

The Biblical Heart (Part 2) By Wendy Wood



In this second blog about the biblical heart, the goal is to show the wide range of ways the bible describes the heart and demonstrate that the heart is a central theme of scripture. Biblical counseling is about genuine heart change because the heart is the control center of the soul. The heart is the thoughts, emotions, desires and the volitional will to act. By having a broad understanding of the heart, we will see how the heart is comprehensive in determining the way of life.

Why is it so important to understand the heart as God describes it? The answer is because God looks at the heart of every single person. God's greatest command is about the human heart.

"But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart."

1 Samuel 16:7

Deuteronomy 6:5 commands "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might." And Jesus added to this in Matthew 22:38 that this is the first and greatest command.

To be able to love God wholeheartedly we must understand what that means. And as biblical counselors, we must know how to address and disciple the heart as well.

First, our hearts are at the root of our sin. Our hearts are deceived by false teaching and our hearts are lured away from honoring God by the lustful desires of the heart. Our hearts are responsible for our sinful thoughts, sinful desires, and even our emotions can be sinful as they are not always aligned with God's desires.

Our hearts are deceived into believing lies about God and his word. **Deuteronomy 11:16 says, "Take care lest your heart be deceived, and you turn aside and serve other gods and worship them."** In this scripture we see that we can be deceived into believing that idols and false gods will give us the comfort, control, approval, or love that we are seeking. Our thoughts and desires chase after sinful things because we easily believe the lies that sin will make us happy. Another scripture that shows our deceitful hearts is **Psalm 12:2 which says, "Everyone utters lies to his neighbor; with flattering lips and a double heart they speak."** A double heart is one that deceives itself and others. Flattery seeks personal gain by using words that we hope will entice others to do as we want. This deception originates in our hearts as we chase after our sinful desire rather than seeking to love God. We do what we do because we want what we want. A heart that has a sinful desire will often sin to get that desire. The deception of believing it's worth it to sin against God begins in our hearts. We deceive even ourselves thinking the sin will be worth it, and sin never delivers long-term what we are looking for.

Our hearts plot sinful actions. **Psalm 36:1-4 says, "Transgression speaks to the wicked deep in his heart, there is no fear of God before his eyes. For he flatters himself in his own eyes that his iniquity cannot be found out and hated. The words of his mouth are trouble and deceit; he has ceased to act wisely and do good. He plots trouble while on his bed; he sets himself in a way that is not good; he does not reject evil."** Transgression, the breaking of God's commands, starts in the heart. People have a tendency to blame someone else or their circumstances for their sin, but scripture is clear that sin begins within. People convince themselves that sin will stay secret and in following the transgression of their heart, they stop following God's wisdom and stop doing good. The heart is what leads a person astray from God.

Second Corinthians 11:3 confirms that deceitful thoughts start in the heart. **"But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ."** The serpent tempted Eve by offering wisdom and autonomy, and Eve sinned because that was the desire of her

heart. Our thoughts of “I want to be in control” or “I deserve comfort” will lead us astray from the truth of Christ, also.

Scripture talks about attitudes within the heart. An unbeliever has a hard heart. **Ephesians 4:18** says, “**They (unbelievers) are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart.**” Without God giving a person a new heart in the new covenant, an unbeliever’s heart remains hard and blind to the goodness and truth of who God is and what he has done for believers in Christ.

The heart can be arrogant. “**Whoever has a haughty look and an arrogant heart I will not endure**” (**Psalm 101:5**). An arrogant heart is one that has elevated self above others and looks down on people God has made. An arrogant heart has thoughts that are “**raised against the knowledge of God (2 Corinthians 10:3-4)** and rejects the need to humbly submit before God.

In **Romans 9:2** Paul talks about having “**unceasing anguish in (his) heart**”. He is broken by the thought that some of his fellow Jews are not trusting in Christ and the idea that they are cut off from Christ makes his heart sick. David also talks about his heart being in anguish. **Psalm 55:4** says, “**My heart is in anguish within me; the terrors of death have fallen upon me**”. David is surrounded by enemies and feels oppressed by wicked men. It is his soul, or heart, that responds with thoughts and feelings of severe suffering.

Foolishness is another trait that comes from the heart. **Romans 1:21** talks about foolish hearts being darkened by not acknowledging who God is and giving thanks to God. Futile thinking leads to a foolish heart. “**For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking and their foolish hearts were darkened.**” A foolish heart refuses to recognize God as God. A foolish heart doesn’t regard God as worthy of worship and honor. **Proverbs 22:15** tells us that people start out foolish. “**Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline drives it far from him.**” The natural state of our hearts is foolish, and we need help and discipline to change. Our hearts are deeply and innately flawed by the curse of sin. A heart of folly wants its own way. It is only through discipline and God putting a new heart in a believer that changes the heart.

We’ve seen some of the ways the bible describes the heart. The bible also shows that it is from the heart that all of our thoughts, words, and actions come. It is tempting for us sinners to blame our circumstances or other people for our words and actions, but God’s word is clear that all of our responses come from within our own hearts. No one else can make us sin. No one else is responsible for our sin. **Romans 2:6** says, “**He**

will render to each one according to his works". Second Corinthians 5:10 says, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad." God is clear that each person is responsible for their own deeds in the body. God holds each person responsible for their own reactions. Therefore, we must understand how the heart works.

The heart is the overflow of life. Consider these passages:

Matthew 15:19 "For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander." In one sentence, Jesus sums up that our thoughts, our actions, and our words come from our heart. No one else causes those behaviors or thoughts, they come from within.

James 4:1-3 "What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions." Don't miss the significance of this passage. We get angry and respond to people in ways that cause fights and quarrels because we are not getting what we want. The desires within our heart drive our behavior. When we don't get what we want, and are willing to be angry, say harsh things, or manipulate to get our way, we know that desire is too big! In this passage, James is warning about inordinate desires, desires that have grown to an idolatrous status in our hearts. If we are willing to sin to get our desire fulfilled, or willing to sin if we think we are about to lose what we desire, that desire has become an idol. Our responses come from the heart that wants what it wants.

Luke 6:43-45 "For no good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit, for each tree is known by its own fruit. For figs are not gathered from thornbushes, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush. The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks."

Again, we see from deep within, come the fruit of our lives, our thoughts, words and actions. Our angry words, our discontented feelings, our disapproving look, our lustful thoughts, all come from the heart. The heart is the root system that grows the tree and produces the fruit. Whatever the heart is loving and treasuring, that is the fruit that will be produced.

There are certainly times when we may fool other people about the condition of our hearts. The tree, or life, that seems to be producing “good fruit” may in fact be rotten to the core. For example, a person who gives money to the poor may look to other people as a God loving, generous person, but in reality that person may be giving the money out of a heart of pride and wanting others to think highly of himself. Or a person who always has the best bible study answers may not have a “good” heart that loves the Lord and is sharing knowledge to help others. This person may desire the reputation of being a “good Christian” or for another prideful reason. Over time, the genuine fruit is revealed and people tend to be found out. However, God always knows the true heart.

Hebrews 4:12-13 says, “**For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.**” God’s word is designed to convict and discern the motives and intentions of the heart. Every aspect of our hearts is known by God. He is not fooled by our false pretenses or hidden desires. Everything is exposed, seen, and judged perfectly by God.

Romans 8:27 tells us that God knows the heart of humans. “**And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.**” And **Psalm 139:1-4** tells us that God knows our thoughts and words before we even have them! “**O Lord, you have searched me and known me! You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar. You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways. Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O Lord, you know it altogether.**” God knows our thoughts. God is not deceived when we try to hide our sinful thoughts or actions from others. Every aspect of our hearts and lives are known fully by God. This is a sobering thought and should lead us to carefully consider the sins that we consider “private”. God sees it all!

Scripture has much to say about the heart. Always keep in mind what Samuel said to David in **1 Samuel 16:7** “**But the Lord said to Samuel, “Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.”** God does not evaluate people as other people do. God sees the innermost depths of a person’s soul and judges perfectly!

In the next blog we’ll continue to consider the significance of the heart in scripture and how God changes the hearts of believers.