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305 - The Heart Of The Matter

1. Introduction

What does the Bible mean when it speaks of our heart and what's the significance of our heart in relation to the doctrine of the Bible, faith and how we live? In this lessons we'll discuss **The Heart Of The Matter** as we explore what the scriptures reveal about our inner being.

2. The being within

The scriptures use several terms that collectively describe the whole person. In our time the fields of psychology and sociology have made great strides in understanding how humans develop and think. In-depth theories have forwarded our knowledge of human behavior over the past century as scientists in medicine and other disciplines sought to explore the complexities of the human race. The Bible on the other hand is dismissed as being nothing more than moral principles and traditions preserved in the absence scientific methodologies and inquiry. Needless to say it may be surprising to find that the scriptures not only identify the presence of our inner selves but discusses qualitative variations of thought, emotion and behavior.

In this lesson we'll

- a. Define what the Bible means by the "heart"
- b. The anatomy of the inner man
- c. The intimacy of the inner voice
- d. The heart, good and evil
- e. Training the heart

Let's take a look at each of these

3. Defining what the Bible means by the "heart"

The term heart refers to several things. It can refer to the organ in our chest that circulates blood throughout our bodies and sustains our life. Physical problems with the heart are serious and can kill us if ignored. We see images of the heart, a symbol representing something that's loved. In conversation we hear someone referring to their heart in a sense that implies their emotional energy or feelings during times of happiness or loss. If we focus on what's being represented we can identify the term heart as indicating physical, mental and emotional states. In common usage we know what we mean by using the term, but the relationship of the elements I just mentioned remains obscure and undefined.

In the religious world the term heart is used much the same way. It can refer to an individual's mental, physical or emotional state. At times these ideas are attached to experiences interpreted as the Holy Spirit, Christ or God interacting with the individual. I suggest that these uses typically represent subjective states and we'll discuss that in more depth in a later lesson.

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For now we need to focus on understanding what we mean when we refer to the heart, and more importantly, we need to understand what the Bible means when it refers to the heart. In order to do that we have to explore the anatomy of the inner self as the scriptures presents it.

4. Anatomy of the inner self

The Bible uses several terms in speaking of humans. Some of these are used interchangeably at times creating confusion as to what they refer to. A key to understanding the differences between the following terms is keeping them in their proper context. By doing so we can understand what a particular term is referring to. The most commonly used, and confused, terms are:

- a. Soul
- b. Spirit
- c. Heart
- d. Mind

Depending on the translation you're using, these may become difficult to understand due to inconsistent rendering by the translators. To add to the confusion we'll find that each term, while referring to different aspects of the inner self, are not completely independent or exclusive of the other elements. Let's start with a basic definition for each of them.

Soul: *“And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.” (Gen 2.7).* In this verse we're given information that reveals that God created man, Adam, from the earth, a process which was also indicated in the creation of the land animals and creeping things. A difference here is in the animation of the first human. The previous chapter sheds some light on that. *“And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.” (Gen 1.26).*

The term for God in **Genesis 1.1** is **elohim** which is plural. We understand that to include God the father, Christ - the word and the Holy Spirit. In **Genesis 1.26** we see God the father and designer of all things, directing the creation of humans. The difference found in these combined passages is twofold. First, humans will be created in the image of God. We'll talk about that as we go along. Secondly, God breathed into the human's nostrils the breath of life. The word for breath throughout the scriptures can refer to the soul, sometimes referred to as the spirit, and indicates that part of man that not only animated but provided spiritual identity. God is identified as a spirit (**John 4.23**) and man, while having a physical form, became the container for a soul that possessed attributes like those of God. The scriptures indicate that only humans have souls and the soul is immortal. We'll discuss more attributes of the soul as we develop the lesson but for now we can identify the soul as the part of us that is made in the image

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of God and will not die.

Spirit: The term spirit can create confusion very easily as it's often used interchangeably by the translators when the soul is the actual subject. The Bible provides a distinction concerning the spirit that will allow us to differentiate between the two. One of the passages that provides clarity on this speaks of death in both humans and animals. "***For that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts; even one thing befalleth them: as the one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath; so that a man hath no preeminence above a beast: for all is vanity. All go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again. Who knoweth the spirit of man that goeth upward, and the spirit of the beast that goeth downward to the earth?***" (Eccl 3.19-21).

This passage sheds light on a very complex subject. From the Genesis accounts of creation we see that life was brought about in the world by God. The life force that animates is present in both humans and animals and is indistinguishable in that regard. The difference in Solomon's writing appears toward the end of the passage as he states, "***Who knoweth the spirit of man that goeth upward, and the spirit of the beast that goeth downward to the earth?***". Both humans and animals are animated by a life force, given by God and which is subject to the natural process of aging, disease and injury. While Solomon has stated that both animals and humans are created from the earth and will return to it, the spirit of humans returns to God who gave it while the life force of animals returns to the earth as part of the natural process that God instituted. In this statement we see that the soul is unique in humans being created in the image of God, and the spirit, or animating force of humans is unique as well and returns to the creator who gave it. Although we might think that animal life and human life is on an equal plane, in a spiritual sense there's a significant difference.

A good example of this distinction between the soul and spirit can be found in the life of Moses. Moses was raised as the daughter of Pharaoh for the first forty years of his life and fled after killing an Egyptian taskmaster. He then married and lived with his father-in-law, Jethro, in the land of Midian for forty years until God appeared to him and told him to lead the people out of bondage. The final forty years of Moses life were spent in the wilderness as the Hebrews wandered for their lack of faith. As the account of Moses life comes to an end we're given a description of his physical state. "***And Moses was an hundred and twenty years old when he died: his eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated.***" (Deut 34.7).

As we age we may lose our eyesight or at least suffer an impairment in visual acuity. Our bodies slow down, joints don't move the way they used to and our minds may not be as sharp. Moses was preserved by God to do the work the Lord called him to do. He suffered no eye problems as seen in the statement that his "***eye was not dim***" and his energies physically were intact as well as noted in the statement "***nor his natural force abated***". The animating life force here is the spirit, that part of us that will energize the body until such time that we're no longer able to function and die. The relationship of the soul and spirit is complex but we can break it

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down to these terms. Our soul, the eternal part of us created in the image of God, defines our identity while our spirit, given to us by God, will animate and support our physical body until such time that the body's integrity is compromised and can no longer support that life.

Heart: We'll spend the bulk of this lesson identifying and discussing the heart but we need a definition that will provide a framework to understand what's meant and to understand it in relation to the soul and mind. The heart as we'll see is a complex conceptual term that refers to the sum total of an individual's emotional, spiritual and mental state. At times it's presented as a representation of emotions, positive and negative, while at other times it refers to the inner self and may reflect one's moral state or character. Although what I just stated refers to aspects of our existence we can understand, it doesn't answer the question about what the heart is. In a moment we're going to examine a number of scriptures that will provide a functional definition of what attributes of life the term heart embraces. Before we proceed with that we need to define another aspect of humans that plays a significant role in understanding the heart; the mind.

Mind: Most of us probably have a good idea of what we mean when we talk about our mind. What we're referring to is an attribute of our inner being that is able to evaluate and process information. This is the decision making part of our being. The fact collector and sifter that stores memory and other experiences. There are two things this includes. The first is the ability to process, store and retrieve information and the second is the process by which this takes place. The organ known as the brain is the seat of our ability to do this and is critical to existence. The mind is separate from the soul but is an expression of the soul as well as a statement of the quality of our existence. Our minds are able to operate in a passive or active mode and can be fortified through training and exercise. The mind is also a description of the space where we commune internally with our inner voice which we'll discuss next.

5. The intimacy of the inner voice

Dismissive attitudes toward the Bible fail to recognize the depth of the content of revealed scripture. Too many times the idea of the Bible is that it's an ancient document written by individuals who wished to preserve their traditions and personal convictions but were generally undeveloped and ignorant in light of what we now know about human thought and behavior. Nothing can be further from the reality of what the scriptures reveal and contain.

If we consider that the revealed word is God's instruction manual on how to live in the present world and be pleasing to him, then we have to consider that it contains information about our most intricate and intimate aspect. That aspect is referred to in some psychological disciplines as the self. The idea of the self is that we exist as individuals with unique identities. It is this aspect of life that the Bible deals with in depth. I also believe it's why the Bible can be one of the scariest volumes we could ever read. The power and wisdom of the scriptures is such that it reveals things on a level that many of us avoid dealing with until a crisis occurs or we're called on to face our own mortality or that of a loved one. In those situations we find ourselves thinking

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about unpleasant realities. Those who are unwilling or unprepared to deal with these may sink into depression or lose sight of good things over time. This is where the Bible supplies examples and revelations that help us cope and survive.

What is the inner voice and what are we talking about. I'll present some terms first that we can keep in mind as we move forward in the study and will help us appreciate what we find in the scriptures. The first term has to do with the idea of mentation. **Mentation** is simply a term that refers to the ability to engage in thought. There's a developmental aspect of this that we won't go into here but it's something that emerges slowly from the time that we're born until we gain a degree of self awareness, language capability and recognition of objects in the external world.

The second term is **introspection**. This is simply the idea that we can engage in thought and direct it inwards. This is the process we utilize frequently when we're making decisions or trying to come to terms with anything in our lives that presents a challenge. To reflect upon the self is a trait that we can develop or avoid as it fits our overall emotional and general mental development. Individuals who may appear defensive and resistant to outside ideas and change many times refuse to introspect and find ways to occupy their minds so they don't have to contact their inner self. This may also denote past trauma or poor developmental integration while those who are more introspective may appear to be more grounded and flexible.

A third term that gives some people problems is the idea of **self-transparency**. The idea of being able to see one's self is a barrier that we all face at some point in our lives. Aspects of our behavior and thinking may emanate from characteristics that we display but that we don't recognize and resist exploring. The idea of psychotherapy is the process of developing an awareness of areas of our psyche or behavior that are unconscious or otherwise hidden to us. Growth is often marked by the process of inner evaluation and recognition of such traits with the result that we are able to manage or change them over time.

That's a crash course in very rudimentary aspects of the study of psychodynamics and psychology. In the Bible we can see each of these presented in simpler and far more powerful terms. As we examine some of these we'll find that the Bible isn't an archaic book of rules and useless traditions, but is a volume that reveals how we work and what we can do to fix things that are broken.

The inner voice as an attribute of identity and therefore one's soul is brought out very clearly in the Psalms. David writes, "***I remembered God, and was troubled: I complained, and my spirit was overwhelmed. Selah. Thou holdest mine eyes waking: I am so troubled that I cannot speak. I have considered the days of old, the years of ancient times. I call to remembrance my song in the night: I commune with mine own heart: and my spirit made diligent search.***" (Psm 77.3-6). In this passage David recognizes his inner turmoil and anxiety (**introspection**). He calls on his memories of the past and his relationship with God (**mentation**).

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He then “*communes*” with his own heart (**introspection**) a process well documented in the psalms as David deals at times with his sin and the consequences he has brought on himself (**self-transparency**). We also see that the soul, here referred to as the spirit, is synonymous with his personal identity as it’s “*overwhelmed*”. The fusion of the soul with the physical container of the body is demonstrated in his statement that he’s so troubled he can’t speak. In order to answer this his communion with his self directs his thoughts to make diligent search (**introspection**). In four brief verses David records a description of intense emotional and psychological turmoil leading him to examine himself. We also see that the ultimate definition of the self includes the soul, or spirit, his emotions and his physical state resulting from these.

The scriptures also reveal that the inward part of our identity is private and concealed from others. David writes, “*If we have forgotten the name of our God, or stretched out our hands to a strange god; Shall not God search this out? for he knoweth the secrets of the heart.*” (Psm 44.20-21). We can see here that the heart includes the self. The self in turn includes our ability to think, make decisions and direct our behavior. It also shows that we can hide our activities so that only we know them, facts that can be reserved to our selves alone. David reveals however that God is one who can see into our heart, know what we’ve done and understands our intentions.

Paul the apostle notes that we have the ability to conceal things and keep secrets when he writes, “*For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God.*” (1 Cor 2.11). Just as humans have the ability to shield their thoughts from other humans, so the Lord’s thoughts are known only to him. This is evidence that we are made in the image of God as we have the ability to think and reserve those thoughts in memory for ourselves.

The intimate inner part of our makeup is the seat of where we decide what’s important to us. David states, “*Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer.*” (Psm 19.14). In this passage the heart is referred to as that aspect which is capable of meditating (**introspecting**) on issues. There’s also a desire that David expresses that his words (behavior and external display) would be consistent with each other and that both would be acceptable to God. Acceptance by God means that the heart is the seat of the decision making process that directs one’s behavior. Meditation also implies the process of developing self-transparency and being consistent to one’s inner self externally.

The decision making process, introspection and development of self-transparency is indicated in a plea for future generations to avoid the unbelief and sin of their fathers. “*For he established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children: That the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born; who should arise and declare them to their children: That they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but*

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keep his commandments: And might not be as their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation; a generation that set not their heart aright, and whose spirit was not steadfast with God.” (Psm 78.5-8). Note the connections between behavior, knowledge, emotion and the heart. Aspects which are inseparable and indicate that the heart is a product of training or lack of it.

Job recognized that the heart concealed secrets which could be hidden from others. Job was concerned for the spiritual welfare of his children and offered sacrifices on their behalf. *“And his sons went and feasted in their houses, every one his day; and sent and called for their three sisters to eat and to drink with them. And it was so, when the days of their feasting were gone about, that Job sent and sanctified them, and rose up early in the morning, and offered burnt offerings according to the number of them all: for Job said, It may be that my sons have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts.” (Job 1.4-5).* The book of Job is known for the trials suffered by the patriarch at the hands of Satan who challenged God. As we can see throughout the book there’s a recognition of the inner being, it’s private nature and the ability that one has to introspect, meditate and commune with oneself. The book of Job in the Old Testament, as well as the epistle of James in the New Testament, explore the inner workings of the heart directly. Other volumes in the Bible, such as Psalms, Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, deal with the heart from other perspectives providing a framework to understand ourselves externally and internally. The outcome of our life has to do with the nature of our decisions and how that affects whether we’ll be identified as good or evil.

6. The heart, good and evil

We can identify the heart as referring to the interaction of our soul, or identity, our thought process, decisions made and emotional makeup. As we examine the scriptures we see examples and descriptions of hearts that are good and those that are evil. The scriptures also note the origin of that which is good and evil from God’s perspective.

The nature and quality of our relationship with God will be affected by the state of our heart. David states, *“If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me ...” (Psm 66.18).* Christ spoke of the origin of evil and it’s relationship to the heart. *“For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: These are the things which defile a man...” (Matt 15.19-20, Mk 7.21).* In this statement Christ clearly indicates that the behavior of an individual is determined by the inner man or heart. A heart comprised of the sum of one’s thought, emotions and behavior.

Departure from God began with a conscious decision to forget the Lord. Paul states that those in the ancient world *“did not like to retain God in their knowledge”* which resulted in God abandoning them to their own devices (Rom 1.28). David touches on this subject as he speaks of our inner self. *“Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom.” (Psm 51.6).* As David continues he states, *“Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.” (Psm 51.10).* From these passages it’s clear

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that our development and the quality of our character emanates from what we think, and as a result of our thought process, how we act.

These are important passages that describe that we have control over what we become morally and spiritually. But, as David asked God to create a clean heart in him, we have to understand how that happens. The heart that we need to develop is one that has to be trained.

7. Training the heart

As I stated in the discussion of faith, everything in a spiritual sense points to God's word. The revealed word is the foundation of belief in God and the trust necessary to direct our lives in a way that will be pleasing to the Lord. Training begins with the word of God and is dependent on an active pursuit of knowledge which in turn translates into behavior. The Bible sheds light on how the heart is shaped.

David writes, ***"I will praise thee with uprightness of heart, when I shall have learned thy righteous judgments."*** (Psm 119.7). The end result of a properly trained heart is that one will be able to offer acceptable praise to God because they're upright of heart, or righteous. As noted in the verse this is the result of knowledge of God's word, here expressed as ***"judgments"***. Failure to know what God's word teaches will not produce the heart that leads one to God. Hosea stated, ***"My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children."*** (Hos 4.6). Studying God's word, understanding what it says and means is critical to being pleasing to God. Some may convince themselves that we don't have to develop a deep knowledge of God's word but that's not what we find in the scriptures.

Training the heart also means that we focus the inner self on God's word in order to think it over, consider it and understand it. David instructs, ***"But know that the LORD hath set apart him that is godly for himself: the LORD will hear when I call unto him. Stand in awe, and sin not: commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still. Selah."*** (Psm 4.3-4). David wrote this to encourage those who sinned against God to turn from their evil. David states that the godly are those who God will hear and protect because they avoid sin. Something they needed to do according to David was to ***"commune"*** with their own hearts in order to understand themselves and contrast their life with God's laws.

Training the heart is an internal process that one must actively pursue to develop the knowledge, thought and behavior that's acceptable to God. As we do so we'll also strengthen our faith, discover more about ourselves that's good and aspects in need of correction. Our relationship with God will deepen as we understand his word and blessings. Paul speaks of this internal process as he writes, ***"Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves."*** (2 Cor 13.5). God's word teaches us to distinguish good from evil. The scriptures expose areas of our inner lives that need to be corrected, fortified or eliminated. Without that

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guidance we can't be pleasing to the Lord. This isn't an easy process. We often get in our own way as we'll be called upon to look at ourselves from another light. The writer of Hebrews talks about this aspect of the scriptures. "*For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.*" (Heb 4.12). As with faith, training the heart begins with the word of God. Solomon writes, "*The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction.*" (Prov 1.7).

David adds to this stating, "*The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that do his commandment...*" (Psm 111.10). The elements we've been discussing are all here. The idea of turning our view inward to see ourselves, adding the knowledge from the scriptures that we need to have. Applying our active thought process to understand what the word tells us and then seeing ourselves as God does. This is how we draw near to God "*with a true heart in full assurance of faith*" (Heb 10.22).

The heart is the sum total of our being. It involves the soul, our mind, the ability to think, how we feel and how we behave. Desiring to be acceptable to God demands that we train the heart and strengthen our faith. This is an active process and one that will span our lifetime but has the promise of an eternity with God and a better life in the present world.

8. What we've learned

A discussion of the heart would take many more lessons than this one but hopefully there's enough information here that will help you move forward with your own study. Here are some things we've covered in this lesson...

- a. We defined and discussed the soul, spirit, heart and mind
- b. We related those to the ideas of the self, introspection, mentation & self-transparency
- c. We discussed the inner voice & its importance in a scriptural and spiritual sense
- d. The heart is the sum of all our inner being which we can control
- e. The heart must be trained to be pleasing to God
- f. Training the heart begins with the knowledge of the scriptures
- g. Training our heart deepens our faith, reverence for God & appreciation of our blessings

9. Next

Understanding what the heart is and how we need to train it leads to questions about how to proceed and what we're trying to achieve. In the next lesson we'll discuss how God has left instructions so we can build **Quite A Character**.