

Devoted and Devout

The English words “devoted” and “devout” both seem to come from the Indo-European language root *wegwh* (“to speak solemnly”). One of their intermediate ancestors is the Latin verb *vovere* (“to vow”). When we say that a person is “devoted,” we mean that he has “spoken solemnly” that he will decline other commitments in order to reserve himself entirely to a certain thing. And when we say that he is “devout,” we mean that a person has a concentrated earnestness about the thing he is “devoted” to.

It is a fine thing to be devoted, and an even finer thing to be devout about our devotedness. There is simply not enough real devotion in the world. I don't understand all the reasons why, but there is no doubt that our age is one in which apathy has become fashionable. Single-minded people who passionately pursue their causes are not looked up to anymore. Instead, they are often tagged with pejorative labels that express our social disapproval of their fervency. We stigmatize them as radicals, extremists, or fanatics. Uncomfortable as we are with those who care deeply about things, we steer clear of what we have come to call “the lunatic fringe.” And there is hardly a worse sin nowadays than being “dogmatic” about one's beliefs.

But think about what we lose by this way of thinking. Very many of the nobler things that grace our world are the work of deeply committed people, folks who shook off lethargy and indifference and “devoted” themselves “devoutly” to the betterment of life. If the apathetic, don't-get-too-involved spirit of the age has caused us to avoid such serious commitments, then we have cheated ourselves of the opportunity to make serious contributions to our world. It's the passion of the commitment that drives the value of the contribution. Complacent people rarely make much of a difference for good as they pass through life.

Christianity — the real thing, not the things that masquerade as Christianity much of the time — has in it large measures of devotedness and devoutness. Peter the apostle wrote, “Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts” (**1 Pt. 3:15**). A part of what that means is that if we intend to be Christians we must reserve the most special place in our hearts for God. We must let Him be what He is: God! At the practical level, that requires dispensing with any loyalties and activities that compete with the exclusive allegiance that is to be given to Him. Being a Christian means “devoting” ourselves in the ultimate way possible, reserving ourselves entirely to the Lord. And it means being “devout” about the issue, maintaining a serious intensity that is worthy of this highest commitment.

In a culture where too few care deeply about anything, counterfeit brands of Christianity are readily available. If all we want is a little “religion” to make our lifestyles respectable, we can surely find that. Churches like Laodicea (**Rev. 3:15-19**) are conveniently located in most communities, often in the suburbs. But if we desire to participate in the life and rewards of the genuine faith, we will have to come to terms with the requirement of being devoted and devout. In fact, Jesus Christ calls us to a devotion that elevates the very concept to a higher plane. He declared that we must do more than have a lukewarm, limited love for God: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind” (**Mt. 22:37**). Heaven will not be populated by the lackadaisical. On the contrary, those who come to God must “believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him” (**Hb. 11:6**). If we are too modern and too moderate to diligently seek God, then we will not see His face.

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