

The Case of the Missing Heart

What is the heart? Anatomically the answer is obvious and needs no elaborate definition. It's simply the pump that circulates the blood. Leviticus 17:14 tells us that "*blood is the life of all flesh.*" This of course, makes the heart a vital organ, the function of which lends itself perfectly to being allegorically the vital organ in the spiritual sense, and indeed it is so used in both the Old and in the New Testaments. In the spiritual sense it is sometimes defined as simply the mind, or perhaps it is the mind-soul, or the soul-spirit. By whatever name it is the whole eternal essence of whom one really is. It is also seen to express any number of other characteristics we see as defining human beings. Thus it is characterized as being who one really is apart from the physical. The physical, that is the flesh, is merely a container, a temple in which a person temporally dwells. Scripture speaks many times of the spiritual heart. It speaks of hardened hearts, softened hearts as well as different hearts and new hearts. In Ezekiel 11:19, God speaks figuratively of replacing the stony heart with a heart of flesh. Our subject here is the "new" heart that is given to every soul that is born-again by grace through a saving faith in Jesus. Our very limited human minds need some sort of visual image to help us understand things. The image of stony and fleshy provide such an aid to understanding. I pray and do believe that I do no violence to the Word by painting another word image with which to help understand the issue of the allusive natures of the old and the new hearts.

Often, as in this case, we all assign specific characteristic to this mystical component of our non-physical being. We speak of being mean hearted, generous hearted, kind hearted, joyous heart; of having a faint heart, a brave heart, a sad heart, an evil heart, a good heart, etc. These all seem to relate to, or describe the characteristics of the soul, that is of the man as he functions, or appears to function in this world. We might choose to leave it at that. The heart is simply the name given to a "catch-all" repository within the mind, of the many qualities that make up a human being. This might seem sufficient were it not for the fact that Scripture speaks of the heart as being deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked "Jeremiah 17:9". It also speaks of receiving a new heart at the

moment one has been born-again, that is when one is justified by grace through faith in Jesus. However, as we all know it to be true, the deceitful and desperately wicked nature of man does not get replaced. What the heart replacement does is remove the constraint in which the soul-spirit has been bound through sin into slavery to Satan and to his eternal destiny. Might we then characterize the old heart as the death defining anchor that binds us to Satan, and the new Spirit-filled heart as the essence of the new creation that binds us to our life-giving Lord and Savior, Christ Jesus? Hasn't there been a gloriously miraculous transfer from ones ties to Satan, as ones master and destroyer, to Jesus, our Lord and Savior? Scripture makes it clear that Jesus bought the saved soul through His blood. Bought from whom? From Satan! He owns all unredeemed souls, but must relinquish to Jesus any and all who accept Jesus on His terms.

I see the unregenerate heart, that heart that "is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked," as perhaps an escape-proof "straightjacket", or some similarly binding garment that sin has woven strand by strand around the soul-spirit, a garment that only Jesus can remove. Only Jesus, by God's grace through faith in the truth of His suffering, death, and resurrection can remove this seal of guaranteed eternal damnation, and replace it with a pure white and holy raiment that we call the "new heart." This is a covering so pure and holy that it can and does become a home for the Holy Spirit. His presence there is our guarantee of eternal life, because nothing can remove Him once He has taken up residence in a new heart. I can't see how the heart can be defined as simply being the mind or the soul, because these are not replaced. It's only the imprisoning fabric woven by sin that is replaced with the garment of salvation. However, sin yet remains in the flesh, but the soul-spirit is no longer bound by sin. They are now free from the judgment of sin and have entered a state where they are also free from the power of sin as the indwelling Holy Spirit guides them through the life long process of sanctification.

From this perspective, we can see that everyone has a spiritual heart. The big question for the professing Christian however, is which heart? Has that old heart really been replaced? Nowhere in Scripture does God repair or clean up the heart. He always removes that offensive thing, and provides to the redeemed, and only to them a new

clean, pure, sinless, heart. Anything less would not be an acceptable abode for the Holy Spirit. While that old heart may be gone, the old sinful nature, the residual impurity that the forgiveness of sins did not purge from the flesh or from the mind, remains to plague the saved soul. That old sinful nature that remains in the flesh seeks incessantly to influence the mind to cause a continuance of various amounts of sinfulness and backsliding, and thus to temporally quench the work of the Holy Spirit. It is only through this sanctifying process that the Holy Spirit begins at the moment justification has taken place that it is possible to subdue the old nature, rendering it ever more ineffectual, even though it remains in the flesh. Scripture tells us that all who go to heaven receive new incorruptible bodies as eternal temples. Perhaps that is one reason why all flesh must die, because like the old heart, it is not capable of being completely cleansed or repaired. All natural flesh, of the genuine Christian will be replaced during the Rapture, when “in the twinkling of an eye” that old flesh, alive or long dead, will be replaced on the way to heaven.

Now, regarding the case of the missing heart. What is that all about? Well it is about what most of my writings are about. It is about salvation, and whether or not one is really saved, especially one who believes he is, but is not. There is nothing new here, just the same old condition being addressed in a varied assembly of the same words expressing the same concern regarding the same legions of un-saved souls who believe that because of some process someone lead them to salvation. They believe that God has reserved for them a place in heaven by whatever route they may follow. In the case under consideration, He has done no such thing. Here is but another prayerful call to study, understand, and apply the whole of Scripture. It’s a call to genuine worship, repentance, humility, obedience, love, and perseverance, for it is all of these things that define what must characterize one who has become a son or daughter of God, and who actually has a reserved place in heaven. It is a call to be like the Bereans of Acts 17:11, that is to listen to what is said but always check the Scripture to see if it is true. The false teachers, false prophets and false pastors, these antichrists, abound in these end times as never before, just as Jesus and the Apostles predicted they would. The ways of the world have inundated our ears, eyes, minds, heart, as well as our churches. All of this validates and

even seems to amplify the way this awesome prophecy is being so universally fulfilled. The amplification perhaps is the result of Satan's centuries-long keen observation of man's weaknesses, frailties, carnal desires, and propensities. This has helped him better train his agents of deceit to be ever more clever and effective in implementing his goal of keeping ever greater numbers from heaven. We only need to look around us to see how very successful these efforts are and have been.

The missing heart, as our topic, is about the new heart given to every soul that is liberated from Satan. Because of today's great apostasies and heresies, perpetrated by many willful, or often unwitting purveyors of spiritual death, multitudes will leave this earth confident that they have that new heart tucked away, safely wrapped around the soul, only to find that it's missing. It's missing not as if they ever had it, but because they had been duped into believing they had it, and never chose to seriously look into the matter to see if it was true. They didn't look because those who led them astray, and whom they trusted, never suggested that they should, and even discourage them from it, convincing them that their simple professing of belief was sufficient. That is because the current fashion in evangelism is, as I see it, more like Harry Potterism. By just saying a few magic words about Jesus, believing that they are believed, sensing some related feelings, listening to a few verses of Scripture, and bingo! One can then skip down the sawdust trail convinced that salvation has been received, convinced that there has been a genuine acceptance of Jesus, and that all sins are thereby forgiven. If they then have any doubt about having been saved by this magic, they often get scolded for lack of faith in the sufficiency of the event. This is as though a contrite heart, humility, repentance, and obedience are of no relevance, for they are rarely if ever even mentioned. This deception by omission condemns both the deceiver and the deceived to hell. Is it too demeaning or sacrilegious to be so irreverent as to call this type of evangelism, the practice of magic? Magic is an incantation, a deception claiming efficacy. Is there a better word with which to define this destruction of the soul? The evangelist's zeal, eagerness, out reach, and serious effort are commendable as far as they go. But these same qualities are equally impressive, and even more numerous among some of the well known "Christian-like" religions who score absolute zero where salvation is concerned.

Now please bear with me for a while, as I seem to digress from the subject. I believe that this will lead to some relevant points that I feel need a little contextual development. None of the above, or what follows are pleasing words, and many are certain to be offended by them. If being thus offended causes a more careful assessment of anyone's spiritual condition, I pray that I will become ever more offensive in these matters.

There are various methods applied by which one becomes a victim of a missing heart. I've described the simple, basic way many are deceived. However, there are many others far less evident, and even very closely resembling a truly saving process. Those so deceived are the ones I cry for most, because there is a level of sincerity in their quest. They believe and do many Christ-like things, but do them by nature, not by the Holy Spirit. I believe it is very frequent that one can, especially with Satan's help, white-wash that ugly sepulcher, that sin soaked garment that is the old heart, so that it looks pretty good and so is often able to fool nearly everyone, especially its owner. Jeremiah 17:9 is proof positive of this when he asks, "Who can know it"?

Jesus told Nicodemus as recorded in John chapter 3, that he had to be born-again if he wanted to go to heaven. To be born-again is to be born from above, to be born of God as His direct creation. This birth is obviously spiritual, not physical, because the old body remains as the dwelling place for the new spiritual heart, and the indwelling Holy Spirit. Jesus didn't elaborate very much to Nicodemus at that time as to the details of just how this new birth could manifest. He told him that God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life. That's the whole thing, that's everything in a nutshell! However, how to attain the fruit of this promise is wholly dependant on the full understanding of the meaning of the word "believe." Jesus made it quite evident that He was that Son, the One to be believed in, and the One who was the Light of the world. He also made it very clear that those who do not believe in Him are condemned.

Was what we know about that Jesus told Nicodemus, during that interview, enough by itself to have caused him to be born-again and thereby saved? Is that enough for those today who desire salvation? Based on the words as recorded by John, I don't believe so, because for the reader, absent the context of the rest of Scripture, especially a full understanding of what "believe" means, those words don't reveal enough of how to become born-again. The same is true of several other biblical references that are commonly taken alone and out of context to establish precepts that simply cannot be used that way by themselves. Perhaps in the case of Nicodemus, having uniquely stood in the irresistible, transforming presence of our Savior, and hearing these words come from Him directly, that saving faith might have manifested. When Nicodemus questioned the meaning and the manner in which a grown person could be born-again, Jesus chided him, because being a renowned teacher of Scripture, he should have already known these things. That is because, as Jesus Himself had elsewhere admitted, most of Scripture was written about Him.

Among the many evidences Jesus may have been referring to, is Proverbs 30 where in verse 4, Solomon was prompted to ask in a prophetic sense regarding God: "*What is His name and what is His Son's name?*" This established the fact that God has a Son. Also there is Psalm 2, where David was privileged to record a conversation that took place in heaven among the Triune Deity. This is where the Father had declared to His Son, His kingdom ruler ship over the earth. Surely our Lord was also speaking of many prophecies that He had already fulfilled, and of the one described in Isaiah 53 that He was about to fulfill. Nicodemus was an eminent biblical scholar, a Pharisee, a teacher of Pharisees, yet absent of the guidance of the Holy Spirit, this did not provide him with what would save him. Before learning of Jesus and hearing Him, he had been certain that he was saved. All Pharisees were of that false belief. They assumed they had salvation by virtue of being sons of Abraham. They failed to understand the significance, the necessity, and the way to obtain the new heart. David knew, and showed them the need for it when he asked God to make in him a new heart in Psalm 51.

How many have gone to their final sleep, believing that they had this new heart, only to discover it missing. The story of the rich man and Lazarus in Matthew expresses among many other things, this same awful circumstance. This was not necessarily the case of not having studied the Scripture as it often is today in this current era of gross deception and biblical ignorance. It was not having understood, because of their failure to seek and receive the guidance of the Holy Spirit in their studies. The departments of Theology of most Universities are littered with such biblical scholars, who, for the same reasons, know the words of Scripture, but not the revealed truth of what they convey.

The missing heart issue of today is not only burdened by a lack of biblical knowledge and understanding, but also by the numerous perversions and omissions of its message that false, timid, or ignorant teachers convey. If many of those who try to draw others to the faith better understood the whole of what salvation is about, they would not leave their “victims” dangling with only a few of the easier simple truths. First, and I believe foremost, they should seek to convince the fact that we are all sinners who need a Savior to save us from eternal damnation. No belief or faith can be genuine until one knows that one’s condition is otherwise hopeless. Then they would convey the whole of what humility, faith, repentance, love, Lordship, and obedience are all about. How else can one be convinced to seek the mercy of Jesus?

There are two important precepts that the Nicodemus story brings to mind. The first has to do with understanding what Scripture says. As we have seen, Nicodemus was full of scriptural knowledge, as were all Pharisees, yet they knew nothing about how to obtain salvation, how to be born-again. It was all there in the Old Testament, as the whole Book of Hebrews attests to, but neither he nor the rest of them could see it. Jesus was most brutal in chastisement of all of them for this abject ignorance. What was the problem? I believe it might be summarized in their failure to realize that they needed a Savior, along with their lack of humility, and failure to seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit for their understanding. We know that since Pentecost, the Holy Spirit dwells in every redeemed person’s heart. However, we might ask, how could anyone ever have known back then or now, the scriptural truth until they could have the Spirit dwelling in them? There must be

a process going on in the heart that is capable of progressing toward a saving faith before the Holy Spirit will be motivated to assistance. The simple fact is, that the Holy Spirit is, and always was everywhere, waiting and available to lead anyone and everyone to the truth and the way, if they would but seek Him earnestly, in humility, and knowing that they needed a Savior. Then the truths of Scripture would reveal themselves, and penetrate the soul rather than remain only in the head as confusing abstractions. God was very close to His people of Israel through Moses. He gave them the Commandments and other laws and procedures by means of which they could keep free of the spiritual consequences of sin. Their on-again, off-again adherence to these is what gives flesh to the bones of that part of their history that God has chosen to share with us. After Malachi there were almost 400 years during which God seemed to remain silent until He broke that silence through John the Baptist. However, a study of the prophets reveals that their foretelling of events that took place during that period was anything but silence. God revealed all that was needed through them so that His plan of redemption could be known, long before Jesus came to fulfill it.

The second lesson that the Nicodemus story suggests to me has to do with short changing the Word of God. This is the failure of today's evangelicalism gone rampant in its eagerness to claim numbers of converts without bothering to determine whether they ended up as "wheat or tares." In these circles there is but a small handful of Scripture verses used to "convert" or "bring to the faith" lost souls. Romans 10:9 says, *"that if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God has raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved."* Then there is Mark 16:16 where Jesus says, *"He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved..."* In John 3:15, Jesus in speaking of Himself said, *"That whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life."* Again Jesus said, as recorded in John 5:24, *"verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life."* Then there is 1 John 5:1, where he says, *Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God..."*

Well that's the "handful." They all speak of "belief" and essentially stop there. This is great as far as it goes. Belief is foundational. Belief and faith are the foundation on which the edifice of salvation is built. However, none of these popular witnessing verses speak of humility, repentance, obedience, perseverance and love. These however are all part of the edifice that defines a saving belief. Without them in evidence, belief is nothing but fluff, and the faith has no substance.

The way these soft, inadequately understood verses are bantered about in the seeker-friendly circles reminds me of something that was common in the early part of the 20th century. It was the "paperboy." In the days before radio, TV and other forms of rapid communication, the newspaper was the major source of information for the general public. This is when the media simply reported the news instead of shaping and censoring it as they do today. In urban areas, some paperboys would deliver the newspapers house-to-house, while others would stand on street corners selling the papers. To attract attention and sell papers, they would often yell out the headlines. Quite often there would be some late breaking news and the newspaper companies would issue "extras". Then one could hear the paperboy excitedly hawking out, "Extra, extra, read all about it! "Man Flies Across the Atlantic," or some other noteworthy information that would induce purchase of the paper.

In all too many areas of modern evangelicalism it seems that a similar technique is used to attract people to Jesus. "Extra, extra read all about it, Jesus saves, come and get it!" I suspect that this is one of the ways that "many are called." But what happens when one comes to the paperboy-evangelist wanting the details, the rest of the story. Is there anything there for him to grab onto, someone to answer questions and provide clear guidance and real understanding? Is there even a "paper" or any other meaningful communication beyond the "handful" of verses and a few platitudes? Are there any convicting words, the words Jesus expressed as commands, if one was to become His? Too much of the time, questions remain unanswered or negated by quick answers such as, "don't worry about that, its not important, just remember you're saved and just believe it! God loves you and He has a plan for you." End of story! After all these

“paperboys” are busy guys. They can’t be burdened by such details. They have to go to the next corner and yell out another “extra”! What happens to the seeker? Most will either shrug their shoulders and move on, remaining as part of the world, while others will say, Wow! That was easy! And they too will move on, also remaining of the world, but believing that they are now saved Christians. They are among the legions of lost heart cases, because of the new hearts they thought they had, but never did acquire.

This tragic situation also exists on a massive scale in some of the large “Christian ministries” such as in Robert Schuler’s Crystal Palace, and in some of the most popular user-friendly churches and TV ministries. Consider the Billy Graham revivals of a generation ago. Million were drawn to these gatherings. His great oratory and scriptural prowess drew thousands to his “altar calls” where they pledged themselves to Christ and therefore were “saved.” Subsequent follow-ups on these “born-again,” according to a Barna Poll, indicated that only a very few showed any evidence at all of a changed life. How many of those spent the rest of their lives calling themselves born-again Christians because of that one emotional event and the assurances they received? They also are among the legions of the lost heart cases. And why not! There was little if any follow up of biblical instruction. Just believe and it’s done! According to some sources, the only follow up guidance after these Billy Graham rallies was to send them all back to the churches, if any, that they had previously attended, whether Christian, Catholic, Unitarian, Hindu, or whatever. How much different is this from the cheap prayerism of galloping evangelists described above?

Without a strong biblical understanding through serious Bible study in fellowship with real Christians, the odds of actually receiving a new heart are very small. However, because God is merciful and dispenses His grace in many ways, there are those who are saved even though they learn very little of Scripture. I believe that they are the poor and humble and meek that already know their condition, and are already seeking a Savior. Perhaps these are those that Jesus spoke of in His Sermon on the Mount. But where are these to be found? I believe that today they are mostly in the “third world” countries, among the deprived, and desperate, especially those who hear the missionaries that Jesus

places in their midst. Of course there are some here as well, because our Lord tends a remnant flock of His sheep in many places. They often need hear only the truth of the Gospel to recognize that here is the Savior they so desperately need. Here is the source of strength that can carry them through the world's cruelties to that blessed eternity. That this may be true, regarding the poor and oppressed seems to be evidenced by the rapid growth of the church in these regions. On a personal note, several times in the last few years, I have been hospitalized for a few days. Each time I have made an effort to speak of the Bible to the doctors, nurse and other care contributors including the janitor. Not even one of the Caucasian doctors or nurses had even the slightest interest. However with the "lower level" people, who were almost all non-Caucasian from Africa or the Caribbean Islands, the response was nearly 100% with nearly all of them long term believers eager for the Word!

As this tiny sampling suggests, here in this country in the more prosperous places where physical needs are far less, there is a tendency to consider God as irrelevant. Therefore the spiritual needs seem far less evident and tend to be disregarded by the growing majority. Many simply put God in the back seat instead of in the driver's seat! Where they recognize a spiritual need, it is more often in a spirit of lukewarmness and complacency, just as Jesus predicted it would be for this end-time church period. What fruit does a lukewarm church produce? Lukewarm Christians. A lukewarm Christian is not a saved Christian. He or she is merely a usurper of the name, a vain empty professor of, and a dabbler in, the Christian faith. He is a member of that legion of those who, a moment after death will realize, as did the rich man, that something extremely vital is missing. It is that new heart that they could have had, and believed that they did have, but failed to receive. As I grieve for these tragic souls, I keep remembering that rich man and Lazarus story Jesus told in Luke 16:20-21. What a shocker it must have been for that rich man, that "son of Abraham", to discover where he had gone, and how hopeless his eternal status was. He had always been certain of his salvation. What happened? He had simply followed blindly the guidance of the wrong people!

The lukewarm church that prevails at this time, evolved from the one characterized as the church of Philadelphia, a zealously, hot-for-the-Lord church of vigorous and sustaining obedience to Jesus as Lord, even during some very trying times. It was in this church period that our once great nation was born and raised to become most extraordinary in stature, both spiritually as well as culturally. Look at it now in this “new age!” How did this horrible decay happen? There are many reasons beyond the scope of this paper. Jesus speaks of physical prosperity as being a major factor leading to this kind of deplorable state. Physical prosperity is a worldly phenomenon for the most part having little or no association with Christianity. This evolutionary process has been long and complex. However, I believe that it can be safely summarized by simply recognizing one major problem, and that is that the world has entered the church. One might even say it continues to be invited in with welcoming arms. As an analogy, if we consider how cold the world is toward genuine Christianity, it is easy to see how the mix of hot zeal of the real church would be cooled by its melding with the cold world, leaving at best, the lukewarmness of which Jesus spoke of in Revelation 3.

A related factor, according to a Barna poll, is that about half of the pastors graduating from the seminaries and entering the ministry do not believe in the virgin birth or the divinity of Christ! It's evident that Satan and the world have also taken over these former citadels of Christian faith. With such pastors leading flocks of already proud materialistic worldly people used to quick and easy “fixes, who chose to merely dabble in the faith, how can one expect to find many saved souls? When these, and even others who are more open to the truth, are fed hollow words, half- truths and platitudes, the sad results are inevitable. They all are led down the wide crowded, but easy path believing that it leads to heaven. Again we have the case of the missing heart that never was, but here multiplied thousands-fold.

I have one last observation regarding this. In the previous Philadelphia church period of which Jesus said nothing condemning (Revelation 3), conservative pastors and teachers, that is those who took the truth of Scripture most seriously and literally, were in the vast majority. Today in this end-time period of the church of Laodicea, of which Jesus had

nothing good to say as “*He spewed it out of His mouth,*” liberal pastors and false teachers are the vast majority. These range from being totally and obviously apostate, to being simply ignorant or too timid with the hard truth, and avoid those precepts that offend the worldly natures. Think deeply about this. We have a Book, the one and only inerrant trustworthy guide to salvation and to the understanding of God’s will. If you know that your eternal destiny depends on your personal adherence to God’s will, which pastor or teacher do you believe is most likely to be your more certain guide to a blessed eternity? Are your present worldly desires so strong and important to you that you’re willing to take a chance on risking the quality of your eternal life by following the easier path that the liberal pastors preach, that Jesus Himself condemned?

In Matthew 7:13, 14. He said “*Enter ye in at the strait gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.*” This “narrow” way is most certainly the way that the conservative pastors taught. The “broad” way is found in what most liberal pastors preach. Let’s face it, we Americans, by nature and long experience want a quick fix and want it now! We want it to be easy, with no sweat. We want pills to cure an illness, which they rarely do, fast food where taste is everything, and where nutrition is absurd and rarely considered. We always want the biggest bang for our buck, yet seldom examine the bang to see if it is really worth the buck. These earthly ways don’t work in the spiritual realm where the only genuine reality exists. The more you learn and take seriously God’s truth as He gave it to us in the whole of Scripture, the more convinced you’ll be that the easy way is never the way to heaven.

There is one very significant difference between the conservative preachers and even the partially truth-telling liberal ones. Both preach salvation through belief/faith, and usually reference several of the verses that speak of this fact. However, the conservative preacher will always include sermons that spell out clearly, and forcefully, the less palatable though essential need for humility, repentance, as well as obedience. Rarely, if

ever, do these essential words pass through the lips of the liberal pastors. Is it safe to place your trust in the guidance of such as these who tell only half of the story?

Have you ever been so froth with anxiety, so fearful, and so eager to warn someone, of a danger that he doesn't see or know about, that you become almost incoherent in your stammering and long windedness as you attempt to communicate the warning? I believe that we all have. Dear reader, you have just suffered through such an attempt. My concern for the plight of these poor souls, who believe they are saved but are not, and will never know the truth until it is too late, grieves me night and day to where I fear I have become a victim of this babbling incoherence. Realizing the inadequacy of each effort to communicate this tragic situation, I continue to fill pages with what has probably, to some, become more like tiresome and repetitive drivel than enlightening and convincing truth. I keep praying however, that in spite of this, some value to someone may nevertheless be derived from these efforts. If even one person is effectually led to Christ Jesus because of anything I've written, I will consider myself to have been blessed beyond all measure.