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THEOLOGICAL FOCUS

Loving God with our Heart and Mind¹

by Frank M. Hasel

As Seventh-day pastors, teachers, scientists, and administrators, we engage in research, teaching, preaching, and passing on to others what we have learned and discovered. In doing so we attempt to speak “the truth in love” (Eph 4:15, NKJV). But within our ranks there is a strangely underdeveloped aspect of God’s love that is worth pondering. When we think about the love of God, we usually envision something on an emotional level. But in the Bible the love of God also encompasses our thinking.

In the New Testament there is a noteworthy text where an intellectual man, a lawyer by profession, is in conversation with Jesus about issues of eternal consequence: he wants to know what it takes to inherit eternal life. Jesus refers him back to what is written. The lawyer then recalls the Word of God and gives this answer, of which Jesus approves: “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,³ and ‘your neighbor as yourself’” (Luke 10:27, NKJV).²

This is a remarkable statement. You shall love God not just with your heart, but with all your mind! The English word “mind” is used for the Greek word *διάνοια* (*dianoia*), which describes the “activity of thinking,” “comprehending,” “reasoning,” and “reflecting” in the sense of understanding something.³ This is how God has created us. Thinking and reflecting is an activity God has endowed human

beings with and we have the privilege to exercise our thinking abilities to explore things not only in the Bible but also in the natural sciences and all areas of life and learning.

Our love of God also includes the way we conduct our thinking. To love God with all our minds encompasses a way of thinking characterized by certain inner attitudes and dispositions toward things like truth, knowledge, and understanding. We could call it “virtuous thinking.” This is about how we pursue what we do when we engage our thinking. Without exercising virtuous thinking we cannot truly love God or honor Him. Neither is it an honor for ourselves if we are deficient in these aspects.⁴ Consider these four virtuous thinking traits as foundational in our pursuit to express our love of God with our heart and mind.⁵

Intellectual Carefulness

Any inquiry into knowledge, any serious study and scientific research, requires carefulness. This is not so much of the scientific rigor and methodological exactness, but rather the intellectual carefulness at the bottom of all our knowledge.

Those who are intellectually careful earnestly want to know the truth and consistently make sure not to rush to any hasty conclusions based on limited knowledge.⁶ Instead, intellectually careful people are thorough and diligent in their thinking, cautious that they do not overlook important details. We all know stories where hastiness or carelessness in work, studies, relationships, science, and theology has led to

disastrous results. Sometimes those negative results of hastiness or careless thinking are seen quickly; at other times it takes a while until they become evident. But the negative effects are inevitable.

If we truly believe we are children of God, then what we do—and how we do what we do—reflects the character of Him to whom our ultimate loyalties belong. As Seventh-day Adventists, we should pursue and cherish intellectual carefulness not just because it is academically sound and scientifically mandated, but because it grows out of our respect for God, who is our Creator and Redeemer. His example and character compel us to work and think carefully. His carefulness in creation and salvation leads the way for our carefulness in thinking. Christian faith that engages our thinking is not sloppy. And faith knows no haste. We do not honor God when we are not meticulous and careful in what we think, say, research, publish, and do! Intellectual carefulness will produce a higher rate of success in every area of our lives. It will also produce a healthy confidence to tackle life's opportunities and obstacles because we will have learned to be careful in our deliberations and evaluations. Put positively: you love God with all your heart and mind when you are intellectually careful!

Intellectual Fair-Mindedness

A second intellectual virtue is fair-mindedness. Fair-minded people earnestly want to know the truth and therefore are willing to listen to different opinions in an even-handed way.⁷ Fair-mindedness is not needed if we think we already know everything and possess all truth. But should we start thinking there is no truth, the virtue of fair-mindedness morphs into meaninglessness, and the end of education is not far!⁸ Fair-mindedness does not mean we have no convictions or do not stand for our convictions. The secret of fair-minded people is that they have chosen to put the truth over any allegiance to their ego or cherished opinions. Therefore, fair-minded people are consistently willing to listen in an even-handed way to different opinions, even if they already have a strong view on the subject. Fair-minded people also try to view the issue from the perspective of those they disagree with, because they are aware that they do not always have the most complete or accurate perspective on a given issue. One could say that an intellectually fair-minded person seeks to know the truth in a fair-minded manner, rather than striving to be right. Intellectual bias would be the corresponding vice.⁹

Among the many benefits of intellectually fair-minded people, two stand out in particular. One is more abstract while the other is amazingly practical. But both are equally life changing. Let's begin with the abstract benefit: the fair-minded person is much more likely to escape from a prison of false assumptions. This historical anecdote illustrates the point:¹⁰

In seventeenth-century Europe, the astronomer Johannes Kepler committed himself to a greater understanding of the stars and planets. Because of Aristotle, the Western world had firmly assumed that the universe revolved around the earth. The Catholic Church was convinced it had interpreted key passages of Scripture in line with the Aristotelian view, which had proven so reliable in many other areas, essentially making Aristotle's view the view of all good Christians. Not only had significant church doctrine been built around this theory, but also almost all scientific inquiry had been rooted in the same set of assumptions. So pervasive and foundational was this perspective that instead of questioning their assumptions, those who noticed inconsistencies between the Aristotelian view and the way the universe actually behaved simply created ever more extravagant explanations for how these inconsistencies were in harmony with the commonly held view. What distinguished Kepler from his predecessors, beyond accumulating evidence undermining the accepted view, was his willingness to look at the evidence in a genuinely fair-minded way. It is unlikely that Kepler was any more intelligent than the many educated people who had considered the heavens before him. He was, however, willing to consider, in a fair-minded way, other possible explanations for the evidence, and the results transformed our understanding of the universe and led to a host of other innovations that form the foundation of science today.

Now let's consider the amazingly practical benefit¹¹ of fair-mindedness: genuinely fair-minded people tend to make and keep friends more easily than people whose thinking habits are closed-minded or biased. The reason for this phenomenon is simple: it is the inherent link between fair-mindedness and attentive listening. Fair-minded people, because they are committed to discovering truth, listen; they actually really listen! Very few things give people a greater sense of their own value, and worth and nothing attracts us to another person more, than the belief that we are valued. This value and respect is often expressed through attentive listening. Such fair-mindedness leads us toward lives of wisdom, richness, and depth. It is something we all can profit from.

Put positively, you love God with all your heart and mind when you are intellectually fair-minded.

Intellectual Honesty

A third virtue is intellectual honesty. The intellectually honest want to encourage the spread of truth and therefore consistently use information in an unbiased way.¹² Unlike other intellectual character traits, intellectual honesty is not primarily about the process of getting knowledge but rather about how we choose to use or present the knowledge we already have. The intellectually honest person is careful not to use

information taken out of context, exaggerate facts, distort the truth by describing it with loaded language, or otherwise mislead others by using statistics or any other type of supporting evidence that might have a deceptive effect. And intellectually honest people do not take credit for ideas that are not their own.¹³ Of all the intellectual virtues, honesty is perhaps the most admired, but unfortunately it is often the least practiced and most tampered with.

When we persist in using or manipulating knowledge in dishonest ways, we begin a battle with our conscience that, unless our conscience wins, will have one of two equally negative outcomes: The first possible outcome is a life weighed down by an encumbering load of guilt. While intellectual honesty often seems to be the more difficult road to take, in the end it is always the one characterized by greater freedom.¹⁴ The second outcome is even worse than living with guilt: it leads to the death of our conscience and thus endangers our moral integrity. When we do what we want and then create a moral code that suits our actions, the result is a corrupted intellectual conscience that no longer values the truth—if it can still distinguish the truth from falsehood at all!¹⁵ The dangerous thing about dishonesty is that, in the end, you firmly believe your own lie. But then you are thoroughly deceived.¹⁶ On the other hand, honesty inevitably builds trust between people, and trust is at the core of all healthy relationships and healthy communities. It also goes a long way toward restoring public confidence in leadership and church governance and is essential for enthusiastic and widespread participation in the church.

Put positively: you love God with all your heart and mind when you practice intellectual honesty!

Intellectual Humility

The virtue of intellectual humility is perhaps the most misunderstood virtue. So what does it mean to be humble in the way we think?

Intellectually humble people have the amazing realization and humbling insight that they are dependent upon something or someone outside themselves. They are aware that truth is not of their own making, but is ultimately God-breathed. Thus, they realize that their reason and rational intelligence is not the measure of everything,¹⁷ and therefore they gladly submit their thoughts in obedience to Christ and His Word (cf. 2 Cor 10:5).

Intellectually humble people understand that the larger our egos are, the less space there is left in our minds for anything or anyone else. The benefits of humbleness in thinking are manifold: A humble inquiry is the foundation of all growth in knowledge, for it generates a freedom that naturally produces a teachable spirit. This makes humble people very

pleasant people to work with. This does not mean that humble people don't have firm convictions. It only means that they are submissive to God's truth and at the same time aware of the limitations of their knowledge, and therefore are capable of expanding their knowledge and understanding of the world in a way that arrogant and proud people are utterly incapable of doing.¹⁸ Proud people feel they do not need to learn from anybody. They think they know all there is to know. But our knowledge must be tempered by humility.¹⁹

This experience from the life of Abraham Lincoln²⁰ is a remarkable illustration of intellectual humility under difficult circumstances:

At the height of the American Civil War, President Abraham Lincoln was doing everything in his power to preserve the unity of his crumbling country. As both the nation's elected president and one of the most intelligent men of his generation, Lincoln had every right to expect deferential respect from his subordinates. And yet, as the war waged, he found himself being criticized and ridiculed by friends and foes alike. One was his secretary of war, Edwin Stanton, whom Lincoln considered a friend. Both publicly and privately Stanton made no secret of his disrespect of Lincoln. Even though Lincoln was aware of Stanton's insubordination, Lincoln kept his secretary of war, believing that Stanton's sharp mind and independent perspective would be a valuable balance to his own.

At one of the war's most critical points Lincoln sent a direct order to Stanton. Not only did Stanton refuse to carry it out, but also he publicly mocked Lincoln again, calling him a fool. Instead of reacting in anger or spite, Lincoln responded: "If Stanton said I was a . . . fool then I must be one. For he is nearly always right, and generally says what he means. I will step over and see him."²¹

Lincoln was no weakling. He had demonstrated many times that he was willing to stand his ground if need be. Still, as the story goes, the two men had a meeting in which Lincoln listened carefully to his subordinate, concluded that Stanton was right after all, and withdrew his order. Lincoln ignored the demands of pride in order to pursue the wisest course. Ultimately, this intellectual humility helped save his crumbling nation and ensured his reputation as one of the greatest statesmen in the history of the United States of America.

Put positively: you love God with all your heart and mind when you are intellectually humble.

As Seventh-day Adventists, we should love God with all our hearts and minds by being intellectually careful, fair-minded, honest, and humble. These

intellectual virtues are significant in yet another important area: our ability to worship God. Entering into meaningful worship with God is closely tied to the character of our minds. To the extent that we apply our minds to understanding God in His written Word and to the exploration of nature that was created by Him, our ability to worship Him increases. While worship is far more than just knowing a lot of information about God, our worship and our relationship with God demand that our minds be fully engaged. You cannot truly worship God without thinking. And when we take on these traits of virtuous thinking, our actions will reflect God's goodness and display a teachable spirit that is fair-minded and honest.

How we think influences how we behave. When we are careful in what we say about others, treat others' opinions in a fair-minded way, are honest in our dealings, and reflect humbleness, it is only natural that our actual behavior toward others will also grow increasingly gracious!²² This is how God deals with each of us.

Imagine if the theological and scientific community we are engaged in and if the church we love and belong to were filled with people of such character and attitude. What a fellowship that would be! Imagine how the relationships and the atmosphere within the church would change for the better if we all would practice this. I think God would be delighted. Others would be attracted and we all would be greatly blessed! So let us strive to be people with such intellectual virtues who love God with all our heart and mind and give glory to our Creator in the way we think.



Frank M. Hasel is Associate Director of the Biblical Research Institute

¹The following presentation was first given as a devotional at the Faith and Science Council at Loma Linda University April 18, 2017. A shorter version of it was published under the title “*Virtuous Thinking: Loving God with Heart and Mind*” in *Adventist Review* Vol. 195/01 (January 2018): 19–23.

²Emphasis supplied.

³Cf. “*διάνοια, ας, ἡ*” in Arndt, William, Frederick W. Danker, Walter Bauer, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 234.

⁴The following ideas are taken from a delightful book that has greatly stimulated my own thinking and inspired me to

become a more thoughtful person. I am greatly indebted to Philip E. Dow, *Virtuous Minds: Intellectual Character Development* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2013), and follow several of his ideas closely in this article.

⁵Dow, *Virtuous Minds*, lists seven thinking virtues but within the limits of this article we will focus on just four indispensable thinking traits.

⁶Cf. Dow, *Virtuous Minds*, 147.

⁷Ibid., 149.

⁸Ibid., 48. For a powerful argument in favor of truth see Princeton professor Harry G. Frankfurt's short book *On Truth* (New York: Alfred E. Knopf, 2006).

⁹Cf. Dow, *Virtuous Minds*, 49, 149.

¹⁰Ibid., 51–53.

¹¹Ibid., 52–54.

¹²Ibid., 151.

¹³Ibid., 61–69, 151.

¹⁴Ibid., 66.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶(Robert Spaemann, *Gut und Böse – relativ? Über die Allgemeingültigkeit sittlicher Normen* [Freiburg: Herder Verlag, 1996], 13–14) points out that human language is the medium to express our thoughts and that lying makes the real thoughts of a person invisible and thus leads to a disappearing of the person because the medium of language that makes the person visible is destroyed.

¹⁷Cf. Dow, *Virtuous Minds*, 72, 152–153.

¹⁸Cf. Dow, *Virtuous Minds*, 72.

¹⁹Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?: The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998), 462.

²⁰See Dow, *Virtuous Minds*, 72–73.

²¹The story and quote comes from Carl Sandburg, *Abraham Lincoln: The Prairie Years and the War Years* (New York: Mariner, 2002), 354, as quoted in Dow, *Virtuous Minds*, 196.

²²Cf. Dow, *Virtuous Minds*, 97–98.

“Love you will find only where you may show yourself weak without provoking strength.”

(Theodor W. Adorno, *Minimal Moralia*, Aph. 122)
