The Altogether Christian (An Introduction)

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John Wesley's notion of the "altogether Christian" contrasts with the "almost Christian". For Wesley, the "almost Christian" was one who had all the outward forms of faith: worship, prayer, service, Sunday School, church committees, etc., but was missing one key element, a heart seeking transformation. They practiced much of the Christian life and had "almost" arrived at what Jesus most wanted for his followers.

The "altogether Christian", on the other hand, was one who practiced all the things mentioned above, but their higher goal was transformation of heart and life. The "altogether Christian" is one who seeks more than anything else to grow in love towards God and people. Their heart is slowly transformed into the heart of Christ, and they gradually learn to love as God loves. Their life, then, is lived from this place of love.

Over the next few weeks, our times of prayer will focus on becoming "altogether Christians", those who are seeking to grow in the love of God and neighbor more than anything else. Our prayer will be for God to make our hearts more like the heart of Christ.

Sermon Series Introduction:
Becoming an Altogether Christian

Two hundred and eighty-five years ago, John Wesley warned an Oxford church full of biblical scholars and people training to be clergy that it is possible to be almost a Christian without being altogether a Christian. We can be sincere, moral, and faithful in Christian practices while missing the transforming power of deep, saving trust in God. We can be followers of Christ in name yet hold back from pursuing a life fully shaped by the Great Commandment.

At the center of our journey to a vital, holistic faith stands Jesus' call to love God with all our heart, all our soul, all our mind, and all our strength, and to love all our neighbors as ourselves. The repetition of the word all is not accidental. Following Jesus is not partial, occasional, or compartmentalized. It is a life given over completely to God's love being made real in us and through us.

The Altogether Christian Sermon Series

Biblical Appearances of The Great Commandment

Old Testament Deuteronomy 6:1-9 + Leviticus 19:18, 34
New Testament Matthew 22:15, 34-40 • Mark 12:28-34 • Luke 10:25-37

See the Great Commandment Texts and Word Study for additional information.

The Altogether Heart

Theme: Aligning our desires, motivations, and will with God's.

Scriptures: Jeremiah 31:31-33 • Ezekiel 36:26-28

Biblical witnesses who exhibit an altogether heart:
David before becoming king, Mary of Bethany, Jesus in Gethsemane

HEART
Hebrew: lev / levav → Greek: kardia
Meaning in both cultures:

- Choosing and willing
- Desiring and feeling
- Motivations

The Altogether Soul

Theme: God is the source of our soul, our very being. What would it be like to open our being, our breath, our life-force to the fullness of God's presence?

Scriptures: Genesis 2:7 • Psalm 42:1-2 • Luke 1:46-48

Biblical witnesses who exhibit an altogether soul:
Mary (mother of Jesus, *theotokos*), Jesus at his baptism or transfiguration

SOUL
Hebrew: nephesh → Greek: psychē
Not merely a spirit inside the body.
Means:

- Life force
- Breath
- Being, Whole living person
- One's very self before God

The Altogether Mind

Theme: As followers of Christ, we embrace God's good gifts of thinking, reasoning, doubting, questioning, and learning.

Scriptures: Proverbs 9:10 • Romans 12:2 • 1 Kings 3:5-10 • 2 Corinthians 5:16-17

Biblical witnesses who exhibit an altogether mind:
Paul, Solomon

MIND (Greek addition to the Hebrew texts)
Greek: dianoia

Jesus expands the Shema for a Greek audience:

- Thinking, Understanding
- Reasoning
- Studying, Doubting, Questioning

Altogether Strength

Theme: What would it look like to be all-in for Christ? To risk being "too much." To offer our muchness, our everything, the fullness of our energy, effort, resources, abilities, and influence.

Scriptures: Psalm 8 • 2 Samuel 24:24 • Romans 12:1 • Ephesians 2:8-10 • 1 Peter 4:8-11

Biblical witnesses who exhibit an altogether strength:
The Widow who gave her mites, Peter in Acts, the early church in Acts 2:39-49,
Jesus on the cross

STRENGTH
Hebrew: me'od (very / exceedingly / abundance)
This word is actually an adverb, not a noun.
Greek translators rendered it as ischys = strength/power

- Muchness
- Energy, Capacity, Might, Effort
- Time
- Money, Resources, Possessions,
- Abilities
- Influence
- Everything you have, Everything available to you

Offering Altogether Love

Theme: You shall make God's love real to all your neighbors. The fullness of God's love in action through us, making a difference.

Scriptures: Genesis 1:26-27 • Romans 13:8-10 • Luke 10:25-37 • 1 John 4:7-12

Biblical witnesses who exhibit an altogether love of others:
Ruth, the Good Samaritan, Barnabas, Tabitha/Dorcus, the early church in Acts 2:37-47, Jesus washing the disciples' feet or Jesus and the Woman at the Well

LOVE
Hebrew (ahav)
Love = covenant loyalty, relational faithfulness, and chosen devotion.
Love is active, embodied, and demonstrated.

Greek (agapē)
Love = steadfast, intentional, and active faith.
Love is self-giving, sacrificial, and willing the good of another.