

TEACHING NOTES: A Summary of Key Points

'Anchored in Christ' Part 4: 'Devices of the Heart' - Proverbs 19:21

Main Scriptures: Psalm 51, Philippians 3:12-21, Hebrews 4:12-13

Others: Genesis 3:4; 6:5, Joshua 6:1, Proverbs 4:23, 16:9, 23, 17:22, 18:12, 21:2; Jeremiah 17:9, Acts 13:22, Ephesians 4:17-19, 1 Timothy 4:2

The physical heart is:

- the primary organ of the body
- the size of a closed fist, weighs up to 400+ grams
- expands and contracts around 3.5 billion times in an average lifetime (75 years)
- beats approximately 100,000 times per day

The spiritual heart is

- actively discerned by the Word of God (**Hebrews 4:12-13**)
- predisposed to folly, sin and selfishness; deceitful (**Jeremiah 17:9**)
- is intertwined with the mind as the seat of all motives, desires, and emotions
- determines our priorities and how we live our lives; e.g. rationalises our behaviour as 'right'
- the source of all human difficulty (**Genesis 3:4**)

The human heart is capable of good or evil depending on what it draws upon from its storehouse (see below). A yielded or 'soft' heart can achieve God's purposes but one left to its own devices (will, choices, and plans) will readily manifest selfish actions. The heart likes to *rationalise* and *justify* its schemes meaning everything we do is right in our own eyes, but beware; the Lord 'weights the heart' (**Proverbs 21:2**). History is a litany of the purposes and plans of men's (sic) hearts; some have resulted in great good, while others have produced great evil. However, God has set in place boundaries to earthly authority, his plans cannot ultimately be thwarted, and there is divine judgement for evildoers. They won't get away with vile crimes.

In **Psalm 51** David speaks about desiring 'truth in the inward parts' (**vs. 6 & 10**). *How does the heart function spiritually?* I suggest four ways:

1. as a **storehouse**. A 'bank', if you like, where every experience becomes a repository from which our thoughts and reactions are formed, and from which 'withdrawals' are made; i.e. emotional responses.
2. through **conscience** which is a God-given discerner of good and evil. A conscience yielded to God shuns evil but an unyielded conscience can create destructive desires or actions. The conscience can also be seared (like wood that burns to charcoal) and it can't then be 'unseared'. A person involved in sexual sin, for example, may feel conscience in the first instance, but if they exercise their will and choices to continue in the behaviour, subsequent acts will be justified and become 'normal'.

3. it can be *healthy* or *wounded*. A healthy heart is 'soft' and open to God and able to process emotion; it has a godly sense of perspective on problems and retains hope. A wounded heart is quick to draw from its storehouse an arsenal of negative experiences and bring them to life all over again, sometimes in real bitterness. A wounded heart can easily become 'hard' simply to protect itself from further hurt (like 'watchmen on the walls', **Joshua 6:1**). And a hard heart is vulnerable to addictions and obsessive behaviours.
4. it can be **malleable** or **hardened**. A malleable (soft) heart will result in growth and maturity, and an openness to God, others, and new experiences. Whereas a hard heart is calloused and insensitive, and if wounded as well, will be very protective and often fearful.

Some years ago I read a pathologist's report of a wider relative's post mortem. In clinical terms it spoke of 'aortic calcification and blockage of the lumen' which simply means blocked arteries and restricted blood flow. Interestingly, that person was also hard-hearted and bitter about many aspects of life. I think we can conclude there was a direct correlation – if not causal relationship here – between the physical and spiritual heart. When a callous develops the skin thickens and loses sensitivity; so it is spiritually with a hard heart.

So, we need to guard our heart because truly it is the wellspring or abundant source of life (**Proverbs 4:23**).

To be anchored in Christ in relation to the heart is a deep process of **yielding, discipline, renewal** and **alignment** with God's will. And the good news is that God helps us! The Spirit of Christ; the one who overcame temptation and resisted all sin; the Holy Spirit, is in us as believers, and he helps us in our weakness. Yielding and discipline are acts of the will but only with God's help can they be fully brought into alignment with Christ.

Questions to ponder

1. Can you see in others and yourself a hard heart? How might this block or impede spiritual growth?
2. A generous open, or soft heart is attractive. Can you think of a person who is like this? They are likely more than just nice on the outside!
3. As a storehouse, there is much locked away in every person's heart. Reflect on your own life experiences. What events have been positive in providing a positive storehouse? What experiences or events have been harmful, hurtful, or damaging? Use your reflections as a basis for prayer, giving thanks for the positive things, and asking for God's help in the negative or painful experiences.

Artwork: 'Peaceful Heart' by 'Banksy'
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