

THE HEART OF MAN
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Of all the words to be found in the Bible that describe man, the term *heart* provides the most complete characterization. The term *heart* (Gr. *kardia*; Heb. *leb*), denotes the “inner man” (cf. Eph. 3:16), the essence of personality; the seat and center of all life. The heart is that central essence of man with which God is primarily concerned – He looks upon it (I Sam. 16:7), searches it (Prov. 10:8), and tries it (Jere.11:20; 17:10; 20:12). Further, the heart is the center and source of all belief and faith (Luke 24:25; Rom. 10:10).

Man's nature or essential essence is a reflection of his heart. Listen to the Scriptures: “The good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth what is evil; for his mouth speaks from that which fills his heart” (Lk. 6:45); “Do you not understand that everything that goes into the mouth passes into the stomach and is eliminated? But the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile the man. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders. These are these are the things which defile the man” (Matt. 15:17-20).

To truly understand man, then, requires an understanding of what the Bible means by the term *heart*.

MAN'S HEART: WHERE IT ALL TAKES PLACE

Man's heart is said to be very profound and deep: “They devise injustices, saying, ‘We are ready with a well conceived plot’; for the inward thought and the heart of a man are deep” (Psm. 64:6). Man's behaviors, expressions, and words have their origins there: “You brood of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak what is good? For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart” (Matt. 12:34; cf. 15:17-20).

Every person lives by faith – whether believer or unbeliever. The difference lies in what each believes. The beliefs that we have about God, ourselves and the world in which we live – which ultimately become the basis of all acts of volition – center in the heart: “And He said to them, ‘O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken!’” (Lk. 24:25); “... for with the heart man believes, resulting in righteousness” (Rom. 10:10).

Man's dealings with the momentary issues of life – his considerations and concerns – are associated with the heart: “It has been made a desolation, desolate, it mourns before Me; the whole land has been made desolate, because no man lays it to heart” (Jer. 12:11). Also, his imaginations originate there, and his inclinations are formed there: “There are six things which the Lord hates...A heart that devises wicked plans” (Prov. 6:16, 18); “A wise man's heart directs him toward the right, but the foolish man's heart directs him toward the left” (Eccl. 10:2).

When the question is asked, “Do you understand?” and the person being asked responds by shaking his or her head in the affirmative, from where within that person does understanding come? You guessed it, from the heart: “So give thy servant an understanding heart to judge Thy people to discern between good and evil” (1 Kings 3:9).

Motives are an important consideration when trying to understand man. Why does he do what he does? It should come as no surprise to learn that man's intents or motives are present in his heart: “For the word of God... (is) able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart” (Heb. 4:12).

Motives incite to action, which requires the formulation of goals and objectives. These are also formed in the heart: “Then when he (Barnabas) had come and witnessed the grace of God, he rejoiced and began to encourage them all with resolute heart to remain true to the Lord” (Acts 11:23); “But Peter said, ‘Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back some of the price of the land? While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not under your own control? Why is it that you have conceived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men, but to God’” (Acts 5:3-4).

The strategy of Ananias certainly reflects his self-serving intentions and his goal of self-preservation. As man determines his goals and objectives, he also devises strategies to bring them about – and there can be a plethora of them! “Many are the plans in a man's heart” (Prov. 19:21). They involve his contemplations and reasoning, which are also conceived in his heart: “But there were some of the scribes sitting there and reasoning in their hearts, ‘Why does this man speak that way? He is blaspheming; who can forgive sins but God alone?’ And immediately Jesus, aware in His spirit that they were reasoning that way within themselves, said to them, ‘Why are you reasoning about these things in your hearts?’” (Mk. 2:6-8); “But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart” (Lk. 2:19).

Motives incite goals and objectives. For goals and objectives to be accomplished, strategies must be devised. But nothing really gets done until the plan is put into action, and that requires volitional choice. Volition, too, is exercised from the heart: “Slaves, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in the sincerity of your heart, as to Christ; not by way of eye service, as men pleasers, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart” (Eph. 6:5-6).

It goes without saying that the heart of man is complex. Much more could be added to what we have already said. For example, the heart reveals the particular qualities of a person's character – as that which is descriptive of a person's attitude as depicted in his or her behavior. It is also the core and seat of man's emotions – the center of emotional reaction, feeling and sensitivity.

But right now we need to address man's great problem: he is sinful (in his essence) and separated from God. The heart is that aspect of man that needs to be reconciled to God.

MAN'S HEART: IT NEEDS TO BE RECONCILED TO GOD

The picture that the Bible paints of the heart of an unsaved, unreconciled, unregenerate person is not pretty. In this brief essay we will mention only five basic aspects of the problem.

First, man's heart is said to be unrighteous: "Do you judge uprightly, O sons of men? No, in heart you work unrighteousness" (Psm. 58:1-2). Because man's heart is essentially unrighteous, he has a natural inclination toward evil: "Because the sentence is not executed quickly, therefore the hearts of the sons of men among them are given fully to do evil" (Eccl. 8:11); "The hearts of the sons of men are full of evil, and insanity is in their hearts throughout their lives" (Eccl. 9:3).

A third thing is that man's heart is deceitful and desperately wicked: "The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it?" (Jer. 17:9); "They do not know, nor do they understand, for He has smeared over their eyes so that they cannot see and their hearts so that they cannot comprehend. ...a deceived heart has turned him aside. And he cannot deliver himself" (Isa. 44:18-20); "Deceit is in the heart of those who devise evil" (Prov. 12:20).

King David wrote about the perversity and arrogance of man's heart when he said: "A perverse heart shall depart from me. No one who has a haughty look and an arrogant heart will I endure" (Psm. 101:4, 5).

The final problem that we will mention is this: man's heart is stubborn and rebellious. "This people has a stubborn and rebellious heart; they have turned aside and departed. They do not say in their heart, 'Let us now fear the Lord our God'" (Jer. 5:23).

What is the solution to the problem? Is there any hope? What must be done? Unbelieving Israel provides a good example of unbelieving people who need to be reconciled to God. Their old heart, like all men, is naturally biased away from God. That natural condition of man's heart, as we have come to understand it, is described by Paul in Romans 3:9-12: "We have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are both under sin; as it is written, 'There is none righteous, not even one; there is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God; all have turned aside, together they have become useless; there is none who does good, there is not even one.'"

Ezekiel records God's admonition to Israel when he writes, "Repent and turn away from all your transgressions, so that iniquity may not become a stumbling block to you. Cast away from you all your transgressions which you have committed, and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit!" (Ezek. 18:30-31). In a word, they need to be reconciled to God.

Reconciliation is the solution – and the only solution – to man's heart problem. If there is any hope for man to make and experience lasting change in his life, he must first be reconciled to God. And it is a work of God's grace that brings it about: "I will gather you...and give you the

land of Israel. When they come there, they will remove all its detestable things and all its abominations from it. And I shall give them one heart, and shall put a new spirit within them. And I shall take the heart of stone out of their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in My statutes and keep My ordinances, and do them....But as for those whose hearts go after their detestable things and abominations, I shall bring their conduct down on their heads, declares the Lord God” (Ezek. 11:17-21).

I am well aware that the primary intent of the passages just cited is for physical Israel. But the concept of reconciliation – the need of it and the means of it – is the same for all men. Therefore, “Be reconciled to God” (II Cor. 5:20).