

Psalm 117 - Head and Heart

1. Simplicity.

You might have seen, sometime, a competition where the contestants are given a minimum amount of materials to either build a bridge, create a food dish, or some other kind of project. I saw a chef competition where you could only use items from a canned food aisle. In another competition you had to build a boat using only straws and plastic food wrap. In philosophy, this is called *elegance*. Some mistake *extravagance* for elegance. Something that is elegant is beautiful, but not all things that are considered beautiful are elegant. Elegance combines simplicity with functionality. The greater the ratio of functionality to simplicity, the more elegant something is. A solution that is very simple and yet takes care of many problems is elegant. This Psalm is very elegant in that it provides a solution to a host of problems.

Ps 117:1-2 O praise the LORD,
all ye nations: praise him, all ye
people.

2For his merciful kindness is
great toward us: and the truth of
the LORD *endureth* for ever.
Praise ye the LORD.

In this Psalm we find a challenge to get a lesson out of just two Bible verses, and not just any two verses. It is not as like considering something like John 3:16 when you have the rest of the context of chapter three. The two verses of Psalm 117 are *the whole* chapter. When you go to give an exposition of this whole chapter it shouldn't take you very long. It is not like explaining all the imagery of one of the longer Psalms. However, the problem is not in explaining *what* is contained in a Bible verse. The difficulty is always just trying to understand the *message* of the Bible. It has been said that brevity is the soul of wit and this especially applies to this Psalm.

When we look at the Bible and the Christian life, there are a handful of *essential* principles that will make the difference in our entire walk. For instance, we might ask what is love, repentance, power and control, self vs. God, and the born again nature? Of these four things, one of them is the basis for the other three.

Psalm 117 provides a solution to one of the most common struggles that people face. They face this struggle in the *kinds* of problems they deal with such as planning a family budget, a choice of career, a selection of entertainment, fulfilling a spiritual obligation, a political choice, a purchase, a discipline action, a physical attack, a health crisis, death, judging, relationships, etc. People face this struggle in the *size* of problems they deal with. They can be life threatening,

life changing, or trivial. They face this struggle with great *frequency*. People have to deal with this struggle daily. One of my chiefest jobs as a pastor is to shepherd people to face their problems with the truth principle of this Psalm and to learn how to recognize it for themselves. The solution that is identified in this Psalm is to the problem people have of connecting head and heart.

2. Head vs. Heart.

The two components of vs. 2 involve the head and the heart. In Hebrew poetry, the more significant aspect is placed second for comparison's sake. The head deals with issues of truth and the heart deals with issues of compassion. There are many ways to describe the relationship between head and heart: intellect and emotion, reason and passion, logic and love.

- Head

Ps 117:2 For his merciful kindness is great toward us: and the truth of the LORD *endureth* for ever. Praise ye the LORD.

The importance of the intellect, reason and logic is addressed in the second half of vs. 2 where the psalmist praises God for His truth that endures forever.

There is a problem with so called science, as Paul refers to it.

1Tim 6:20 O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust, avoiding profane *and* vain babblings, and oppositions of science falsely so called:

- All knowledge is going to be consistent with God's Word because God *is* truth and the source of all truth.

John 1:14 And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.

John 14:5-6 Thomas saith unto him, Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way?

6Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.

John 16:13 Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, *that* shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come.

- God's Word is truth. You can check out all of Psalm 119 the whole Psalm is a reference over and over to God's Word in one way or another.

Eph 6:14 Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness;

Ps 119:160 Thy word *is* true *from* the beginning: and every one of thy righteous judgments *endureth* for ever.

John 17:17 Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.

Ps 119:152 Concerning thy testimonies, I have known of old that thou hast founded them for ever.

As part of teen studies in the Bible we have been looking at the book of Proverbs specifically because it speaks so powerfully for the wisdom needed to live a changed life for Christ.

- Heart.

Ps 117:2 For his merciful kindness is great toward us: and the truth of the LORD *endureth* for ever. Praise ye the LORD.

The importance of the emotions, passion, and love is addressed in the first half of vs. 2 where the psalmist praises God for His merciful kindness. What is interesting about this reference is that it speaks of merciful kindness, not love. Why didn't the psalmist just say love, or heart? To say that the love of God is great toward would have been fine. It *could* be just as meaningful. But this reminds us the curious case of 1 Cor 13 where instead of using the word *love*, the translators used the word *charity*. The reason for this was because they wanted to emphasize the manifestation and perfection of love that is found in Christian action. The Psalm speaks of merciful kindness for the same reason the translators said charity and not love. Love finds its perfection in mercy and compassion.

Charity specifically refers to the love that we have toward other men. Paul stresses that we are to walk "charitably" toward our weaker brothers (Romans 14:13-15). He praised the Thessalonians because "the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth" (2 Thessalonians 1:3). In 1 Peter 4:8-9, Peter told the believers, "And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins. Use hospitality one to another without grudging."

Truth without passion and compassion is dead and ineffective.

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

Matt 9:36 But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd.

Matt 14:14 And Jesus went forth, and saw a great multitude, and was moved with compassion toward them, and he healed their sick.

Matt 20:34 So Jesus had compassion *on them*, and touched their eyes: and immediately their eyes received sight, and they followed him.

Luke 10:33 But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion *on him*,

- Head vs. Heart.

The problem of Head vs. Heart comes when one is disproportionately weighed against the other. I face this problem numerous times a week. I give counsel from God's Word that I suspect is going to be ignored. A large portion is counsel over basic, standard teaching from God's Word. I give people Scripture after Scripture that they will even acknowledge is true and then they promptly disregard it because their heart is not in it for the Lord, even though they will strongly exclaim how much they love God. I can show verse after verse about the importance of being together as a church, tithing and supporting God's Work, engaging in soul winning, doing devotions, studying God's Word, meeting with each other to encourage each other, leading our children spiritually, and people who don't respond in faith will *invariably* "follow their heart" with an emotion based "I don't feel like it," even though they won't speak so truthfully. Those are just basic spiritual responsibilities. Then there are other consequential areas to address regarding responsibilities, issues that affect society at large, relationships, and spiritual affiliation, for example. People regularly have a disconnect between truth and emotion. There is either no foundation on truth where people are entirely under-informed, or a disregard for the truth in favor of an inappropriate emphasis on emotion while disregarding truth.

3. Head and Heart.

As you look at this problem, I would

like to point out that the psalmist makes a declaration of how large it is in the first verse. In vs. 1, he tells people to praise God. Unlike so many other psalms, he doesn't address this only to *Israel* though. Instead, he tells the *nations* to praise God for the following principle. When you read the word *nations*, it might sound a little curious. The word in Hebrew is *goy*. It always refers to non-Jews. It used to highlight the distinction between the Jews and the rest of the world. You all here are *goys*, or more properly, *goyim*, the Hebrew plural for *goy*. The Jews were supposed to see themselves not just as the chosen people of God but a people chosen by God for a mission to the rest of the world, the nations, the *goy*. By addressing the nations, the psalmist is challenging the rest of the world to receive a missionary message.

This message, then, is intended to be universal in scope. It is not just something that the Jews enjoyed by virtue of their calling and doctrine, but a message the whole world was challenged to receive *from* God's people. The psalmist is offering a gift as a child of God to the world to receive. Because half the Psalm is devoted to this, the psalmist is conveying that this is VEEEEEEERY important! If you can master the head and heart connection, people can apply it to receive salvation and abundance of life.

Every reference to any and every single person named in the Bible is a testimony of how they reconciled head and heart. Look at:

- Adam and Eve chose to follow their heart instead of the command of God.
- Cain chose to reject the truth that God presented and killed his brother Able who chose to offer the right kind of sacrifice.
- Enoch chose to be the friend of God.
- Noah chose to obey God and spent 120 years preparing the ark to his salvation.
- Abraham forsook the world in Ur of the Chaldees and went in search of a city whose maker was God.
- Jacob wrestled with Jesus and was blessed with a bad leg and a new name, Israel.
- Joseph had a heart committed to accept the will of God having compassion on his brothers.
- Moses balked but submitted himself to God's call and led the people of God with compassion.
- Joshua served God with integrity and faithfulness and he, along with Caleb, were the only two in their generation to enter the Promised Land. He then

called on them to choose:

Josh 24:14-15 Now therefore fear the LORD, and serve him in sincerity and in truth: and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt; and serve ye the LORD.

15 And if it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that *were* on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.

Peter confronted on the seashore, Thomas beholding Christ's hands, Paul on the road to Damascus, Demas on the road to the world, Mary (all heart) and Martha (all head), Nicodemus in the night, Pilate before Christ...all had to choose to embrace the truth. Some succeeded, some failed.

Mark 12:28-34 And one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, and perceiving that he had answered them well, [he was impressed with the reasoned response Jesus was giving them] asked him, Which is the first commandment of all?

29 And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments *is*, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord:

30 And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this *is* the first commandment.

31 And the second *is* like, *namely* this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these.

32 And the scribe said unto him, Well, Master, thou hast said the truth: for there is one God; and there is none other but he:

33 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.

34 And when Jesus saw that he answered discreetly, he said unto him, Thou art not far from the kingdom of God. And no man after that durst ask him *any question*.

This passage is a summation and application of this whole concept. Use *all* of the strength of your heart and compassion *combined* with your understanding and you will get the whole

Law.

1Thess 5:20-21 Despise not prophesyings.

21Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.

Show your love for the truth, prove it out, hold it fast. It is sad to see people unwittingly and passionately committed to false doctrine because they have not proved it out. It is glory to passionately commit yourself to the truth, especially when it is not accidental.

The psalmist gives us the conclusion, the goal to reach for when he speaks of compassionate mercy. Remember that our passion always yields *compassion*. When we exercise our passion and commit ourselves to a choice it is going to have an effect on others. If our decisions are well informed, our passion will necessarily turn in to compassion. However, if our decisions are ill informed then our passion will appear as anti-compassion, or cruelty.

A passionate person who avoids knowing truth will easily flip from one mind to another.

2Tim 2:15-16 Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

16But shun profane *and* vain babblings: for they will increase unto more ungodliness.

2Tim 3:16-17 All scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:

17That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

When you prove the truth, don't waste time wrestling with your self-centered emotions.

James 4:17 Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth *it* not, to him it is sin.

When Jesus asked the 12 if they would leave like many other disciples after they were faced with a hard truth, Peter answered for them:

John 6:67-69 Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away?

68Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life.

69And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.

When I was in the Coast Guard, I was taught that the proper answer to a

question of fact was either "Yes, sir" or "No, sir." When given a command, you didn't respond with "Yes, sir." Instead, the correct response was, "Aye, aye, sir." It is interesting to me that in the Coast Guard and Navy, for the factual response you had a choice between an affirmative or a negative. However, when it came to a command, there was no choice to answer in the negative, only in the affirmative.

2Cor 1:19-20 For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us, *even* by me and Silvanus and Timotheus, was not yea and nay, but in him was yea.

20For all the promises of God in him *are* yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us.

Salvation is based on giving your heart to God and accepting *His* salvation, salvation on *His* terms. Joy in the Lord is based on being passionately committed to *His* Word and living it out day by day. It is the elegant thing to do. Choose you this day whom *you* will serve.

1. Simplicity. Ps 117:1-2
2. Head vs. Heart. Ps 117:2, 1Tim 6:20, John 1:14, 14:5-6, 16:13, Eph 6:14, Ps 119:160, John 17:17, Ps 119:152, 117:2, Hos 6:6, Matt 9:36, 14:14, 20:34, Luke 10:33
3. Head and Heart. Josh 24:14-15, Mark 12:28-34, 1Thess 5:20-21, John 6:67-69, 2Cor 1:19-20