

## **With All the Heart**

Deuteronomy 6:1-9

Mark 12: 28-34

Oct 31, 2021

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### *Deuteronomy 6:1-9*

Now this is the commandment—the statutes and the ordinances—that the Lord your God charged me to teach you to observe in the land that you are about to cross into and occupy, so that you and your children and your children’s children, may fear the Lord your God all the days of your life, and keep all his decrees and his commandments that I am commanding you, so that your days may be long. Hear therefore, O Israel, and observe them diligently, so that it may go well with you, and so that you may multiply greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, as the Lord, the God of your ancestors, has promised you.

Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

### *Mark 12: 28-34*

One of the scribes came near and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, he asked him, “Which commandment is the first of all?” Jesus answered, “The first is, ‘Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.” Then the scribe said to him, “You are right, Teacher; you have truly said that ‘he is one, and besides him there is no other’; and ‘to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the strength,’ and ‘to love one’s neighbor as oneself,’ —this is much more important than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.” When Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” After that no one dared to ask him any question.

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It is October 31, 1517, and the Church is preparing for November 1, All Saints Day, and November 2, All Souls Day. A part of honoring those who have died is to perform indulgences, special acts, prayers, and practices of faith which would reduce the amount of punishment in purgatory—a soul’s place of suffering before going to heaven. Here in Germany, as in other places and times, this spiritual act of indulgences has become abused and corrupted as they can be bought for money. Sent by the Roman Catholic Church, a Dominican friar has been touring the country selling indulgences to raise money to rebuild St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome. A priest in Wittenberg, Martin Luther, protests against the sale, the abuse, of indulgences, and writes a scholarly letter to his bishop, in particular asking “Why does the pope, whose wealth today is

greater than the wealth of the richest Crassus, build the basilica of St. Peter with the money of poor believers rather than with his own money?" Luther's protests include objecting to the idea that God's forgiveness is for sale, as forgiveness is God's alone to grant. The protests, nailed to the church door, become the 95 theses that birth the Protestant Reformation. While not intending to confront the church but wanting to decry such an abusive practice, Luther did indeed inaugurate the moment that all forms of our Protestant denominations began.

Luther ultimately did not just reject abusive practices. He went on to shape the five solae, the five theological foundational principles of the Protestant Reformation as we live out the faith of the priesthood of all believers:

Sola Scriptura --Scripture Alone  
Sola fide -- Faith Alone  
Sola gratia -- Grace Alone  
Solus Christus --Christ Alone  
Soli Deo gloria -to the glory of God Alone.

Luther's achievement at reforming the church back toward a purely biblical Christianity was not the first attempt, but for reasons that were theological, economic, and political, and with the invention of the printing press, this faithful, wise, and articulate man was successful. Yet the changes and improvements of faith reform are always an ongoing process. Its successes come erratically, and often painfully, and with sweat and tears, with angst and sleepless nights. It comes from leaders and from grass roots movements.

Moses was another kind of reformer as he led and shaped the Israelites to understanding their relationship, their covenant with God, and their promises from God. He reformed their thoughts and practices from wishing they had not escaped Egyptian slavery, and from worshipping a golden calf, to instead observe God's commandments, statutes, and ordinances for themselves and for all the generations to come. His reforms taught what Jesus would someday tell us is the greatest commandment, "The Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength." And then Jesus added a second, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' Loving God with all our heart, all our soul, all our mind, and loving others as we recognize that all humanity are our neighbors, is the ultimate core of our faith, yet over and over again across history we need—and we have—reformers to pull us back to these commandments, these truths, which slip away from us. We lose sight of loving God with all our heart, we lose sight of loving others as ourselves, as time, situations, politics, cultural influences, and competing ideologies pull us away from what we profess.

Jesus was and is the greatest social revolutionary and political reformer. He came to be our Savior, our Redeemer, and along the way of teaching us how to worship, how to pray, how to welcome and accept all, how to love God with all our heart, soul, and mind, he reformed how we are to care for the least, the most vulnerable. As Steve Kimes wrote in his *'The Radical Reformer'* blog, "The offering of hope and love to people who have had nothing. A politics of giving, not of taking. A politics of love, not of demands. A politics of listening to the impoverished and not the wealthy, or even the middle class. A bottom-up politics.....This is the politics of God—the kingdom of God. Start with love. Start with the weakest. Start with offering hope, real, practical hope. That's the kingdom of God."<sup>i</sup>

Loving God with all our heart, all our soul, all our mind, and loving others as we live out the politics of God, means that we need—and we have—reformers to pull us back to these

commandments, these truths, which slip away from us when we lose sight of loving God with all our heart, when we lose sight of loving others as ourselves. Reform is always ongoing as new ways of loving God, loving others, and expressing that love in ways that are just, honest and that lift up the least of us are needed.

It is 1634 and Anne Hutchinson, the daughter of a dissident minister, arrives in Boston. As a midwife, she quickly develops strong bonds with local women. She begins to have meetings at her home with the women to discuss the sermons of her pastor, Reverend John Cotton, a Puritan reformer. In time their conversations will become critiques of Puritan beliefs about the Covenant of Works—the role of good works and adherence to religious law in salvation. Agreeing with Cotton that salvation is by God’s grace alone, she renounces the Puritan belief that good works are a sign of God’s grace. Soon her meetings will become popular with men, and therefore controversial with the authoritarian religious leaders as she defies gender roles. She will be tried for heresy in 1637 for speaking and preaching with authority, for interpreting Scripture, when women are required to be silent. She will be banished from the Bay Colony for her views and her actions, yet she has begun reforms for religious freedom in the church that women are no longer just to be silent, and that women do indeed have a place in ministry, as she breaks the way from Puritan norms. Anne Hutchinson becomes the first women's rights activist in the New World.

It is 1886 and Walter Rauschenbusch is pastor of a Baptist Church in "Hell's Kitchen", New York. Surrounded by urban poverty and many funerals for children, he is led to social activism as a call, as a mandate, for the Church to have an essential role in the fight against a lengthy list of systemic injustices: economic inequality, crime, racial tensions, child labor, and many other ways in which a quality life is denied others but can be addressed. He will form a group, the Brotherhood of the Kingdom, in which pastors and leaders will organize as advocates for the ‘social gospel,’ a religious movement—often within Protestantism-- which applies Christian ethics to social problems. The Social Gospel seeks to truly put into practice the words that Jesus taught us to pray, "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven". In 1907, Rauschenbusch will publish the book, *Christianity and the Social Crisis*,<sup>ii</sup> affirming that the chief purpose of religion is to create the highest quality of life for all citizens. Rauschenbusch and other leaders of the social gospel reformed the beliefs that justice work was not a call of the Church.

It is October 31, 2021. Many opportunities and needs for reform surround us as we live in an extended time of a pandemic which has become a political weapon as much as an illness, as justice issues of the climate, race relations, economic disparity haunt us, as faith differences are often not tolerated or learned from. As individuals, as a congregation, as a denomination, as a community, how will we hear and act in reforming ways on Moses’ words, on Jesus’ words, “The Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength. You shall love your neighbor as yourself?” Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> Kimes, Steve, <https://stevesbasics.blogspot.com/2018/12/jesus-political-theory-in-context.html>

<sup>ii</sup> Rauschenbusch, Walter, *Christianity and the Social Crisis*, 1907