

TALE OF TWO HEARTS

Context. “For as he thinks in his heart, so is he,” is most profound. (Proverbs 23:7) People are unique in God’s creation because of the inner life of their minds — what they are in their thought world determines how they act. People have presuppositions and they will live consistently on the basis of their presuppositions. By presuppositions, we mean the basic way an individual looks at life, his basic world view, the grid through which he sees the world. This concept is true of their corporate actions, such as political decisions, and it is true of their personal lives. The pen of Shakespeare, the chisel of Michelangelo, the sword of Joseph Stalin, and the creative endeavors of others who have influenced the literary, philosophical, scientific, cultural or political events of this world, past and present, reflect the results of their thought worlds. How does Scripture describe the “inner life” (heart) of those who enter God’s kingdom?

I. Pathophysiology of the Heart: Jer. 17:9-10.

The universality of sin and the “ischemic” nature of the heart are taught in Scripture. Jeremiah describes the “mens rea” of the heart as being “deceitful” and “desperately wicked.” The OT description is vivid: “[T]hat every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time. (Gen. 6:5) Even after the flood, God still characterized “every inclination of [man’s] heart [as being] evil from childhood.” (Gen. 8:21) Isaiah opines that “we all, like sheep, have gone astray[.]” (Isa. 53:6) The NT asserts that Jews and Gentiles alike are under sin. (Rom. 3:9; 3:23) An additional proof of the universality of sin is that all persons are subject to the penalty of sin, namely, death. (Rom. 6:23)

2. Transformation of the Heart: II Cor. 3:18.

Scripture teaches that the cure for a sinful “heart” comes through a supernaturally produced alteration of one’s human nature and through divine help in countering the power of temptation. (Jn. 3:3; Eph. 1:18) It is individual conversion, repentance, and regeneration that will alter the person and bring her or him into a relationship with God that will make successful Christian discipleship possible. (Matt. 4:17) The goal of discipleship is to engage in a process of being transformed into the image of Jesus Christ through “practicing” spiritual disciplines.

3. Protection of the Heart: Phil. 4:8.

Our hearts are protected by “dwelling” and “meditating” on godly virtues. The word λογίζεσθε means thinking according to logical rules or resulting from an objective evaluation. Careful thinking, discernment, and evaluation are the distinctive marks of the Christian faith. “Watch over your heart with diligence, for from it flow the springs of life.” (Prov. 4:23) Just as the believers’ initial act of saving faith leads to a life of faith, so also the transforming of the mind at salvation initiates a lifelong process of choice in renewing their minds.

Study Questions:

1. Definition of Heart. The Hebrew word for “heart” is *lēb*. This word and its synonym *lēbāb* appear 860 times in the Old Testament. Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary offers several meanings for this word: inner being of man; seat of desire, emotion, inclination, or will; seat of knowledge and wisdom; and seat of conscience and moral character. “Heart” appears 15 times in Psalm 119 which is a wisdom Psalm celebrating the Torah. Read Psalm 119, underline all occurrences of the word “heart” and evaluate this use of this word in the context of the chapter.
2. What is sin? One author defines “sin” as “simple failure to let God be God. It is placing something else, anything else, in the supreme place which is his.” M. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (2nd ed.) 598. How would you define sin? Why do you think that modern societies have had difficulty with the concept of “sin”? What or who occupies the “supreme place” in your worldview? Is Jesus the lord of your life? Or is “man the measure of all things”?
3. Doctrine of Humanity. GracePoint’s “Doctrine of Mankind” says: “We believe that Adam, being tempted, chose evil and so fell away from God resulting in the penalty of death. We believe and confess that by reason of Adam’s sin all men with the exception of Jesus Christ, are totally depraved in nature at the time of their conception, being under the power of sin. This depravity is manifested in man’s rebellious heart toward God resulting in disobedience and a final judgment resulting in eternal separation from God, the second death, except those redeemed by Jesus Christ.” [footnotes omitted] Is there a logical necessity to a final judgment for the “redeemed” and the “unredeemed”? Why or why not?

Transformation Exercise:

Read II Cor. 3:18. Are there any “heart” issues which prevent your being fully transformed into the likeness of Jesus Christ? Do you have any un-Biblical presuppositions about God, salvation, sin, the nature of humanity, or the importance of true “heart” transformation which may prevent you from fully engaging in discipleship with Jesus? Do you engage in carefully thinking, discernment and evaluation of where to allow your mind to “dwell”?