

The Heart

We all speak often of our hearts. “Have a heart; I don’t have a heart for that; my heart isn’t in it; you are breaking my heart, etc.” What do we mean? When we say these things, we are not speaking of the blood pump in our chest, but of something else. For the purpose of this message, we will make use of the word “heart” as found in the translation from the Hebrew Old Testament Book of Jeremiah, chapter 17, verse 9, because it is here that the Holy Spirit provides us with God’s assessment of every human heart.

In this verse we are informed that “the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?” WOW!! What a horrible indictment! Surely, there is something wrong here. This cannot be true of my heart. I’m basically a good person! Surely I am far better than many people I know. This can’t be an absolute as it is written; there must be some varying degrees of deceitfulness and wickedness, from almost total wickedness like Hitler (after all, he did like dogs) to Mother Teresa who unselfishly served others all her life, and probably never knowingly hurt a soul. Sorry, Scripture makes no such exception. None of God’s Word can be subject to private interpretation modification or watered down to leave anyone with an exception, which God Himself, in His own Words, has not clearly provided! Scripture provides NO possible exception regarding the condition of the heart. Escape, YES, exception, NONE!

Well, then let us analyze this horrible accusation to see if it actually means what it seems to say. What is the Holy Spirit talking about when He speaks of the “heart”? The Hebrew word used here is “leb,” pronounced as “labe,” which is defined as, “feeling, will and the intellect.” We know, or should know, that none of us “has” a soul. The soul IS the person we are! The body is merely the bag of flesh and bones and blood which carries each of us souls around, giving us the ability to perform physical, earthly activities, and to articulate our words, thoughts and emotions. We can, to a surprising degree of applicability, use the computer as an analogy in order to understand this. The

hardware, the physical, visible, dissectible parts of the computer, is like the body. The CD disc is like the brain. On it is stored all the information which gives the computer any useful function or purpose. That information is nothing but digitized, vibrational disturbances on the surface of the disc (brain) which give it a uniqueness of character and provides all of that which makes the computer a functioning device, a device that expresses and makes useful the information which its maker has programmed into it. That dimensionless, weightless and timeless “information” on the brain, is the mind, or we might say, the essence of the soul. The analogy is somewhat weakened by the fact that the soul has a certain divine maker, which a computer can never have, having been made by man’s human hands. Among those divine qualities is that there is no erasure or obliteration possible of the soul as there is with that which has been given to the disc. The soul is immortal, and will, one day have an ageless, indestructible body to carry it around. The only issue is where it will spend eternity. I believe that from the above, we can correctly conclude that the “heart” is the summation of the characteristics, or the “character” of the soul.

Now, let us examine the word “wicked” as Scripture has defined it in the original Hebrew. The word is “anash,” which is pronounced aw-nash.” There are a total of seventeen different Hebrew words, which translate into wicked, wickedness, or wickedly. The Old Testament uses most of them over and over again. Yet the word “anash” is used only once and only here in Jeremiah 17:9! The other 16 versions of the word center around “morally wrong” as the definition. However, “anash” seems to have been most carefully and uniquely chosen to describe only the human heart. Strong’s concordance defines “anash” as being “frail, feeble, desperately wicked, incurable, sick, and woeful.” This word does not appear in any of the 460 other instances where “wicked” is used! How can one not revel in awe at the finely tuned precision and accuracy of the word choices our Lord has used in His authorship of this blessed, inerrant Volume! Therefore, the human heart, every human heart, which may be defined as the character of the soul, is “wicked, frail, incurable, sick and woeful.” And catch this! The word desperately occurs nowhere else, but only here in the Old Testament, and is a translation of the very same word uniquely defining wicked! The same Hebrew word that is used in Jeremiah 17:9

for “wicked” is also used for “desperately”! How strange! And yet how singularly forceful in its effect in describing the awfulness of the human heart! Desperately wicked, therefore, is wickedly wicked or incurably incurable, etc. This reminds me of where Paul in Romans 7:13 calls sin “..exceedingly sinful.” Sin is so bad that there are no adjectives adequate to describe it, therefore, he turned the word onto it itself in describing it. Here it seems that the Holy Spirit is doing the same thing as He describes the heart as being wicked, wickedly wicked.

Now, let’s examine the word, “deceitful.” This word in the form of deceit, deceitful, deceive, etc. occurs ninety times in the Old Testament and is used to translate ten different Hebrew words of that general meaning. However, the word translated “deceitful” in Jeremiah 17:9 is used only once, here and nowhere else! It is the Hebrew word “aqob.” pronounced “aw-kobe.” It means fraudulent, crooked, deceitful, polluted. My oh my! Are you seeing the same picture of yourself as I am seeing of myself? Does it make any more sense to you when you read David’s words in Psalm 51:10 where he asks “create in me a clean heart, O God.” He doesn’t ask God to clean his heart, or to repair it, or in any way to adjust or transform his heart. He knew several hundred years before God told Jeremiah, that the heart was “desperately wicked,” that it was doubly feeble, so frail, so incurable and so polluted that only the Creator God could create a clean heart, and not a repaired, rebuilt or restored heart, but a New and Clean heart! David knew that with that natural heart alone, he had no chance for eternal life. Somehow he knew he had to have another heart, a new, clean one that only God can create. Perhaps that is why God called David a man after His own heart. Everyone who hopes for eternal life must make the same petition, as did David. But for that petition to be effective, it must come from a heart that knows that it is desperately and hopelessly wicked and has no other hope except through God’s boundless grace and love, which He eagerly gives to anyone who will humble himself or herself recognizing their hopeless, hateful state, and appropriately seeking Jesus as Lord and Savior.

If we allow “heart” to be defined as the character of the soul and accept the truth of its incurable wickedness, then we might perceive a logistical problem in having a clean, new

heart. Being born-again is another way of saying one has received a new heart, a new and different soul-character. But how can we have this new soul-character when the old soul-character remains, and it surely does remain because it continues to plague us? The explanation that I feel persuaded to offer may seem to be simplistic and perhaps even contrived. Nevertheless, I see the two hearts, that is, the two-soul characteristics residing in the soul at the same time, like two sides of a coin. The spiritual consequences of the sin nature are not cleansed from the soul at the instant the new heart, the new soul-character, is received. But the sin nature, that sin prone characteristic of the soul, remains until the moment it leaves the corrupt body. That sin nature stays behind along with the body, but unlike the body, it will not rise again because no sin or sin nature can enter heaven. But while we remain with our original hardware, our corruptible bodies, the two sides of the soul-character wage a continuing war for dominance. The one we favor, the one we yield to, is the one who will dominate our lives. However, this is a losing battle for the evil side, assuming that, in fact, we actually have that other “clean” side, because our love and gratitude towards our Lord and Savior will, because it must, inevitably put down, subordinate and eventually destroy the wicked side. So what is the “bottom line” in all of this? What is the message we are to receive from our Lord’s Words given to Jeremiah? I believe it is this:

1. We are all, every one of us, hopelessly wicked whether we are willing to admit it or not!
2. Redemption, that is, relief from this hopeless state, which can only lead to eternal punishment, must begin with a “wholehearted” recognition of that hopeless sin-filled condition.
3. With that recognition must come the realization that only through Jesus, the Redeemer, can we be extricated from that fate.
4. With the realization, there must come faith that He can do it.

5. That realization must be followed by a genuine faith that He will do it.
6. This immediately turns into the fact that He has done it.

However, because of the incredibly deceitful nature of our hearts, as I hope I have convincingly reported here, we must, if we are to be certain that we haven't deceived ourselves, seek confirmation of that accomplishment. In order to gain a reasonable assurance of the fact of redemption, I believe that we must carefully search for evidence of it, because salvation is far, far too important to leave to chance, or presumption, or some superficial, and thereby false, evidence. At the minimum one must look for the following:

1. Is there a conflict occurring within the "heart" as the two natures collide and compete? Here we are back to the two-sides of the coin analogy. If we are saved, especially during the early years following the event, there should be an inner conflict. This most likely is expressed by an increased sensitivity of the conscience. Sins which our old "heart" excused or rationalized, the new "heart" rebels against, using the sensitized conscience to cause the soul to seek relief by a growing avoidance of sin.
2. The growing avoidance of sin must be sincere and not done in fear, but in gratitude to Jesus for what He did for us on the cross. Once one is able to understand, even a small portion of what Jesus willingly went through in order to deliver us from a deserved hell, it will be an overwhelming love, and profound gratitude which can not help but manifest in the soul, and express itself in every aspect of a saved soul's earthly life, in actions, behavior, thoughts, feelings, worship, and prayers.

3. This manifestation is unlikely to “hit the soul running,” but should be a continually moving, enlarging phenomenon as one grows and matures in the faith. As Jonathan Edwards once said, regarding a saved soul, “Life is evidenced by movement.” If one is actually alive in the faith, it cannot be a dead, motionless faith, or it is not a saving faith. It must move, that is, it must grow if it is to be recognized as a saving faith. An important and telling question one should ask, and ask often of one’s self is, “Am I a better Christian today than I was a year ago?” Be very circumspect and honest. It may be the most important question one can ever ask oneself.

4. Those who are born-again become genuine components of the Body of Christ. Each component has one or more functions. Becoming born-again is not a retirement event. It’s not an achievement, which allows one to rest on any laurels. The saved person did nothing to either deserve or to achieve this blessed condition. His or her involvement was nothing more than to sincerely believe. Jesus did every bit of the hard and painful pulling which brought the soul out of the ditch leading to hell and onto the straight road to eternity. The soul, who accepts the title Christian must live the name, must become an active, effective, loyal ambassador as His namesake. Anyone who cannot find these characteristics growing evermore dominate on the soul, to the extent that the old other “side-of-the-coin” is seen slowly fading, weakening and dying, should re-examine the sincerity of that initial vow by which one had assumed to have been given a born-again status.

5. Those who are His are called upon to bear fruit. Is there evidence of fruit or is the tree continually barren? Those who know a little Scripture know what Jesus does with trees that don’t bear fruit and vine branches that fail to have grapes (Matthew 21:19-21 and John 15:5,6). Reading and studying Scripture prayerfully, always seeking God’s wisdom, is evidence of involvement and interest in what God so

carefully, accurately and lovingly provides through His Holy Word, the Holy Bible. It's through it and what it reveals that gives us the wisdom and direction we need in order to do His will, to perform the function one is assigned as a member of the Body of Christ. How can one possibly serve Him, as He wants us to serve Him, if we go through life only guessing, applying questionable hearsay and a once-a-week 20-minute sermon? He didn't write the Book to sit on a coffee table or shelf. He wrote it to be studied, mused on, digested, and assimilated into every aspect of our lives. Without having done this, or being in the process of doing so, how can we even pray to Him for guidance? He gave it all to us in advance in His Book!! His guidance is all there ready and willing to be revealed, if we but seek it sincerely.

As you can see, I never run out of ramblings. Having finally "come up for air" I see that I've exhausted all that I felt prompted to say about this topic, at least for now. So, I'll just stop here and pray that there is something of use to someone, as a way to perhaps see more clearly what Jeremiah was given to tell us.