually takes time.

This is not a secret. This is all about intention. I promise it will take hard work. But God has already promised to help us. He has done much hard work in setting us free from the shackles of lies and the bondage of sin. What are you going to willfully intend today? On what will you set your mind and emotion on? What will help you be shaped into the right kind of citizen in God's kingdom? What will you do to strengthen your will to choose God's very best? Will you love God?

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