

The Old Hickory Bulletin

Old Hickory Church of Christ

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"With All Your Heart"

Mark 12:30 reads—"you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength." This is the first commandment" (NKJV). Our world often speaks of acting with "heart," but unless we are talking health, this usually doesn't mean the vessel that pumps blood through our body. Instead, it refers to the seat of our emotion and sensation. We refer to those who pursue their interests as "following their heart." The stomach of a hungry man is playfully said to be, "the key to a man's heart." This use of the concept of the "heart" is often set in contrast to pure thought and reason. The foolish lover may be said to "follow his heart, but not his head." The older woman may counsel the young woman to "listen to her head, and not her heart."

The heart as it is portrayed in Scripture is not independent of thought and reason. Consider a number of passages that illustrate this. As Jesus taught He explained to His disciples why He used parables and why they were not understood. He said—"the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, And their eyes they have closed, Lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, So that I should heal them" (Matthew 13:15). Here Jesus speaks of the heart being able to "understand" but failing to do so. The heart as Jesus portrays it can grow dull. When Jesus spoke of defilement, He helped the people understand that defilement is internal. He taught—"out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies." In this text it is the "heart" that thinks. Jesus shows that the heart is the birthplace of defilement, in that it produces the types of behavior that defile the body and mind. In the same way, Scripture elsewhere teaches that it is the heart that can become hardened (Matthew 19:8), thus rejecting the rational influence of God's word. It is the heart that can doubt (Mark 11:23), thus minimizing the comfort that faith should offer to our thoughts and anxieties.

This is not to suggest that the heart is divorced from emotion. It is the heart that forgives a person. At the end of the parable of the unmerciful servant who refused to forgive although he had been forgiven, in speaking of the servant's punishment Jesus said—"So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses" (Matthew 18:35). "Heartfelt" forgiveness is not ritual with no

substance. It is genuine. It is meaningful. Although it may be "heart-wrenching" it must be sincere. When Jesus spoke to the scribe about the "first and greatest commandment," the man said of the text above—"to love Him with all the heart, with all the understanding, with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as oneself, is more than all the whole burnt offerings and sacrifices" (Mark 12:33). Jesus said that this man was not far from the kingdom.

Unlike the modern concept of the heart that is separate from reason and thought, the heart as the Bible portrays it "thinks." When Jesus perceived the disciples arguing about who was the greatest, He was said to know the "thought of their heart" (Luke 9:47). How the heart focuses its thoughts, affects how the things of God are received. This, in turn, affects the deeds that one does. The sinner "out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil" (Luke 6:45). The word grows when it is planted in the "noble and good" heart (Luke 8:15). This is what explains conversion. The proud heart who hears the gospel doubts because his dull, hardened heart will not let it grow. Yet, humble hearts, which hear the truth, just as those hearts on the day of Pentecost will be, "cut to the heart" (Acts 2:37) and moved to obey the gospel. Paul told the Romans that it is the heart that "believes unto righteousness" (Romans 10:10). From a Biblical standpoint the rational acceptance of the word of God produces faith. This is not a faith that comes from imagination or wishful thinking. While faith is not based upon sight (2 Corinthians 5:7), it is wrong to hold that it is based upon nothing. God's word is its source. Paul also told the Romans that—"faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17).

Our love for God must be "with all of our heart." So many in our world claim wholehearted love for God, yet walk in sin, harbor ungodly thoughts and attitudes, and allow themselves to maintain ignorance of God's word. Let's never make the mistake of thinking that giving our "heart" to God just means that we have strong emotions for Him. The "heart" God wants is much more than just our feelings, passions, and emotions. It is that part of us which thinks, believes, forgives, is cut, and is able to motivate us to good works. That is what God demands from us and He will be satisfied with no less.

- Kyle Pope

A Matter of Choice

God made man a free moral agent. We are creatures of choice. We have the right and the power to choose day to day activities. This power of choice is expressed in the Bible over and over. Both Moses (Deuteronomy 30:19) and Joshua (Joshua 24:15) put choices before Israel. But the choices they followed had consequences. They would likely make

the choice that suited their own desires at the time, which would best serve their interests. But the choice would set in order chains of events that would not be to their liking.

Today we choose each day the kind of life we want to live, the rule of ethics to govern us, the people we wish to associate with. We usually do this out of selfish concern. But when we do, we also set in order chains of events that bring about end products that we may not like. The social drinker does not choose to be an alcoholic, to lose his job, family and friends, nor to have a damaged liver, but all too often that is what he gets. The criminal does not choose to go to jail when he robs or kills, but that's where he winds up.

When the prodigal son left home to enjoy spending his inheritance, he did not intend to end up in the hog pen, starving and friendless, but it was inevitable with that choice he made. Lot chose to pitch his tent toward Sodom because of the personal advantages it held for him and his family. He did not intend to choose to end up on a mountain having sons born by acts of incest with his own daughters. He did not intend to lose his wife and all his possessions in the destruction of Sodom. But all this he did, because "he pitched his tent toward Sodom" (Genesis 13:12).

We do not intend to lose our children when we become too deeply involved in economic and social affairs to love, train and mature them, but that's the end product of the choice. We do not intend to have delinquent, rebellious children when we chose not to discipline them, to teach them respect for God, parents and others.

No one chooses divorce from the beginning, it is a hard, heart-rending experience. But that's the end product of self-centered neglect. We all want happy occasions with exciting mates but in our day to day choices we ourselves are not contributing to that end. We blame others when we are at fault. We made choices long ago that resulted in the end product. We like to sow but we don't like to reap.

- Morris D. Norman

GOD IS LIGHT!

John wrote: "This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all." (1 John 1:5). John uses this sharp contrast to depict the holy character of God. The images light and darkness are richly employed throughout John's letters, and he clearly establishes that neutrality is impossible. One either walks in the light (1 John 1:7), or he walks in darkness (1 John 1:6). There is no middle ground.

The Bible student quickly comes to appreciate how light emphasizes the holy character of God, His unsurpassed moral perfection, absolute truthfulness and unmatched righteousness. Light reminds the Christian that the Source of light has revealed Himself to mankind. Light also points to the highest expression of God's self-revelation: His Son, who brought truth to mankind. When light came into the world, it serves to expose the true nature of things. The Lord God has allowed us to know realities that are not perceived through man's eyes.

God is the "Father of lights" (James 1:17); He "dwells in unapproachable light" (1 Timothy 6:16). Contemplate that truth for a moment! Those who belong to God have a purpose relating to light: "so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;" (1 Peter 2:9). In our former lives we had nothing to do with light, but now, as a result of our obedience to the Lord through the call of His gospel we are "Light in the Lord" – we "walk as children of light" (Ephesians 5:8).

Isn't this truly wonderful?

- Gary Smalley

* "Faith in the future begets power in the present!"

* "Faith keeps the one who keeps the faith!"

* "God can use ordinary instruments to produce a concert of praise!"

* "God does what few men can do: He forgets the sins of others!"

* "God feeds the sparrow, but He never throws the food into the nest!"

What Must I Do To Be Saved?

HEAR THE GOSPEL

(Romans 10:14-17; John 20:30-31; Romans 1:15-17)

BELIEVE IN JESUS CHRIST

(Acts 8:37; John 8:24; Hebrews 11:6)

REPENT OF PAST SINS

(Luke 13:3; Acts 2:38; Acts 17:30)

CONFESS CHRIST

(Romans 10:9-10; Acts 8:37)

BE BAPTIZED

(Romans 6:3-4; Mark 16:15-16; Acts 2:38; Acts 8:36-39; 1 Peter 3:21)

LIVE A FAITHFUL LIFE

(Revelation 2:10; 2 Peter 1:5-11; John 15:1-8; Hebrews 10:23-25)