

Mark 12:33

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love his neighbour as himself, is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.

Analysis

To love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength—the scribe comprehensively restates Jesus' answer, emphasizing totality. Four faculties (καρδία, διάνοια, ψυχή, ισχύς—heart, understanding, soul, strength) encompass the whole person: affections, intellect, will, and physical capacity. God demands not partial devotion but complete self-surrender.

The scribe's climactic insight: such love **is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices** (περισσότερον ἔστιν πάντων τῶν ὄλοκαυτωμάτων καὶ θυσιῶν, perissoteron estin pantōn tōn holokautōmatōn kai thysiōn). The comparative περισσότερον ('more than,' 'surpassing') indicates not that sacrifices are worthless, but that love fulfills their intended purpose. Burnt offerings (holokautōma—complete consumption by fire) symbolized total consecration; animal sacrifices atoned for sin. Yet without love for God and neighbor, ritual becomes empty performance—precisely the prophetic critique (1 Samuel 15:22; Hosea 6:6; Amos 5:21-24). Jesus quoted Hosea 6:6 twice (Matthew 9:13; 12:7), emphasizing mercy over sacrifice. This scribe grasps that heart-reality exceeds ceremonial form.

Historical Context

Levitical sacrificial system formed the center of Jewish worship. Daily burnt offerings, sin offerings, and festival sacrifices filled the Jerusalem temple's schedule. Priests meticulously followed Mosaic regulations for acceptable sacrifices. Yet the prophets consistently warned against ritualism divorced from justice, mercy, and covenant faithfulness (Isaiah 1:11-17; Jeremiah 7:21-23; Micah 6:6-8). By AD 30, temple worship had become commercialized (hence Jesus cleansing the temple, Mark 11:15-17). This scribe, steeped in sacrificial system as a professional scholar, recognizes its limitations—love is the substance; ritual is the shadow. Within 40 years, Rome would destroy the temple (AD 70), ending the sacrificial system and confirming that Christ's once-for-all sacrifice superseded repeated offerings (Hebrews 10:1-18).

Related Passages

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. How might religious activities (church attendance, Bible reading, prayer) become substitutes for genuine love of God and neighbor?
2. What does the scribe's hierarchy (love above sacrifice) teach about evaluating spiritual practices by their fruit rather than their form?
3. How does Christ's final sacrifice fulfill what the Old Testament sacrificial system foreshadowed?

Interlinear Text

καὶ τὸ ἀγαπᾶν αὐτὸν ἐξ ὅλης τῆς καρδίας καὶ ἐξ
And G3588 to love him with all G3588 the heart And with
G2532 G25 G846 G1537 G3650 G3588 G2588 G2532 G1537

ὅλης τῆς συνέσεως καὶ ἐξ ὅλης τῆς ψυχῆς, καὶ
all G3588 the understanding And with all G3588 the soul And
G3650 G4907 G2532 G1537 G3650 G5590 G2532

ἐξ ὅλης τῆς ἵσχύος καὶ τὸ ἀγαπᾶν τὸν πλησίον
with all G3588 the strength And G3588 to love G3588 his neighbour
G1537 G3650 G2479 G2532 G25 G4139

ώς ἔαυτὸν πλεῖόν ἐστιν πάντων τῶν ὄλοκαυτωμάτων
as himself more is than all G3588 whole burnt offerings
G5613 G1438 G4119 G2076 G3956 G3646

καὶ τῶν θυσιῶν
And G3588 sacrifices
G2532 G2378

Additional Cross-References

Hosea 6:6 (Sacrifice): For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.

1 Samuel 15:22 (Sacrifice): And Samuel said, Hath the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams.

Matthew 12:7 (Sacrifice): But if ye had known what this meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice, ye would not have condemned the guiltless.

Matthew 9:13 (Sacrifice): But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

Psalms 50:23 (Parallel theme): Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me: and to him that ordereth his conversation aright will I shew the salvation of God.

Hebrews 10:8 (Sacrifice): Above when he said, Sacrifice and offering and burnt offerings and offering for sin thou wouldest not, neither hadst pleasure therein; which are offered by the law;

Proverbs 21:3 (Sacrifice): To do justice and judgment is more acceptable to the LORD than sacrifice.

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