

D1: The Heart – Troubling and Comforting Truths for My Heart

I. Troubling truths for my heart.

1. *What keeps the sinner from God is hardness of heart, Eph 4:17-19; Heb 3:8, 15; 4:7.*

- Eph 4:18 "because of the hardness of their heart" = describes why unbelievers have a deeply ingrained ignorance. This is not an accidental ignorance; not an ignorance that caught them by surprise. They couldn't say: "I didn't see that ignorance coming!" This is planned ignorance; purposeful, willful. It is like the child who purposefully will not look into mommy's eyes when she is in trouble. That little one wants to be ignorant of the disappointment on her mother's face. So, to describe their ignorance Paul turned to their heart. That is why they want to remain willfully ignorant of God and His will - their hearts are "hard" = dull, insensible; cannot be penetrated so as to feel or be moved from its current status or condition; petrified.
- Now let's make our way backwards through the verses. Remember, this hardness of heart (4:18d) is the ultimate cause for why they are so deeply ingrained in willful ignorance of God (4:18c). And THAT is the cause of them being alienated from the life of God (4:18b). That is the description of what it means to have a reasoning process that is flooded with spiritual darkness (4:18a). And that is why the unbeliever's mind has failed him and led him to a sinful walk of life, 4:17.
- The heart of man (every single one) is just this way because of Adam's fall. But God also simultaneously warns man to not participate in the hardening of the heart - man is culpable. Hb 3:8, 15; 4:7 (At the hearing of God's voice in the call of the gospel, you are calling the sinner to stop hardening his heart.)

2. *Whenever possible, unbelief will naturally take root in the heart, not belief, Luke 24:25; Heb 3:12.*

- Lk 24:25 - the disciples had hearts that were not quick to trust, but rather slow to believe Christ-centered, Christ-revealing Scripture. Everything they had just eye-witnessed - a substitute being offered, blood being shed - was not registering for what it truly was. Their hearts were not quick to tie what they saw back to what the Scriptures revealed about Messiah. Therefore their hearts were not quick to believe the Scriptures, but rather slow to believe.
- The resurrected Christ had to work/labor against that natural, rooted slowness of heart that day! Hb 3:12-13 - The church must also labor to root out this natural inclination to not trust the living God. Here is the stark reality: If you do nothing with your heart; if you put it on cruise control, will it rush into belief, trust? No. Rather it will slide easily into disbelief.

3. *Self-made religion never moves the heart nearer to God, Matt 15:7-8.*

- Read Mt 15:1-9. Perhaps those religious men hope God will see THEIR teaching, rules, good deeds (their tradition) and be moved to set aside HIS for THEIRS (they actually have ALREADY set aside His)! They are confident! Innovative. They appear very religious but God's assessment of them is that even though they are religious, their hearts are far from God, 15:8.
- So - let's summarize these troubling truths: Hardness of heart keeps the sinner from God, or to put it another way, the heart falls into unbelief naturally, like an ice cube at the top of a hot metal slide in August. But suppose it crosses the sinner's mind to be religious? Suppose the sinner, on his own apart from God, wants God to accept HIS version of religion over GOD'S own commands. That kind of heart is NOT open to God.
- What is the sinner's hope then? God! And not just any God, but a God who won't be motivated to act on the basis of what He sees in the sinner, but was motivated to act by His own heart to save sinners.
- Let's think about what happens to these conditions at conversion. Power to enslave is broken, but power to harass is not. These conditions have a lingering, harassing presence. In conversion, the believer is equipped to now fight these lingering, harassing heart-conditions.

II. **Comforting truths for my heart.**

- Here is the gospel! God overcomes hardness of heart, slowness of heart to believe, and God dispels foolishly offensive self-made religion from the heart. At the cross and empty tomb of Jesus, God creates a new inner man to see what the sinner's old inner man could never see on its own.

1. *God enlightens dark hearts to know Christ, 2 Cor 4:5-6.*

- If God shines into our hearts to give spiritual enlightenment, that means the heart was in darkness before. What kind of power-light, light-power is this that can do this? It is the light-power/power-light that God the Creator has. How bad, devastating, formidable was our spiritual darkness? Only God, the Creator's light-power could overcome it so we might know the glory of Christ.
- Have you experienced this divine power from God at the heart level?

2. *God cleanses hearts through faith, Acts 15:6-11.*

- It doesn't matter if you are a Jew or Gentile, the heart is filthy and in need of cleansing. God will be the one to do it. Mt 15 made it clear what self-religion does for the heart. . . No self-cleansing is called for. By what means will God cleanse? "Faith" = the great act of looking away from yourself in order to entirely entrust yourself to God; "venturing your all on Christ" (J. Edwards). "Grace," 15:11. As long as you remain in a heart condition where you are willing to look TO yourself, you will never trust God and therefore you remain filthy before Him (the old Mt 15 thinking). THIS requires the work of God on your behalf!
- Have you seen your heart go from dirty in unbelief to cleansed by faith?

3. *God frees the heart from sin to become obedient, Rom 6:17-18.*

- When God saves the sinner, the first place He goes to work on is the heart, the inner man. That is where bondage to sin exists (the hardness and slowness to believe; the quickness to establish self-made religion is nurtured there). By the grace of God, your heart was able to hear another voice over the voice of the old master, sin - you could hear God's voice! We used to be only able to hear sin's voice commanding us. By God's grace, He switched our heart's

4. *Christ makes Himself at home in hearts by faith, Eph 3:14-19 (esp. v. 17).*

- Beyond conversion into the new creation; into the Christian life. . . This (3:17) is not the original indwelling of Christ at conversion being described. We are not to pray that THAT would occur - it already has. We are to pray for a richer, deeper, practical indwelling of Christ here. "May dwell" = intensified word for dwelling; not temporary dwelling; not pitching a tent. Rather, it is a feeling very much at home kind of dwelling. Compare to Col 1:19; 2:9. How "at home" is God's Godness in Jesus? A perfect fit! That's the way Christ's practical indwelling is to be like within us. And like His original indwelling came by faith through grace, this practical indwelling comes also by/through faith (ongoing trust).
- Ladies - Christ dwells in us positionally. But what kind of residence does He find you to be for Him? Does Jesus find you heart to feel like a hotel room or a home? What will help you? Divine strength through the HS, 3:16.

5. *Christ establishes hearts without blame in holiness, 1 Thes 3:11-13.*

- Explain the phrases in 3:13: "Make their hearts strong, settled, "established" -> without blame (negative); -> in holiness (positive). -> Where? Before our God and Father. -> When? At the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints.
- This looks forward to our glorification. It is tied to Christ's presence, which will usher the saint into the presence of God, the Father. From conversion all the way to glorification, God and Jesus (and HS) are active within us; they are powerful in us at the heart level.
- Notice each of these comforting truths are about what God does for the heart and not you: God opens the heart. God enlightens the heart. God cleanses the heart. God frees the heart. Christ makes Himself at home in the heart. Christ establishes the heart. The gospel is all about God and what He does to create a new heart/inner man/new creature.
- So then what about us? What do we do? What is to be by my/your response to God's amazing, personal and powerful work in our hearts? In no way can we be neglectful of what God is so focused on from conversion to glorification! What He gives intense attention to, I must also give intense attention to. My response to God's heart work within me is to shepherd my heart to the word of God in order to worship, love, fear, know, obey the God of the word!