

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, ἰσχύς—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** (περισσότερόν ἐστὶν πάντων τῶν ὁλοκαυτωμάτων 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would destroy the temple (AD 70), ending the sacrificial system and confirming that Christ's once-for-all sacrifice superseded repeated offerings (Hebrews 10:1-18).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		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	ισχύος	καὶ	τὸ	ἀγαπᾶν	τὸν	πλησίον	
with	all	G3588	the strength	And	G3588	to love	G3588	his neighbour	
G1537	G3650		G2479	G2532		G25		G4139	
ὥς	ἑαυτὸν	πλεῖον	ἐστίν	πάντων	τῶν	ὀλοκαυτωμάτων			
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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