

The Biblical Theology of the Heart

Revised January, 2009

Love the Lord your God with all your Heart

Deuteronomy 6:5 and Luke 10:27

And the seed that fell on the good soil stands for those with a good and noble Heart

Luke 8:15

If you confess with your mouth and believe in your Heart...

Romans 10:9-10

All the same," said the Scarecrow, "I shall ask for brains instead of a heart; for a fool would not know what to do with a heart if he had one. "I shall take the heart," returned the Tin Woodman; "for brains do not make one happy, and happiness is the best thing in the world."

L Frank Baum, The Wonderful Wizard of Oz

Some time under the microscope.

I remember where I was and what I was doing: sitting in a chair, surrounded by 200 men at a Conference/Retreat event in CO, listening to the speaker talk about men needing to “*get their hearts back*”. My mind began to wonder as he spoke and a dialog within me began... a conversation (I assumed) I was having with myself. You know when you go to a restaurant that plays music but you are tuned into someone else so you don’t hear the music, then you catch or notice a song you like and now the music is louder than the person speaking. That is what happened to me in that moment. I drifted from the audible words that the speaker was sharing and tuned into the internal words trafficking through my mind. The thoughts and questions rose to the surface, "Why haven’t I heard this before? Is this right, is this true?" Then another question arose from within, "I wonder how many passages there are about this heart stuff?" That was one of my traditional questions used to measuring the Biblical weight and significance of any subject...how many verses there are related to it. To answer this interrupting question that had surfaced in the middle of this conference session, I flipped to the back of my NIV Study

Bible's concordance. You know the place in the back of a Bible you go to in order to find a quick reference to the verse that kinda know and sorta recall but aren't sure where it is actually located? When I got to my word, *Heart*, I was stunned... there was over three columns of verses with this one common word and the phrase within the bible verse that used it, *HEART*. The print was tiny mind you- 8 font and covered one page then into the next. Add an "s" to make it *hearts* and the references started up again. Now I don't know about you but in my limited scholarly way, I tend to apply this small validating equation to the scriptures to determine if it is a major theme and of significance, or not. Major means... lots of scripture references. *HEART* qualified. I was stuck in that moment observing how often the Bible uses the term *heart*. There were more than 200 points of contact (not an exhaustive concordance). I saw "*heart*" passages from Genesis to Revelation; the Old Testament, then Jesus and His disciples in the New Testament all referencing the heart. I remember sitting there in that moment silently yelling, "Oh my gosh, I think this *is* really important!" I left that session and the weekend awakened, disrupted and wanting more.

When I returned home, my quest to research the subject of heart was before me and my game plan was simple; look up all these passages and uncover what they say. After a few months I found myself over the theological microscope looking at sample after sample, Petri dish after Petri dish if you will, in order to see microscopically the Greek and Hebrew that my naked eye had missed. It was becoming clearer and clearer to me, weighty the heart is in scripture and how critical the heart was and is to God...much more so than our behavior. Author, Ted Tripp, offers us this explanation in his book, *Shepherding a Child's Heart*, "*The scripture teaches that the heart is the control center for life...Proverbs 4:23- 'Above all else, guard your **heart**, for it is the wellspring of life.'*"¹ *The heart is a well from which all the issues of life gush forth. The behavior a person exhibits is an expression of the overflow of the **heart**.*"²

Not only were the passages that contained the word *heart* coming clearer to me but a much larger picture was starting to emerge. For me the overwhelming conclusion that God was leading me to

¹ All Scripture references taken from the "*New International Version*" unless otherwise noted.

² Tedd Tripp, "*Shepherding a Child's Heart*", (Wapwallopen: Shepherd Press, 1995), 3

was that I can't live in these two realms with 2 kingdoms without my heart, my whole heart. Now before we go much further, I have to acknowledge that it will not be possible for me to unpack every passage in the Bible concerning the heart. You however, are invited to go further and deeper on your own. Many of the scripture references concerning the heart will fit under multiple sections of the paragraphs that follow, such as when Paul talks about the **heart** in Romans 2. I could place it under the heading of "Paul's Writings" or "Circumcision regarding the Heart", because I don't do both I trust you; will make the connections and applications of this *multifaceted* subject and expansive biblical theme of the heart. In order to see all the passages covered, even at a glance, I have italicized them and have bolded the word **heart** for emphasis throughout the rest of the chapter. Recovering the heart is one of the most significant things a person can do. Partner with God in its recovery... there is few things greater that we can do.

Definitions of the Heart in Hebrew and Greek

Offering and understanding the Biblical word **heart**, and its truest meaning, might be a really good place to start. The subject of "**Heart**" in scripture is indeed deep and broad. Obviously there are some passages that refer to the physical and actual blood-pumping organ in our chest, but the most often used definition /description can be summarized by Easton's Illustrated Dictionary of Biblical Terms. Regarding the **heart**, Easton's refers it to as "***the heart is that center of spiritual activity and all the operations of human life***".³ In the Hebrew language the term *leb* and its synonym *lebab* appear approximately 860 times in the Old Testament. Vines Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words states, "***The heart is regarded as the seat of emotions, seat of knowledge and wisdom, and can be used of the man himself or his personality. It is also considered the seat of conscience and moral character***".⁴ Here are some significant and noteworthy samples from the Old Testament... we are told to *love the Lord our God with all our heart* (Deuteronomy 6:5, Luke 10:27), that *the Lord searches the heart* (1 Chronicles 28:9) and that *we will be given a new heart* (Ezekiel 36:26).

³ Bible Navigator: "Easton's Illustrated Dictionary of Biblical terms"- Heart

⁴ W.E.Vine, Merrill F. Unger and William White, "Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words", (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1985) 297

One of the larger questions that always seems to surface in the discussion or debate regarding the heart is whether or not the heart is good or evil?" The overwhelming weight of the scriptures refers to the heart as a good, wonderful and crucially important place. The battle between two kingdoms is for its alliance, affection and allegiance. The good heart is especially true for the believers and followers of Christ. A few passages do talk about the sin and evil found in the heart, yet *the believer heart, the regenerate heart* (2 Tim 2:2, Ezekiel 18:31) is the one truly in question here. The heart that passed through being *born again* (John 3:3) is the one that must be examined and rightly concluded by the student of the scriptures.

When a life is searched and rescued by Christ, the recovery of significant things comes next. Change would be an understatement; *transformation* would be getting closer to what has happened and what is ahead. The man or woman who was once dead in their sin is now alive. That is truly a transformational work of Christ. The question is then, is the heart still evil and sinful, hard (like a stone) and wicked after one is transformed and steps into the family of God? When a person, by repentance of sin and acceptance of God's provision for sin, the savior Jesus Christ is justified to God is he or she still wicked and sinful at their core? Scripture states that the work of Christ revives, reshapes and restores us from our inside core, the heart, out. Would Jesus then, in the form of the Holy Spirit, reside in a predominantly or even remotely evil, sinful place? Scripture clearly states that *He comes to dwell in our hearts* (Rom. 10, Acts 15:9, 2 Cor. 6:11). Maybe the question is, "Is this figurative?" My caution would be to walk gently on that ice, be careful here to apply the "figurative label" when the biblical evidence points unanimously to a *real* place not a figurative one. And if it is figurative then what weight and significance can be placed on it if it were, contrary to scripture, evil after it is redeemed?

According to the scriptures, the heart is the home of personal life. Therefore a man is "designated" to the orientation of his heart, which is described in the Bible as: wise (I Kings 3:12), pure (Psalms 24:4 and Matthew 5:8), upright and righteous (Gen. 20:5, Psalms 11:2 and 78:72), good (Luke 8:15). The heart is also the seat of conscience (Rom. 2:15) and in its unregenerate or "unsaved" or natural state-wicked (Gen. 8:21) and therefore can and does contaminate the whole person. If the well is polluted, the water will be bad; if the root source is contaminated or infected the fruit will be also. God knows this and that is why we must go

through a heart transformation (Ezekiel 11:19 and 36:26) before we can truly have a relationship with God. He recognizes our deepest need and does something only He can do...transform us. Acts of a cleansing, softening and restoring are done for us, to us and with us...this is good news, really good new!!!

Old Testament Law

Three references I want to look at in the Old Testament and the relevance of the subject of the heart. The first mention of the heart is in Genesis chapters 6-8, second, the role of the heart in fulfillment of the law and the commandments in Deuteronomy 6:5 and thirdly, the incredible historical narrative involving King Solomon and his heart in I Kings 3:7-15.

In Genesis 6:5-7 the association of wickedness with the heart is made. *“The Lord saw how great man’s wickedness on the earth had become and that every inclination of the thoughts of his **heart** was only evil all the time”*, notice the connection to thoughts and not emotions or desires regarding the heart. I really like how John Wesley describes the heart in his commentary on this passage in Genesis, Wesley calls it the “corrupt spring”⁵. Because of the fallen and lost condition of man’s **heart**, God does a sad and grand work of redemption, a great do-over. He flooded the earth, sparing only Noah and his family to begin again. God found it necessary to provide a law in which people would know how to live in a righteous way before Him. Because of the condition and the activity in the human **heart** we see God is grieved. He moves from places of compassion and patience to an expression of judgment and remorse. The **heart** is clearly the place that evil can and does reside when we have no movement whatsoever toward the living God, choosing to live our lives without Him, a heart in exile. A heart that chooses or prefers to stay lost, fallen...dead.

Exodus 20 is the beginning of God’s formal law when He gives the Ten Commandments. Later, it is in Deuteronomy chapter 6, verses 5 and 6 that Israel is on the verge of the promise land and they are commanded again to "hear and obey". Duane Christensen writes in his Word Biblical Commentary writes, *“In some respects it can be argued that the whole book of Deuteronomy is*

⁵ Bible Navigator 3.0, Holman Software: “Bible Navigator- Special Academic Edition: John Wesley’s Commentary”, copy write 2004

simply a commentary on this one verse (verse 5): ‘You shall love Yahweh your God with all your **heart**, and with all your soul-life, and with all our might.’⁶ Later in the Gospels, when Jesus is asked what is the greatest commandment (Matthew 22:34-40) He quotes this passage in Deuteronomy, “Love the Lord your God with all your **heart** and with all your soul and with all your strength. This is the first and greatest commandment.” The book of Deuteronomy has many references to the heart...

4:29- look for Him with all your **heart**

10:12- love God with all your **heart**

11:13- serve Him with all your **heart**

13:3- love Him with all your **heart**

26:16- observe them (the law) with all your **heart**

30:2-10 love and obey Him with all your **heart**.

This raised a significant question for me. *Would God command us to do something that was impossible for us to do then or now?* It is obvious the heart is very important to God by these passages (remember, we are still only exploring what might be best understood as the cliff notes on the subject). The heart is the most important issue to God, because He knows that when He gets a person’s heart, He gets the person. One of my favorite stories that I uncovered in my exploration and research on the heart was what I found when looking at Solomon. It has often been taught that Solomon asked for *wisdom*. Go ahead and ask a room full of adult believers in a Sunday school class or Bible study small group some time...“What did Solomon ask God for?” I have yet to hear someone get it right. Let’s look at what he really asked for from I Kings 3:7-15,

“Now, O Lord my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David. But I am only a little child and do not know how to carry out my duties. Your servant is here among the people you have chosen, a great people, too numerous to count or number. So give your servant a **discerning heart** to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong. For who is able to govern this great people of yours?” (The King James says an “**understanding heart**”). The passage goes on to say that *this was pleasing in the sight of the Lord that Solomon had asked this thing*. And God said to him, “Because you have asked this

⁶ Duane L Christensen, “Word Biblical Commentary- Deuteronomy 1-11”, Dallas: Word Publisher, 1991 p143-144

*thing and have not asked for yourself long life, nor have asked riches for yourself, nor have you asked for the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself discernment to understand justice, behold, I have done according to your words. Behold, I have given you a **wise and discerning heart**, so that there has been no one like you before you, nor shall one like you arise after you.” (NASB).*

Solomon asked for a certain type of heart: discerning and wise! You English majors, look what the noun is and what the adjectives are...wise and discerning – adjective, *HEART* -noun. If that wasn't amazing enough, look what comes shortly after in II Kings 9:4- God says to Solomon at Gibeon, “*As for you, if you walk before me in **integrity of heart** and uprightness, as David your father did, and do all I command and observe my decrees and laws, I will establish your royal throne over Israel forever...*”

(There is an honorable mention passage for me that runs a close second to the Solomon story and it is found in First Chronicles 28:9 when David is speaking to his son Solomon, “*And you my son Solomon, acknowledge the God of your father, and serve him with **wholehearted** devotion and with a willing mind for the Lord searches every **heart** and understands every motive behind the thoughts*”).

Two of the greatest rulers and kings have it recorded in scripture that their greatest quality was their hearts toward God. By no means were they perfect, on the contrary their flaws were great and their mistakes cost them dearly. It might be argued that greater than their blunders (their sin) were their hearts for God. The heart is important to God!

From the OT Prophets

The prophet's writings in the Old Testament, both major and minor, consistently make reference to the heart. Two prophets stand out by writing referencing more than the others regarding the subject of the heart, **Jeremiah** (4:14-19, 5:23, 11:20, 12:3, 17:5-9, 20:9-12, 24:7, 29:10-13, 32:40, 48:29, 49:16) and **Ezekiel** (2:4, 3:7, 6:9, 11:19-21, 18:31, 25:15, 36:25-26). There are also prophets who spoke to the heart, or even better for us to understand is that in their writings, God speaks to us through them about the heart (they are prophets after all, the spokesman of God, *Thus sayeth the Lord*). The following prophets make honorable mention concerning the

heart: **Ezra** (6:22, 7:10,27), **Nehemiah** (4:6, 9:8), **Isaiah** (6:10, 9:9, 10:12, 40:11, 42:25, 46:12, 57:15, 65:14, 66:18) and **Joel** (2:12-13).⁷

The consistent language and themes of these Old Testament prophets and their books are that the people of God, Israel, have contaminated, “adulterated their hearts”. The prophets expose and declare the Jewish Southern Kingdom of Judah, and the Northern Kingdom of Israel, have gotten in bed with other gods. The language used by God and spoken through the prophets is like that of a jealous lover. God is grieved and hurt and yet committed to the covenant relationship-this marriage with His people. So much so that He says to His adulterous people who are being intimate with other gods in and through their worship and actions, “You have been untrue to me, but I will come for you.” God compares Israel, his covenant people, to “*harlots*”, “*she camels in heat*” and “*adulterers*”, those who have taken their worship somewhere other than Jehovah God. In looking at a few passages from Jeremiah and Ezekiel we can see just how committed God is to His people and what He will do to bring us back to *intimacy* with Him. It is a beautiful picture of the lover of our hearts and souls coming to rescue us from ourselves, false Gods and from our enemies.

Jeremiah 29:10-14- “ *This is what the Lord says, ‘When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my gracious promise to bring you back to this place. For I know the plans I have for you, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your **heart**. I will be found by you and will bring you back from captivity’ ...”*. The purpose of the exile was to force Israel back to God.⁸

Move on in the book of Jeremiah to chapter 31, verses 31-33 where the prophet Jeremiah declares the word of the Lord “ *...I will put my law in their minds and write it on their **hearts**.*

⁷ Bible Navigator 3.0, Holman Software: Naves Topics, Heart

⁸ John F. Walvoord, Roy B. Zuck, “The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament”, (Colorado Springs: Cook Communications, 2000), 1166

will be their God and they will be my people.” (This passage will be highlighted at length in the section on Covenant and Circumcision).

Two significant works are to take place. We are to seek God with all our **hearts** and second, He is going to write his laws on our **hearts** (and minds). This is a contrast to where God wrote the laws down for the people the first time as 10 commandments, the stone tablets (Ex. 34:1).⁹ The obvious difference is that one is external and the other, internal.

The book of the prophet Ezekiel carries a similar message as it relates to our hearts but one that is more profound because of the work and promises of God *in us and for us*. In chapter 11 verse 18 and 19, Ezekiel says, *“They will return to it (the land of inheritance) and remove all vile images and detestable idols. I will give them an **undivided heart** and **put a new spirit in them**; I will **remove from them their heart of stone** and give them a **heart of flesh**.”* This is good news for God’s people. We will no longer operate from a hard heart but a soft one, soft toward God. When we come to God by faith in his Son Christ we are made over and given a soft heart, a heart of flesh, one that can and will be able to respond to God in faith as we grow in our relationship and intimacy with Him.

Psalms and Proverbs

Though there are many Psalms to choose from, this section will be limited to three passages in the books of Psalms and Proverbs that speak very specifically about the heart. Of all the books of the Bible, the Psalms holds the most references of the heart. The Bible Knowledge Commentary states, *“Of all the books in the Old Testament the Book of Psalms most vividly represents the faith of individuals in the Lord. The Psalms are the inspired responses of human hearts to God’s revelation of Himself in law, history and prophecy.”*¹⁰

Psalm 9:1-2, *“I will praise you, O Lord, with all my **heart**; I will tell of all your wonders. I will be glad and rejoice in you; I will sing praise to your name”*. David is the author of this Psalm

⁹ Walvoord, and Zuck, OT 2000, 1171

¹⁰ Walvoord, and Zuck, OT 2000, 779

and its occasion is to honor God as the *vindicator* of the nation, Israel and the judge of those nations that were opposed to God's people.¹¹ David often writes of the heart in the Psalms as the source or wellspring in which he offers praise and or declares his pain and grief.

In Psalm 37:3-4 David says, "*Trust in the Lord and do good; dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture. Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart*". The implications are clear as David connects desires and the heart. Many Bible teacher's message would have believers to think that the desires of the heart are solely wicked, perverse and not to be trusted. This we must examine more in detail later. David is actually promoting in these lines that our desires are housed and connected to our hearts and to trust God with our desires is a way to delight in our relationship with Him as the one who cares for where we are and how we are.

Lastly, Psalm 51:10 says, "*Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.*" David desires an inward renewal at this deepest core level, the heart. David requests in this Psalm that this deep place be clean, uncontaminated and unencumbered. He knows that only God can make this deep cleansing happen, only God can make a heart pure. Is David a believer? The answer is surely yes. Can a believer be affected or dirtied again? Yes, not in the way that would cost him his relationship with God but rather on that would cause him to go to God for renewal again and again. Once we learn to ride a bike doesn't mean we don't fall or crash any more. It means that when we do, we have the help we need to get back on and go again. Though beliefs held deep in my heart may move me to glorious things they also can move me to sin (this is true whether you are a believer or unbeliever). It doesn't make sense for the scriptures to record something that David asks for that is or would be unattainable or too lofty to be accomplished. When he asks for a *pure* heart or to enter into the process of God purifying his heart it is logical to see it as an example and an invitation for me to do the same and for God to respond in similar ways with love and a commitment to renew me at my core.

The book of Proverbs is a book of moral and ethical instructions. How we can lead wise and godly lives, as well as how to avoid the pitfalls of unwise and ungodly living are the broad and

¹¹ Walvoord and Zuck, OT 2000, 791

timeless themes of the book.¹² The Bible Knowledge Commentary actually says that, “*Proverbs were employed by parents and teachers to impart wisdom in a manner that made learning an adventure and a challenge*”¹³.” While we are going to move to specific passages, this is good information as it pertains to the heart of youth and the use of the Proverbs in the life of the Hebrew culture. The Proverbs frequently address a particular audience, sons. For example, “my son(s)” is used 24 times. It is considered wisdom literature and written in a poetic style.¹⁴ The “child or children” have a special place in scripture. We have already stated the importance of the book of Proverbs in their Hebrew education during Biblical times and culture; it would be the equivalent to our *home school curriculum* but for the Hebrew child of Biblical eras. A few highlights of these cultural backgrounds, just for context would be important to note.

In the Old Testament traditions, children were regarded as a gift from the Lord (especially sons). Much went into naming a child and caring for their lives and their hearts. Mothers did most of the training in the early years. Daughters stayed with their mothers for this manner of guidance and teaching until they were married. Sons, as they progressed in age, became more dependent on the father for their education¹⁵. Boys were trained in farming, tending livestock and in trades usually upheld in the tradition of the family. Fathers were bound to protect their children and were given the power of life or death over them.¹⁶ On rare occasions when well to do families could, they would provide a child a private tutor. Many Hebrew children attended school, if a school was available. Unlike today, children spent countless hours with their mothers and fathers. It was a constant and the way of life. As a command of the Lord, children were expected to work with and alongside their parents and to obey them. (Exodus 20:12, Deut. 5:16, Ephesians 6:1)

¹² Walvoord and Zuck, 2000, 901

¹³ Walvoord & Zuck, 2000, 902

¹⁴ Andrew Hill, John H. Walton, “A Survey of the Old Testament”, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 2000), 358-359

¹⁵ Bible Navigator 3.0, Holman Software: “Bible Navigator- Special Academic Edition: History and Culture of the Bible- Manners”, copy write 2004

¹⁶ Bible Navigator: “International Standard Bible Encyclopedia”- Children

That being the case, all these passages (and there are several more) represent instruction for a child's heart: Proverbs 3:1-6, Proverbs 4: 4, 21, 23 and Proverbs 22: 17 and 18. Universally to all the passages is the stage or backdrop of a *father-teacher* spending time with his child, teaching him the ways of wisdom and life which are bound up in understanding what it means to walk with the Lord and trust in Him. I once heard the great Bible teacher, Howard Hendricks once say, "It is impossible to impart that which you do not own." I believe that statement applies here. What was entrusted to the father when he was a boy and tested by time as he grew up is now what he must offer to his son as the way to see life, live life, have life and guard life. The mission of this home school curriculum and its lessons is that the children not only *know* them but they *own* them. They will own them over time as life and events, circumstances and experiences will prove them to be true.

Proverb 3: 1-6 states, *"My son, do not forget my teaching, but keep my commands in your **heart**, for they will prolong your life many years and bring you prosperity. Let love and faithfulness never leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your **heart**. Then you will win favor and a good name in the sight of God and man. Trust in the Lord with all your **heart** and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and He will make your paths straight."*

Here the son is urged to both the negative consequences of forgetting, and the positive results of remembering (keeping) his teaching. "Teaching" here translates in the Hebrew as *torah*¹⁷, the commandments and law of God. The term *heart* here is used as reference to a "library or storing house". The promise is that God will actually move aside the obstacles and make the path straight.¹⁸ The path is actually excavated by God for a man, or for a boy who is on his way to becoming a man, who chooses to lean on God as Father for direction and safety.

Proverbs 4: 4, 21, 23, *"he (my earthly father) taught me and said, 'Lay hold of my words with all your **heart**' keep my commands and you will live.' (21) Do not let them out of your sight keep them within your **heart**; ... (23) Above all else guard your **heart** for it is the wellspring of life."*

This passage refers back to and is shaped in the overriding main theme of the previously presented about the *heart*; the inner and core of a person. Solomon, the collector and author of Proverbs is talking about his father, David, as the one from whom he learned about life and how

¹⁷ Walvoord & Zuck, 2000, 910-911

¹⁸ *ibid*

to live in the environment of their home the kingdom that was Judah. We see Solomon then in turn, generationally passing along the legacy of truth he inherited from his father. The beginning of Chapter 4 in verse 1 shows Solomon is speaking to his sons, quoting his father, David. Wisdom is personified in this passage and as a “person”, wisdom is invited to live in (take residence in) the *heart*. “*Keep them (my wise words) in your heart then guard them*” and protect them, for from them, comes life! What a great image of the heart and of the relationship of father to a son about the things that are most vitally important to life.

Proverbs 22: 17, 18 and 19b “*Pay attention and listen to the sayings of the wise; apply your **heart** to what I teach, for it is pleasing when you keep them in your **heart** and have all of them ready on your lips- So that your trust may be in the Lord.*”

In verses 17 and 18 Solomon is training up his children. Here, the heart is to be engaged (applied). There is effort, work, strain and application. Solomon exhorts his children to be in the ready position! The connection is to be made that the effort will be worth it and the affect of your life will be great.

The New Testament Gospels

Jesus speaks quite often of the heart as well in his teachings and parables. It is clear in the Sermon on the Mount that He is after more than a "principled or dutiful life", more than a life that simply manages itself by keeping the law. A life bent in law keeping will be a life that expresses the even belief that our performance is the key to gaining favor with God. In the Beatitudes (Matt. 5:1-12) Jesus says, “*Blessed are the pure in **heart**, for they will see God.*” In their New Testament commentary on The Gospel of Matthew, Walvoord and Zuck state the passage means literally, *happy are those who are clean on the inside from sin through faith in God’s provision.*¹⁹ We are transformed and our hearts, the core of us is made clean and holy.

A few verses later in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus makes it clear that it is the heart He is after. He wants his audience to see the heart as the source of their sin-behavior, sin-attitudes and sin-choices and the very place that He came to heal and restore because if the heart and its condition is all those things on the one side of the ledger...then when made over and made new,

¹⁹ Walvoord and Zuck, New Testament 1983, p 29

it is the source of godliness and holiness, identity and mission. The following are several other passages to highlight from Jesus' teaching about the heart.

Matt. 6:21 ... *"for where your treasure is there will your **heart** be also"*,

Luke 6:45... *"the good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his **heart**...for out of the overflow of his **heart** his mouth speaks"*.

Luke 8:15... *"but the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good **heart**, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a good crop"*.

Matt. 13:15... *"For this people's **heart** has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes and hear with their ears, understand with their **hearts** and turn, and I would heal them"*.

Lastly Jesus says in John 14:1 and again in 27, *"Do not let your **hearts** be troubled. Trust in God, trust also in me...Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your **hearts** be troubled and do not be afraid."*

Jesus was very concerned with the inside of a man and what is referred to in Vines Expository Dictionary, *the heart is to be seen as the seat of moral nature, spiritual life, grief, desires, affections, perceptions, thoughts, understanding, reasoning powers, imagination, intentions, purposes, will and faith.*²⁰

Paul's Writings

Paul has more references to the heart than any other New Testament writer. Of Paul's writings, the book of Romans carries the greatest inventory of heart passages in the New Testament. The two passages that I believe are of the greatest significance are Romans 10:10 and Ephesians 3:16-17.

²⁰ Vines

Romans 10:9-10, “...confess with your mouth, Jesus is Lord, and believe in your **heart** that God raised him from the dead and you will be saved.”

Ephesians 3:16-17, “I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your **hearts** through faith.”

This is central to our gospel message when a congregation or community of believers encourages and exhorts a non-believer to “invite Jesus into your heart.” The critical connection that we must make is that in offering Christ to others, we are offering *life* (I am the way, truth and life, John 14:6). What was once dead because of sin, a life without God, is made alive in Christ (Col. 3:1-4, John 10:10). When a “patient” who is pronounced dead encounters the one who raises from the dead and has the power to transform a person... life is the result. He enters their heart revive them, to indwell them and to sustain what He has started in them, *new life*. This is why Jesus can invite us to come to Him *and* by no other, that we may have life (John 5:40). The Heart and Life are consistently connected in scripture, especially when the subject of scripture has anything to do with the Gospel and how a person is saved from their sin. The result is a new state.. from death we are brought into...*Life*. ISNT THAT WHAT WE ARE SEARCHING FOR, *LIFE*? Heart and Life, You can not have one without the other. Try to have life without a heart or a heart without life. They go together and are clearly meant to by design. It is in the physical realm and that physical reality seems to parallel a more significant reality, the Spiritual Realm- the realm that matters most.

For Paul, the heart is referred to again and again throughout his letters written to the first century believers that made up the first century churches, churches, by the way, with serious problems and challenges both inside their walls and out. In these churches, that were comprised of Christians who are struggling to be Christians, Paul takes them again and again to *the* source of life- Jesus Christ and the place He dwells (has taken up residence) within them, their hearts. In its infancy, Luke writes of this early church in the book of Acts, 4:32, “*All the believers were one in **heart** and mind.*” Isn’t that interesting that when the subject of unity is explored the key ingredients to express their connection is at the deepest level... their hearts. For some deeper

looks I recommend that old NIV Study Bible I mentioned earlier shows more than fifty references that Paul makes to the subject of the heart in the Christian life.

Other New Testament Writers

The other writers of the New Testament after the Gospels and Acts, that we have yet to explore and expose on their contribution to the significance of the heart would be the apostles James, John and Peter.

Peter writes in his first letter to believers in I Peter 1:22, *“we are to love deeply from the **heart**.”* Later, he writes in I Peter 3:15, *“But in your **hearts** set apart Christ as Lord, always be prepared to give and answer for the hope that is within you”*

The apostle, James exhorts us in his letter to first century Christians in James 4:8 to *“purify your **heart**”* implying that it was possible to do so and exhorting us to get busy in the process and partnership with God in that event.

The disciple John writes in I John 3:19, *“This then is how we know that we belong to the truth, and how we set our **hearts** at rest in His presence whenever our **hearts** condemn us. For God is greater than our **hearts**, and he knows everything.”*

God has a Heart

This subject of God’s heart entered the arena as I was studying and researching the overall topic. It truly was a stunning discovery and whisper to my heart, “God has a heart too”. Here are a few of the verses that present this quiet and relevant truth.

Matthew 11:29 Jesus speaking, *“take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in **heart**, and you will find rest for your souls”.*

John 12:27 Jesus again, *“Now my **heart** is troubled, and what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour?’ No, it was for this reason I came to this hour. Father glorify your name!”*

Jeremiah 3:15 “*Then I will give you shepherds after my own **heart**, who will lead you with knowledge and understanding.*”

Jeremiah 4:29 God says, “*I have agony in My **heart***”.

The most *validated* man by God in the Bible, other than Jesus, was King David. The story of his life is recorded in both Old and New Testaments and his stepping from the sheep pasture to the king’s throne is marked by one of the greatest confirmations, validations and declarations one could ever receive from God. In I Samuel 13:13-14, Samuel tells King Saul that God’s hand is being removed from him as king and another is going to replace him. Samuel says of the future replacement, “*...the Lord has sought out a man after his own **heart** and appointed him leader of his people.*” Later in Acts 13:22 it is stated again that, “*I have found David son of Jesse a man after my own **heart**; he will do everything I want him to do.*”

God express in scripture that He has a heart. Whether or not we are to interpret that literally or figuratively, I leave to the discussions or arguments of those more skilled in theology and exegesis than me. What I do know is that either way, there *is* a heart of God according to Him: A core, a center to His being. Going back to Genesis 1 and 2 and the record of how we were created, *in the image of God* takes us to a new and glorious place. We are His *image bearers* according to scripture and though there is much more to discuss on the weight and significance of that subject (image bearing) I simply ask that we take this small nugget at face value. God has a heart as revealed by scripture and so do we, those created in His image. When He made us, He gave us one, a heart of our own that is linked to His... on purpose and for life.

Circumcision and Covenant

The heart is the critical subject as it relates to circumcision and the New Covenant. The relationship of circumcision and covenant are worthy of their own books or research papers in and of themselves and already have volumes written on them as do all the critical subjects and themes of scripture. While we will only touch this subject of circumcision and covenant, I do believe it is important to chew on at least three important points of significance and relevance. Just to get our arms around a definition, The International Bible Encyclopedia states,

circumcision was and is the cutting away and discarding of unwanted flesh symbolizing (representing as a reminder) the promise (covenant) that God had made with Abraham in Genesis 17. That is regarded as the origins and beginnings of the old covenant given to the Jews of which Abraham was their father the original patriarch of the family. While history records the Jews many more experiences and encounters with God over during the 1,000 years of their relationship, there came the time when it was time for an upgrade. God, at just the right time ushered in a new covenant when He sent His son, Jesus Christ to invade the story and to take the largest and most significant step of redeeming it all that the story has known or will know until it is complete in Christ second coming. Sounds weighty to me, even as I write it and it reminds me that it is. The closest we come to understanding the word and living in covenant and with one is in the covenant of marriage. Two people making a promise to each other in love, for love and with love.

The second place to take a look at this issue of covenant and circumcision and how they are bound together are in the New Testament book of Hebrews. This letter that is written primarily to Jewish believers of the first century, is full of “*covenant language*” and based on what we just looked at from the Old Testament, why wouldn’t it be. This is what the Hebrew people knew from their history with God and their tradition with Him. The truth in the book of Hebrews that is being give is that one covenant is now replaced by a new one. The Old is exchanged or to give way to the New, and this theme runs through the author’s message to the Hebrew believer in Christ in an attempt to bring the Jews clarification and a connection to the “upgrade” being offered by God through Christ on their behalf. It is described in the book of Hebrews as “*new*”- 9:15, “*the second*”- 8:7, “*the better*”- 7:22 and “*an agreement between God and Israel*” in Deuteronomy 29.²¹ Paul, who is assumed to have written this letter to the Hebrews, is well qualified to pen it because of his status as a former Pharisee. Pharisees were the pastors and priest of the Jewish church in that day. They were actually lawyer/priests; experts in the law (the torah) and were teachers on how to live lives pleasing to God. Circumcision, what was performed on the foreskin of a Jewish infant was to mark him, to demonstrate the family the child belonged to, God’s and to server as a reminder and symbol the promise/covenant between

²¹ Bible Navigator: *Vines*- Covenant

God and his people. What then (the old covenant) brought of a *marking* of God and for God, is now (the new covenant) to be done on the *heart*.

Paul writes about this circumcision of heart in Romans 2:17-29 and ends that passage with

*“...For he is not a real Jew who is externally a Jew; nor is the real circumcision the external circumcision in the flesh; but he is a real Jew who is a Jew in inward things; and real circumcision is the circumcision of the **heart**, in spirit, and not in letter”.*

God desires and is committed to do a work that is far deeper than mere physical realm. He desires and is committed to enter into the deep water of a man’s heart and cut away the places that encumber and are in the way. Marking the man for Himself. Redeeming a man or woman for an eternal lifetime...*sealing us* (Ephesians 1:13) and *securing us* (Hebrews 6:17-19) for Himself.

Lastly, the covenant language God uses is binding not only to us but to Himself. That is why the book of Hebrews talks of a New Covenant in which God actually takes both sides. He demands restitution for our breach of the old covenant (which is sin leaving us dead) and then pays it with the death of His son, Christ which is resurrected back to life and brings us with Him.

Resurrecting us into a new life, a new existence, a new covenant that “I will be your Father, God and you will be my sons and daughters”

*“The time is coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them, declares the Lord. This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my law in their minds and write it on their **hearts**. I will be their God and they will be my people.”* Jeremiah 31:31-33

Jesus ushers in and establishes the new covenant.

In Hebrews 8:6 it says, “*But the ministry Jesus has received is as superior to theirs as the covenant of which He is mediator is superior to the old one, and it is founded on better promises.*” (That passage in Hebrews goes on to quote and cross-reference Jeremiah 31:31-33 and Exodus 19 and 20. Also see Deut. 10:16 *circumcise your heart* and 30:6 *your God will circumcise your heart* and Jeremiah 9:26)

So What Now?

All this to say that the Bible officially goes on record as stating that the heart matters. The Biblical evidence is clear that the heart is one of the central pieces of this thing called Christianity and it must be recovered. Not only its theological significance recovered but the heart itself must be recovered. The discovery that I had a heart and that God was after it and that there was another suitor trying to capture my heart and throw it in the dungeon all ushered me into a much larger story than I knew I was living in. The heart of a believer, one who has placed his or her faith in Christ is made good. Good at its core and good for a person’s journey for more. This reality of a believer getting a good heart is the declaration of whom and what I am as a believer and who or what I am no longer when I didn’t believe. In Christ and by His work through the Cross, Resurrection and Ascension, I am no longer a sinner but a saint, a son. The New Testament writers who charge us to live a certain way know that the only way to live and grow is from a central place that has been transformed from dead to alive, from a bad place to a good one. This is the plight of a heart searched for, recovered and restored.

The battle for the heart is real. Both kingdoms know that if you influence or capture a heart you get the whole man or whole woman. We live in fallen place where a war ensues daily and where casualties and injuries are a part of the story. God knows, we’ve all felt the bombs and their impact on our lives. It is imperative that a man or woman know where they are and what is at stake and engage in the fight for their hearts. Engage in the fight for their heart and then the hearts of others. For me, I have found that this information and much of what else is offered in this book makes the difference. It makes the difference in moving from trying to simply survive my captivity and making the best of bad situations to finding healing and restoration that leads to freedom and life. After all, isn’t that the best way to live... made alive and set free. The more

and more alive and free I am, the more and more I want to fight for the hearts of others. That is why the pursuit of the recovery of my heart is not a selfish one but rather the fundamental mission so that the more whole hearted I am, the better equipped I am to fight for the hearts of others.

Above all else, guard your heart for it is the wellspring of life. Proverbs 4:23

I like how the New Living Translation says it... **Above all else, guard your heart, for it affects everything you do.**

Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. (John 15:13)

The one who showed us how, was able to from a whole heart. My hope and prayer for my life and yours is the that we will believe in Christ, receive our new heart, live free and help others to that freedom that is Christ and is from Christ. May you journey well.

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