

The Heart of Man

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Of all the words to be found in the Bible to describe man, the term *heart* provides the most complete characterization. The term *heart* (Gr. *kardia*; Heb. *leb*), denotes the “inner man” (cf. Eph. 3:16), the essence of personality, itself being the seat and center of all life. The heart is that central essence of man with which God is primarily concerned – He looks upon it (I Sam. 16:7), searches it (Prov. 10:8), and tries it (Jere.11:20; 17:10; 20:12). Further, the heart is the center and source of belief and faith (Luke 24:25; Rom. 10:10).

Man's nature or essential essence is a reflection of his heart. Listen to the Scriptures: “*The good man out of the good treasure of his **heart** brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth what is evil; for his mouth speaks from that which fills his **heart***” (Lk. 6:45); “*Do you not understand that everything that goes into the mouth passes into the stomach and is eliminated? But the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the **heart**, and those defile the man. For out of the **heart** come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders. These are things which defile the man*” (Matt. 15:17-20).

To truly understand man, then, requires an understanding of what the Bible means by the term **heart**. In this essay we will concern ourselves only with man's heart as that whereby he imagines, intends, purposes, thinks, understands, and chooses; and as that which needs to be reconciled to God.

Man's Heart – Where It All Takes Place

Man's heart is said to be very profound and deep: “*They devise injustices, saying, 'We are ready with a well conceived plot'; for the inward thought and the **heart** of a man are deep*” (Psm. 64:6). Man's behaviors, expressions, and words have their origins there: “*You brood of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak what is good? For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the **heart***” (Matt. 12:34; cf. 15:17-20).

Every person, whether believer or unbeliever, lives by faith. The difference lies in what each believes. The beliefs that we have about God, ourselves and the world in which we live – which ultimately become the basis of all acts of volition – center in the heart: “*And He said to them, 'O foolish men and slow of **heart** to believe in all that the prophets have spoken!'*” (Lk. 24:25); “*... for with the **heart** man believes, resulting in righteousness*” (Rom. 10:10).

Man's dealings with the momentary issues of life -- his considerations and concerns -- are associated with the heart: “*It has been made a desolation, desolate, it mourns before Me; the whole land has been made desolate, because no man lays it to **heart***” (Jer. 12:11).

Also, his imaginations originate there, and his inclinations are formed there: *“There are six things which the Lord hates,...A **heart** that devises wicked plans”* (Prov. 6:16,18); *“A wise man's **heart** directs him toward the right, but the foolish man's **heart** directs him toward the left”* (Eccl. 10:2).

When the question is asked, “Do you understand?” and the person being asked responds by shaking his or her head in the affirmative, from where within that person does understanding come? You guessed it, from the heart: *“So give thy servant an understanding **heart** to judge Thy people to discern between good and evil”* (1 Kings 3:9).

Motives are an important consideration when trying to understand man. Why does he do what he does? It should come as no surprise to learn that man's intents or motives are present in his heart: *“For the word of God...(is) able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the **heart**”* (Heb. 4:12).

Motives incite to action, which requires the formulation of goals and objectives. These are also formed in the heart: *“Then when he (Barnabas) had come and witnessed the grace of God, he rejoiced and began to encourage them all with resolute **heart** to remain true to the Lord”* (Acts 11:23); *“But Peter said, ‘Ananias, why has Satan filled your **heart** to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back some of the price of the land? While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not under your own control? Why is it that you have conceived this deed in your **heart**? You have not lied to men, but to God’”* (Acts 5:3-4).

The strategy of Ananias certainly reflects his self-serving intentions and his goal of self-preservation. As man determines his goals and objectives, he also devises strategies to bring them about – and there can be a plethora of them! *“Many are the plans in a man's **heart**”* (Prov. 19:21). They involve his contemplations and reasonings, which are also conceived in his heart: *“But there were some of the scribes sitting there and reasoning in their **hearts**, ‘Why does this man speak that way? He is blaspheming; who can forgive sins but God alone?’ And immediately Jesus, aware in His spirit that they were reasoning that way within themselves, said to them, ‘Why are you reasoning about these things in your **hearts**?’”* (Mk. 2:6-8); *“But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her **heart**”* (Lk. 2:19).

As noted above, for goals and objectives to be accomplished, strategies must be devised. But nothing really gets done until the plan is put into action, and that requires volitional choice. Volition, too, is exercised from the heart: *“Slaves, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in the sincerity of your **heart**, as to Christ; not by way of eyeservice, as men pleasers, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the **heart**”* (Eph. 6:5-6).

It goes without saying that the heart of man is complex. Much more can be said, but right

now we need to address man's greatest problem: he is sinful (in his essence) and separated from God. The heart is that aspect of man that needs to be reconciled to God.

Man's Heart – It Needs to Be Reconciled to God

The picture the Bible paints of the unsaved, unreconciled, unregenerate heart is not pretty. Much could be said, but for our purposes we will mention only five basic aspects of the problem.

First, man's heart is said to be unrighteous: *“Do you judge uprightly, O sons of men? No, in **heart** you work unrighteousness”* (Psm. 58:1-2).

Second, because man's heart is essentially unrighteous, he has a natural inclination toward evil: *“Because the sentence is not executed quickly, therefore the **hearts** of the sons of men among them are given fully to do evil”* (Eccl. 8:11); *“The **hearts** of the sons of men are full of evil, and insanity is in their **hearts** throughout their lives”* (Eccl. 9:3).

A third thing is that man's heart is deceitful and desperately wicked: *“The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; Who can understand it?”* (Jer. 17:9); *“They do not know, nor do they understand, for He has smeared over their eyes so that they cannot see and their **hearts** so that they cannot comprehend. ...a deceived **heart** has turned him aside. And he cannot deliver himself”* (Isa. 44:18-20); *“Deceit is in the **heart** of those who devise evil”* (Prov. 12:20).

King David revealed a fourth aspect when he wrote about the perversity and arrogance of man's heart: *“A perverse **heart** shall depart from me. No one who has a haughty look and an arrogant **heart** will I endure”* (Psm. 101:4-5).

Finally, man's heart is stubborn and rebellious. *“This people has a stubborn and rebellious **heart**; they have turned aside and departed. They do not say in their **heart**, ‘Let us now fear the Lord our God’”* (Jer. 5:23).

What is the solution to the problem? Is there no hope? What must be done?

Unbelieving Israel provides a good example of unbelieving people who need to be reconciled to God. Their old heart, like all men, is naturally biased away from God. That natural *condition* of man's heart, as we have come to understand it, is described by Paul in Romans 3:9-12: *“We have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are both under sin; as it is written, ‘There is none righteous, not even one; there is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God; all have turned aside, together they have become useless; there is none who does good, there is not even one.’”*

Ezekiel records God's directive to Israel when he writes, *“Repent and turn away from all your transgressions, so that iniquity may not become a stumbling block to you. Cast*

*away from you all your transgressions which you have committed, and make yourselves a new **heart** and a new spirit!” (Ezek. 18:30-31). In a word, they need to be reconciled to God.*

Reconciliation is the only solution to man's heart problem. If there is any hope for man to make and experience lasting change in his life, he must first be reconciled to God. And it is a work of God's grace that brings it about: *“I will gather you...and give you the land of Israel. When they come there, they will remove all its detestable things and all its abominations from it. And I shall give them one **heart**, and shall put a new spirit within them. And I shall take the **heart** of stone out of their flesh and give them a **heart** of flesh, that they may walk in My statutes and keep My ordinances, and do them....But as for those whose **hearts** go after their detestable things and abominations, I shall bring their conduct down on their heads, declares the Lord God” (Ezek. 11:17-21).*

I am well aware that the primary intent of the passages just cited is for physical Israel. But the concept of reconciliation – the need of it and the means of effecting it – is the same for all men. Therefore, *“Be reconciled to God” (2 Cor. 5:20).*

In all of my exposure to the world of psychology, I have yet to read anything that approaches what we have presented in this brief article. The basic problem is one of revelation. It is obvious that man's observations and subjective opinions about himself are seriously deficient. Consequently, he desperately needs a word from God.

It is essential to note the implications of the biblical teaching about man's heart as it relates to our ability to *“admonish (counsel) one another” (Rom. 15:14)*. Biblical counseling begins with the premise that God's word is totally adequate and sufficient to equip us to understand man and his problems. It claims that for itself (see 2 Tim. 3:16-17; 1 Pet. 1:1-11).

Counseling is an art form, it is not a science. Consequently, we need to be careful to distinguish understanding from technique. That is, biblical and non-biblical counselors may use the same or similar techniques in dealing with people, but the basis of their approach is different. One is based on a biblical view of man and his problems, while the other is based on man's view of man and his problems. In your ministry to others, be sure to give clear, accurate biblical advice – or direct them to someone who can – lest you direct them into the philosophies of the world – even with good intent!