

Touching the Heart of God

Mathew 5:8 “Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.”

There are three realms in which a person can live: the aesthetic, the moral or ethical, and the religious.¹

I. THE AUSTHETIC

A. The aesthetic realm is the realm of feeling and experience. It is the non-verbal realm of art: dance, music, painting.

B. It is also the nonverbal realm of religion: pietism, monasticism, the mode of the hermit.

C. Feeling is the basis of love, religion – all life. Feeling is the vehicle that takes us into the heart of God ad into the heart of others.

ii. However, feeling can be misused.

a) When people center upon feeling and experience, projecting them into the most important position in their lives, then the me generation can come into existence. “Nothing matters but how I feel about things. If I don’t feel good about doing what I’m doing then I won’t do it any more.” These are the words of the person who is locked into the aesthetic realm.

b) Commercials often expertly reveal the heart of people. Recently Toyota has been using the motto OH, WHAT A FEELING. The people of the United States, and all the developed countries for that matter, have placed feeling and experience upon their altars as the God worthy of their adoration.

c) If the feeling were the feeling of sorrow and joy that is God’s sorrow and joy then that would be a virtue rather than a vice. However, the feeling that Toyota is exploiting and tapping is the feeling of pleasure and comfort.

d) The feelings of pleasure and comfort are not evil in and of themselves. They are evil only when they take the foremost place of importance in a person’s life: Then they become idols and must be cast down from their altars.

D. The aesthetic realm is the most fundamental realm of all: without feeling there cannot be love and happiness. Without love and happiness, there cannot be a relationship with God, with humanity, or with creation that is meaningful. But we are not meant to fixate in that realm.

1. Hippies, the Wood stock Generation, have reminded us of the importance of feeling and experience in our technological world, but they do not do the world or themselves a service if they fixate upon the experience of sensual pleasure.

E. Once we are in touch with love and experience as the foundation, as the cornerstone, of our experience with God, each other, and creation, then we have to move on to the next realm, the moral or ethical realm.

II. THE MORAL OR ETHICAL REALM

A. The moral or ethical realm is the realm of principles or rules.

1. Our feelings need a guide; our experience needs interpretation. Holy Scriptures present us with the principles we live by.

2. Morality, or ethics, is the guide for feeling, but it does not take the place of feeling – moral principles are the keel of the boat, not the wind in the sails.

a) The wind in the sails is the Holy Spirit; the feeling of God's love within and throughout our heart, soul, body; the feeling of God's love that binds us one with another; and the feeling of God's love between the person and creation.

B. There is a danger inherent to being born in a moral or ethical, a "religious" family: that is the danger that doctrine or ritual will supplant real faith.

1. That is the danger of the established religions. Those who bring new rituals and doctrines, the prophets, are deemed to be dangerous to society by those who live strictly in the realm of morality or ethics.

2. Morality protects social welfare but its observance can become more important than what it protects: God's Love.

C. The paradox of the moral realm is that although it is essential for the proper guiding of feeling and experience (the aesthetic), it often solidifies into ritual and doctrine, blocking the way to the next and most important realm, the religious realm.

1. Those who are locked into the moral realm will usually oppose those who personally encounter the living God, those who enter the religious realm.

III. THE RELIGIOUS REALM

A. The religious realm is the realm of direct experience with God.

1. It is the realm in which God speaks directly to you.
2. It is the I and Thou realm.
3. It is the realm of personal encounter with God.

B. The religious realm is reached when a person has successfully passed through the incorporates the aesthetical and the moral realms. The person is living and moving freely through all three realms at the same time.

1. It is the realm in which the person who experiences love, tempered by moral principles, comes into a direct relationship with God in which he is able to suspend the moral principles he has been taught if God directs him to perform an act that requires it.

2. A case in point is the case of Abraham.²

a) Abraham was a man who loved his family; he as a principled man, a moral man. Yet when God directed him to sacrifice his only son Isaac, he was willing to do it.

b) The position in which Abraham stood was the position of fear and trembling. Fear and trembling: What if it were not God who was commanding him to kill his own son? What if it really were Satan in excellent disguise?

c) What if Satan, who knew that Isaac was to be the heir to many nations, was attempting to destroy God's providence by having Abraham kill his only son?

d) Abraham had to work through that critical assessment before he knew he to perform the sacrifice.

e) Abraham finally reached the conviction that it truly was God who required him to sacrifice his son.

i) At that point Abraham was tested. Did he have the strength to enter into the realm of the religious by suspending his and society's moral principle "Thou shalt not kill"?

ii) Abraham was successful and because of his success the Providence of God went forward.

CONCLUSION

- A. Fortunately, most of us are not confronted with trials of the magnitude that Abraham was confronted with.
- B. But those who live in the realm of the religious may be required by God the Holy Spirit to believe teachings that are considered heretical or perform acts which go against the grain and fiber of the moral convictions of the society they live in.
- C. To walk the path into God's heart requires a heart pure and humble enough to be willing to fulfill whatever task He might ask.
 - 1. It also requires a heart pure enough to discern when it is truly God whom we stand in the presence of.
 - 2. It is awesome to stand in the presence of God, but for the pure in heart it is a blessing, for they shall surely see God.

¹ This broad construction is taken from the work of Soren Kierkegaard, especially his Either/Or, or although most of the substance in this sermon is new material.

² This case is wonderfully treated in Soren Kierkegaard's Fear and Trembling.