

A Change of Heart

Crime in all forms has been on the increase for more than twenty-five years. We will never solve the problem with legislation and police force. We can and should suppress criminals by enforcing law and order, but the general picture will not be changed until we change the hearts of people. Jesus said, "But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: these are the things which defile a man: but to eat with unwashen hands defileth not a man" (Matt. 15:18-20). He also said to lay up treasure in heaven and not upon earth, "for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matt. 6:21). "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life" (Prov. 4:23). "For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he . . ." (Prov. 23:7). "A man's heart deviseth his way: but the Lord directed his steps" (Prov. 16:9).

The increase in murders, rapes, riots, thefts and destruction of property is because the hearts of the people involved are set upon this sort of life. Why? Because of the influences and impressions made upon their hearts by evil goals and influences. Most of them have never been shown the good way of the Lord. They know little or nothing of God's word. Today nearly everything is framed in a setting of sex, usually leaving the impression of favoring illicit sex relations. Nudity, and profane and vulgar language are seen and heard in nearly all areas of entertainment. Drunkenness, dope addiction, and wild hippie-type parties are shown through nearly all news media in a mildly approved setting, or at the best with indifference. Men and women in powerful and influential positions in government, education, entertainment, and even religion are caught cheating, stealing, lying, adultery, drunkenness, rioting, and even murder, and the average man just smiles and says, "Everybody does it; it could happen to anyone."

A dark, pessimistic picture, you say? Yes, but it is true. It is a very real problem in society today and no one can deny it. It is axiomatic that every effect has a cause. Until we know where the problem originates and begin to do something about it, things will grow worse.

Since man's conduct originates in his heart, it is obvious that his heart must be changed in order to really change his conduct. "A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil, for of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh" (Luke 6:45). Why do young men and women accept the lowest standards of morality and become criminals and heathen who act like wild animals? It is because of what they see, hear and read. Certain publishers are making millions on pornography, novels on sex orgies and crime. Movie producers are seducing millions of young people by actually showing nudity and adultery on the screen. Television is almost entirely sex oriented; comedy, drama, and personality shows are built around illicit sex and sin, and are shown in the most favorable light.

The entertainment industry has decided that one of the greatest causes of violence in America is the impression left upon the young and old by television programs that show violence. They realize that what people see and hear, they think and do. Why can they not realize that immorality, broken marriages, unwed mothers, venereal diseases, dope addiction, and nudity are the results of the same impressions made upon the hearts of people?

Satan works through lust of the heart and such are lost to God. "Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves" (Rom. 1:24). They are "alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart" (Eph. 4:18). Persistent sin hardens the heart so that it is impenitent toward God (Rom. 2:5). The continual sin of Israel is pictured in these words: "By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive: for this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them" (Matt. 13:14-15).

The function of the heart is divided into three parts, not considering the conscience. The **intellect** is that part which thinks (Matt. 9:4), reasons (Mark 2:8), understands (Matt. 13:15), and believes (Rom. 10:9-10). This function depends entirely upon evidence received through the senses. The strongest impressions are made through sight and hearing.

The process of thinking and reasoning acts upon the **emotion**. Desire is created by the thought process stimulated by impressions made upon the intellect. Love and hate, and sorrow and rejoicing, are emotional actions of the heart that grow out of reasoning upon something seen or heard. The heart may be "pricked" by what one hears and believes. Those on Pentecost who heard Peter tell of Christ were "pricked in their heart" and this resulted in their cry: "What shall we do?" The emotion of "love" for sin results in "hate" for righteousness; the "love" for truth and righteousness will result in "hate" for every evil way. Whatever the emotional state of the heart, it is produced by hearing, seeing, understanding, reasoning and believing.

The **will** is a function of the heart that normally grows out of our emotional state. One may "resist" (Matt. 28:27) because of his feelings (emotion) about a certain thing. Sin is a matter of will. Because of the pleasure and joy of sinful practices, many will not see, hear and understand, lest they change their minds (will) and obey the truth (Matt. 15:17-19). The heart intends - plans, purposes - the conduct of life and the words of the mouth (Heb. 4:12; 2 Cor. 9:7; Acts 11:23).

What one deliberately does, good or bad, he does by his own will. His will to do or not do a certain thing is the direct result of his "feelings" (emotion) regarding the matter. His love, desire and rejoicing will lead him to will to do that thing. His hate, condemnation and sorrow will lead him to will to oppose the thing. His "feelings" are created by the function of his intellectual powers which are brought into operation by what one sees, hears and reads.

The real cause of sin is the impression made upon the heart by the "god of this world" who blinds the minds of them which believe not (2 Cor. 4:4), "the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience" (Eph. 2:2). Sin is pictured as a beautiful life of "freedom" and "happiness" that can never be realized by following the word of God. The heart of the person who accepts this will act in accord with his acceptance of right and wrong. The only way to change his life is to change his heart. The only power in this world to change the heart from sin is the living word of God; not a part of it, not a perverted version, but all of it and nothing more.

The good and honest heart seeks for truth. When he finds it he will accept it and enjoy a life never before realized. The heart is purified by faith (Acts 15:9), by obeying the truth (1 Pet. 1:22), by fleeing youthful lusts and following righteousness (2 Tim. 2:22).

Do you really believe a normal young man or woman can sincerely abhor the emphasis on sinful sex indulgence, despise the nudity and vulgarity so common today, the unlawful rioting and rebellion of many today, and the immoral conduct of people in high places? Well, they can! Thousands do. The reason is that they have been taught what is good and right. They have received this into the "good and honest heart" and out of love for good, and the desire to serve God, they will "flee also youthful lusts" and "follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart" (2 Tim. 2:22).

If you are one who considers this person who follows the will of God "a square" you are right! He is just as square as the word of God. He is just square enough to make this world a little better because he has passed this way. He is just square enough to save some soul from eternal hell. He is just square enough to reject this philosophy of life that is "so round, so firm, so fully packed" with sin and iniquity!

My brother and friend, the best contribution you can make to society today to make this a better world in which to live, and to make life healthier and happier, and to save millions from an untimely death and hell is to feed the hearts of as many as possible with the word of God. Give your children something to read besides filthy magazines. Provide yourself with reading material that will make you think in clean and right channels. Offer your relatives, friends and neighbors something to read that will expose the filthy trash upon which their hearts are fed through most avenues of communication, and give them something righteous to think about.

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Preacher of the Word (Vol. 1, June 23, 1996, # 26)
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