

Understanding the Heart

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[0:00] Well, I don't know if any of you have kept track of our lesson topics and which one should be next. If you have been, you'll recognize that we're making a switch.

And we're going on to a different topic this morning, one that I was going to go over a couple lessons from now, but instead I thought, well, this one fits quite well right here.

And we're also going to spend two weeks on this lesson. And just because it is such an important topic for our consideration when we're talking about growing in godliness and that topic being on targeting the heart and understanding the heart, what's really going on inside of us.

We've made some progress throughout the weeks already. Last week we took a look at the purpose for growing in godliness, and that is to glorify God. As our Creator, and for those who are saved, our Heavenly Father, He deserves to be praised by us and by all of creation.

That's what all of creation is doing. They're declaring the glory of God, the praises of God, and as His chosen people, we're to show forth the virtues of Him who has called us out of darkness into His glorious light.

[1:23] And that means really that we are advertisements for God on a regular basis. In everything that we do, we put on display the wonders of God.

But it's also something that is good for us. It's very good for us. It's that which will really bring us the greatest joy and happiness in our lives, because it's what we were designed by God to do.

We've said that over and over again, that that's at the core of what we are as human beings. In fact, that is what normal human life really is supposed to look like.

What is abnormal is to live apart from God and His counsel. Really, the world looks on us as being the abnormal ones when we follow the Word of God.

But in reality, true humanity is a person who is living by the counsel of God and for the glory of God is the individual that is living the normal human life, the life that we as human beings are really designed to live.

[2:35] Well, in order to live out that purpose, we need to be converted and then to be growing more and more in the likeness of Christ, in our thoughts, in our words, and in our actions.

And Jesus was the one that was the perfect example of that. He lived the perfect, godly, righteous life, and we could say the perfect, normal human life as the God-man.

He lived the human life that all people were designed to live but can't because of indwelling sin. And also, that's what God is really seeking to accomplish in us.

We quote the verse Romans 8.28. We need to follow that up with 8.29, understanding that what is God working all things together for good for in our lives?

Well, it's our transformation into the likeness of Jesus Christ. Many times we think of Romans 8.28, God's going to work all things together for good.

[3:39] That means he's going to make all my circumstances nice and pleasant and comfortable. Well, sometimes he will do that, but that's not the greatest thing he's working toward in our lives.

He will work all things together for the good of transforming us into the likeness of his son, Jesus Christ, which is the best thing that could happen to us, even while we're in this world.

And so the Holy Spirit, who dwells within us, is also at work transforming us into the likeness of Christ. And now our responsibility is to live by the Spirit, to keep in step with the Spirit, to be led by the Spirit, and to discipline ourselves or train ourselves or orient our lives in this direction of godliness.

That was our 1 Timothy 4, 7, and 8 passage that we looked at the first week that we were here. That challenge, that exhortation that God brings to us, yeah, while you're here in this world now, what it looks like to be led of the Spirit is to be disciplining yourselves, orienting your life in that

direction of godliness.

And as we're doing that, well, we will be keeping in step with what the Spirit is leading us to do. So this transformation into the likeness of Christ involves who we are on the outside, our behavior, our actions, and our words, but then also who we are inwardly, our thoughts, desires, the intentions of our heart, even the expression or the emotions that we have and their ultimate expression.

[5:29] So we don't want to miss what's happening in our hearts. So many times it's just easier to deal with the outward, and maybe at times find that that's how we're responding to our growth in godliness or what we're going through each day.

Maybe as parents we see our children misbehaving and we might yell at them or threaten them or whatever just to get them to conform outwardly to what we want them to do, maybe what will make our day more pleasant.

Or we think about just changing the circumstances of our lives, thinking if this was just the way my life was, well, I wouldn't be so miserable. And we miss focusing on our hearts.

So we want to be sure in our growth in godliness that we're not missing the heart, but targeting the heart. So this week we'll take a look at some passages that deal with targeting the heart, the importance of dealing with the inner man issues.

And then next week we'll take a look at, okay, well, how do I identify maybe the idols of my own heart? And what is the progression that's taking place where I set up an idol of the heart and then that finds expression in my words and actions?

[6:59] And then you would have to determine just what those expressions are. So I thought it's important to spend a couple weeks on this. And so this morning, let's start by understanding the heart biblically.

Many people understand the heart just as referring to our feelings. But the Bible presents a much broader understanding of the heart.

And the term many times in the scriptures is referring to the inner being. And here a passage that we're familiar with in 1 Samuel 16, 7, this passage where this is brought out, when Samuel was choosing a king for the nation and his focus was on the outer person and God comes alongside and instructs.

And he said to Samuel, do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.

So the inner man is what God wanted Samuel to focus on and that he wanted Samuel to understand that that was the more important issue at this time when it comes to a leader for their country.

[8:19] A quote by Paul Tripp in his book, Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands, the term heart encompasses all the other terms and functions used to describe the inner person, like terms spirit, soul, mind, emotions, will, and other terms as well.

These other terms do not describe something different from the heart. Rather, they are aspects of it, parts or functions of the inner person.

So right now we're considering man being made up of not multiple parts. There's the outer essence of man and the inner essence of man.

The inner essence of man being described by various terms used in the scriptures. And we'll take a look at some of those different terms now and some of the activities that are ascribed to the heart. And we'll get a fuller understanding of how this word is used in the scriptures. So at times in the scriptures, that term heart is used to describe the activities that are taking place within our mind.

[9:26] Matthew 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, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and turn, and I would heal them.

And then in Mark 2, 6, some of the scribes were sitting there questioning in their hearts. And then Acts 5, 4, Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart?

You've not lied to men but to God. So the message that we heard from Pastor last Sunday. So there were some thinking, some planning, some contriving going on in their inner man that led them to this outer behavior.

And it's an interesting passage there that can even be a passage of instruction to us of the importance of getting to the heart. What they did, Ananias and Sapphira did in that situation, was a

result of something that was already taking place in their heart.

And so we want to learn from that, again, and be challenged. Let's not focus on outer behavior. What's going on outside of me? What am I doing outwardly? We want to think more of what are my words and my actions reflecting about me that's going on inside of me.

[10:56] And we'll develop that a little bit more as we go on. Next activities. Activities like longings and desires, feelings and emotions. Psalm 24.

May he give you the desire of your heart and make all your plans succeed. Jeremiah 17, 9. The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately sick.

Who can understand it? There's a lot of things going on in our inner man. Deuteronomy 28, 47.

Because you did not serve the Lord your God with joyfulness and gladness of heart.

And then 1 Samuel 1, 8. Hannah, her husband, questioning her, Why do you weep? And why do you not eat?

And why is your heart sad? Again, we're learning more and more of what we're seeing outside of us. And even in this situation, what was revealed, what was going on in our heart was revealed outwardly.

[12:02] And we know that it's not something new, but many times we just ignore. We don't think at the moment, okay, something's going on. I wonder what's going on in that child's heart right now.

And we miss the opportunity to help that child explore and understand this greater principle that they need to understand in order to grow and change and even need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

I mean, people can change outer behavior many times, but we want people, our children, to have changed hearts. We're not in the, well, what do I want?

Business. That's not the word I want, but it communicates the idea of just making little Pharisees and getting them to change their behavior when their hearts are not there at all.

So whether it's our own personal growth and godliness or that of our children or grandchildren or our friends that we're working with, we want to help them explore what's going on inside their hearts.

[13:12] And we don't want to miss that because, well, I can't say because yet because we're going to get to that. Letter C, other activities performed out of willful choices that we're making.

The choices that we're making from our wills are a result of what we're treasuring in our hearts.

Mark 7, 21. For from within, out of the heart of man come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness.

All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person. So there's something existing within each one of us, or if we're practicing any of these things, or any sinful activity that we perform on the outside as a result of what's going on inside.

Something there that we're loving, and as a result, we're making these plans and then make willful choices to pursue that, and it's expressed in our words and in our actions.

In 2 Corinthians 9, 7, Each man must give as he's decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion. So just some of the ways in which this term is used in the scriptures, and so I trust we're getting a broader understanding of what this term heart refers to.

[14:45] It refers to our inner man. There's a lot going on in each one of us, and many times what's going on inside of you, I really can't see, but that's not to say that what's going on inside of you is not made manifest.

Now the danger is that when I see something, I make an assumption of what's true about what's going on inside of you, and that's not good. We don't want to go there.

I can understand that what I'm seeing is a result of what's inside, but it would be a foolish thing for me just to assume what's going on inside.

You have to go to the child, let's say if it's parenting, and speak with the child. Ask the child questions. Try and draw out from the child what they were thinking about, what they thought these actions would actually accomplish, and then you're beginning to learn more and more what the motivation of that child's heart was, or you're doing that with yourself, and that's going to be one of our lessons in the future, so I don't need to spend a whole lot of time on that now.

What kind of questions do we ask, or how do we help our children or help a friend explore what's going on inside of them so that they can actually work at these changes inside and not just outward behavioral changes?

[16:14] So there's a relationship between what's going on inside of you, your words and your actions. It's important to understand this relationship in order for God-glorifying growth in godliness to take place.

Now let me get a chance to get my breath here. I feel like I'm really running on this. Do you have any questions or comments at this point? There.

This is what you're going to talk about in the future, but as I've shared with our women friends, in asking those questions, someone shared with us four questions.

What do you mean by that? What do you base it on? How do you know it's true? What happens if it's wrong? Those are good questions to try to figure out what's going on in the future.

Yeah, and I think one of the hardest things for me as people were trying to help me learn how to work with others and help them explore issues of the heart.

[17:24] Because for me it was easy, well, just to tell them, well, you should be doing this. Just do this, get over it, and go on with life. Well, that's not the way it is. And it was difficult for me to make that transition to help to the place where I was asking them questions, helping them explore what's going on inside of them.

And so we'll share some additional questions beyond the ones that you've shared there that will help us be more effective disciplers of other people, parents, et cetera, friends.

But right now we want to explore this relationship between the inner and outer dimensions of man, and I've already shared some of that. But Jesus does some teaching on this in Luke 6, verses 43 through 45.

And just to read those verses at this point, no good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. Each tree is recognized by its own fruit.

People do not pick figs from thorn bushes or grapes from briars. The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart. The evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart.

[18:42] For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks. So in previous verses, Jesus had been confronting the people about some unrighteous behavior.

But now he directs them to the source of that behavior. So it's not just us today. This is something that Jesus wanted people to understand even during his time.

And he does this with that illustration and uses the illustration of plant life. And at first, like in verse 43, he's connecting and helping them see this relationship by connecting with this illustration the basic goodness or the soundness of a tree with what it produces.

He just says, No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. Of course. We all understand that. Makes perfect sense.

They understood that. But using a simple statement like this, principle illustration like this, to help them miss that important principle of what's going on within each one of them.

[19:51] So the good tree, yep, produces good fruit. The bad tree produces bad fruit. What you see on the tree outwardly is related to the basic condition of the tree.

Things that you couldn't necessarily see. Sometimes I have a tree in our yard that dies. You know, I look at it. What's going on? And while there was something going on that I did not see, and what was revealed outwardly, either the bad fruit or the death of the tree itself, was a result of something inside the tree or in the ground, in the roots.

On verse 44, he elaborates further as he talks about what the tree produces. Each tree is recognized by its own fruit.

People do not pick figs from thorn bushes or grapes from briars. So the tree will put forth fruit in keeping with the nature of the kind of tree that it is.

The nature of the tree determines the kind of fruit it produces. And at this point, the people would have maybe been thinking, okay, well, what's the purpose of all this?

[21:09] We understand this. Of course, this all makes sense. And then Jesus applies it to people in verse 45. The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart.

The evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For out of the overflow of his heart, his mouth speaks. So whether it's words that come from our mouths or other things, other actions that we do, if they're good, then they come from the good that dwells within us.

And if they're sinful or evil, then they come from the evil that dwells within us. We've got to be ready to admit that and not just think that this passage is talking about some evil, wicked person, some

unsaved person.

But in reality, we all sin with our words and our actions through the week. And the sooner we readily admit that, well, it wasn't so-and-so and it wasn't these circumstances, it was coming as a result of what's in my own heart.

So it's not people in situations that make us say what we say or do what we do.

[22:31] This passage is telling us that our words and behavior are an overflow of our hearts and our inner man, what's inside of us. Now let me ask you a question here.

If someone doesn't understand this concept but instead blames sinful behavior on other people or circumstances, what reasons might you hear that person give for his sinful words and behavior?

Say a person comes home from work or school, comes through the door complaining, slamming doors, speaking harshly to others in the home, et cetera, and you ask the person, well, what is wrong?

What kind of responses or answers might you hear that person give that would indicate they don't understand this concept that Jesus taught in Luke 6.45?

These are phrases you hear other people say, not necessarily that you've ever said. There. I say, you make me feel so angry.

[23:36] Yeah, yeah, yeah. So it's the other person. So we're saying, if they weren't like this, I wouldn't be talking like this. Other phrases you might hear.

Yeah, I got a terrible boss. Boy, that guy was on me today for stuff that wasn't even my fault. Okay, he may have been.

But he's not the one who generated what you're now saying to your wife and children, et cetera, in the home. What else might you hear that would indicate they're blaming other people or the circumstances?

I'm having a bad day. Yeah, I'm having a bad day. And they might say, well, what do you mean you're having a bad day?

Well, the person doesn't usually say, well, I'm allowing this sinful desire to rule in my heart. And as a result, I'm talking this way. No, you know, the kids were horrendous.

[24:43] You know, I got out of the car. My glasses fell. I stepped on my glasses. And et cetera and et cetera. And says, can you blame me for the way I'm speaking to you now?

Well, yes, I could. But you might not want to say it at that point. But, yeah, we want to be alert to those kind of things that we might be saying that would indicate, hold it, you know, I'm missing something here.

And as a result, I'm missing an opportunity of growth that and probably have been missing that opportunity of growth numerous times. If I've established this habit of responding and talking and acting with people when those kind of things happen.

So we speak and act the way we do because of what's in our hearts. Other people and circumstances just provide an occasion for what's inside us to manifest itself outwardly.

That's why we tend to blame the circumstances of the people because those are the times when it's expressed. And so sometimes we make that conclusion, well, then obviously if this wouldn't have happened, I wouldn't have talked this way.

[26:05] Well, you probably wouldn't have, but it wasn't because you have such a clean heart. It's just because the occasion wasn't there. But when the occasion comes up, what's in the heart will come out.

You put dirty water in a glass and somebody comes up and bumps my arm. What's going to come out of the water?

Not clear spring water. The dirty water will come out. And why does it come out? Well, somebody bumped my arm. Well, yeah, it came. That was the occasion that brought it out when somebody bumped my arm.

But it came out because it was in there already. You know, if I put clear spring water in there, somebody bumps my arm. Well, clear spring water is going to come out.

And so we're just making that application to us as individuals. Questions, comments? That doesn't leave us much room for excuses.

[27:08] Yeah, it doesn't really leave us any room for excuses. But it does provide us a great opportunity for growth and godliness. A wonderful opportunity because had that occasion not taken place, I could have gone on for a long time without realizing that that really is what was in my heart,

ruling in my heart.

And so there's times that, say even with your children, or you could say it with yourself, it's so terrible to see our children do something sinful.

But if we don't see it, we can't deal with it. But if we do see it, in a sense, we can thank God for the opportunity that I saw and what was going on here.

Now I can deal with it and help my child prepare for other occasions that will come along and help that child understand his need of a redeemer.

Because it's about more than just changing his behavior. A person can change their behavior without need of a savior. There's unsaved people that do that all the time.

[28:25] They change their behavior. But that's not what we're all about. Why would it be so good to change behavior and then a person go to hell for eternity? We're about helping people see their hearts and see their need of a redeemer and humbling themselves before a redeemer and then live lives that are truly glorifying to God and are good for them, better than anything they could have imagined.

So what does this have to do with our growth in godliness? We've got to deal with inner man issues. As I've said, God's not interested in just changing outer behavior.

Even when outer behavior was what seemed to be good, when it was done with wrong motivations, Jesus was not pleased. These verses in Matthew 23.

Jesus said, And another verse, Proverbs 21.

So even when, I keep going back to children or grandchildren, even when you have a child that seems very compliant on the outside, is it right to assume that that child's heart is good?

[30:11] Well, no, it's not, because he just might be seeing that the best way to get what he wants is by being compliant. He's living under the authority of this person right now, and if he really wants to get what he wants, it doesn't come by being rebellious, let's say, but he has learned he can get it by being compliant or doing other things.

And so even then you want to help that child explore, you know, why they're doing what they're doing so that they can, again, understand really what's the truth about what's going on in their hearts.

Well, we need to be exploring what's in our hearts, our growth in godliness. So in our growth in godliness, I have to deal with what's ruling in my heart if God-glorifying lasting change is going to take place.

So what has preeminence in my heart, in my inner man? What really has the highest place? What am I worshiping above everything else?

And that's what's going to have to be addressed if I'm going to grow in godliness. Now let me take you to another passage that was shared with me once that I thought was very helpful.

[31:38] And we're talking about what's ruling in the heart. Ezekiel 14, 1 through 5. Some of the elders of Israel came to me and sat down in front of me, this being Ezekiel.

Then the word of the Lord came to me. And son of man, these men have set up idols in their hearts and put wicked stumbling blocks before their faces. Should I let them inquire of me at all?

Therefore speak to them and tell them, this is what the sovereign Lord says. When any Israelite sets up idols in his heart and puts a wicked stumbling block before his face and then goes to a prophet, I, the Lord, will answer him myself in keeping with his great idolatry.

I will do this to recapture the hearts of the people of Israel who've all deserted me for their idols.

Therefore say to the house of Israel, this is what the sovereign Lord says, repent, turn from your idols and renounce all your detestable practices.

So the rulers came and sat down with Ezekiel because they had questions they wanted him to take to God. Everything seems good at this point. Ezekiel wouldn't have known any different.

[32:46] And outwardly you might think that what was happening was good, but it wasn't.

Something was wrong with these elders inwardly. And how does God describe what was wrong?

Well, he uses that term, that phrase, idols of the heart. They set up idols of the heart and have set and have put wicked stumbling blocks before their faces.

So how would you describe an idol? What words would you use or phrases would you use that describe what an idol is?

And why do people set up idols? Okay, they're desires, but what are they desiring?

What's motivating them to set up this idol in their hearts, let's say? Selfish passions.

[33:46] What do they believe? There's something. They desire this idol. Why? Why have they set this idol up?

Why is it that they're ascribing worship to this idol? Yeah, to bring something. So there's an inner belief that they have that this idol will produce something for them.

And of course, we're understanding in relationship to God, they believe that this idol will bring them something more that they could get, even more of that than God could bring into their lives.

The idol will produce more for them than what God will produce for them. And probably without the obligations that worshiping God brings.

So there's something that they're believing that this idol will produce for them. They've ascribed greater worth to that idol than to God. It's something that they've cherished to the degree that they're willing to disobey God to get it or to protect it and not lose it.

[35:06] Something that they believe would bring them greater pleasure, happiness, security than God ever could. Or they wouldn't worship the idol. They believe that what they love, what they're setting up as preeminent in their hearts, will bring them something more than what God ever could.

I mean, that's the reality of why we give ourselves to that rather than God. We believe it's a better path to take than worship of God and obedience to God. And that's how we have to understand what's going on in our hearts.

Many of us don't think of ourselves as idol worshipers, but we set up those idols in our hearts. And it's revealed through our words and our actions. Especially when those words and actions are contrary to what God tells us to do.

Contrary to our purpose of glorifying God. And so we're wanting to not miss that issue of the heart. People are always worshipers.

It's part of who we are as humans, but these elders had made something else God in their lives. And they had broken the first commandment. You shall have no other gods before me.

[36:25] And what did their idols produce? Were they able to pursue God's, bearing God's image, being His image bearers with joy and glory and glorify Him?

No, it produced bad fruit. It says that they had set up stumbling blocks before their faces. The stumbling block of their iniquity was set before their face and hindered or prevented them from enjoying and living for God's glory.

Enjoying God and walking His truth and His counsel. And instead of enjoying the fruits that come from worshiping God by loving and obeying Him with their whole being, they stumbled on in their disobedience and received the fruits and results of their idolatry.

An idol, even though it promises great things, is not able to produce what God-glorifying actions produce for us in this life.

An idol will make all kinds of promises, promises. We see that in our thoughts when we begin justifying what we want to do. Well, it's okay. Nothing will happen.

[37:40] Really, it'll turn out just fine. All these promises that we think through to justify wrong behavior, wrong actions, wrong words, and then we go do it and the idol is not able to produce.

We're not able to accomplish our purpose and have the resulting fruit of living as good trees, living for the glory of God.

There's an interesting principle that Paul Tripp wrote in one of his books. It's the principle of inescapable influence. Whatever rules the heart will exercise inescapable influence over a person's life and behavior.

So we can't think that what we're setting up as preeminent in our hearts will not affect the way we speak and live.

No, the principle of inescapable influence is whatever rules the heart will eventually manifest itself through words or actions. And that's what Jesus was, and God's helping us to understand from his word.

[38:53] And so does God ignore what's going on in our hearts? Well, no. In verse 3, he goes to Ezekiel and says, Should I let them inquire of me at all?

Should I act like nothing's wrong? Business as usual, just go on? Well, no, the answer is. And so God sends Ezekiel to them with a message from God in verses 4 through 6.

Therefore, speak to them and tell them, This is what the Sovereign Lord says. When any Israelite sets up idols in his heart and puts a wicked stumbling block before his face and then goes to a prophet, I, the Lord, will answer him myself in keeping with his great idolatry.

And of course, well, let me finish. And I will do this to recapture the hearts of the people of Israel who all deserve me for their idols. So God's response, he tells what he will do in those verses 4 and 5.

He won't answer them with the answers they want, but with what is in keeping with their idolatry. In verse 8, it was going to be judgment. He just couldn't, as a loving, faithful God to them, let them continue on with these idols in their hearts.

[40:04] And what he's going to do is bring this discipline upon them so they change their behavior? Well, yes, but it says, I'll do this to recapture the hearts of the people of Israel.

He's understanding it's at the heart level that I need to get their attention and to bring them back to me. It's not just a matter of just offering. They were already coming to God but they had taken on other gods as well.

It couldn't go on like that. And then he tells them what he wants them to do. He calls them to inner and outer change. What they needed to do was repent.

Turn from your idols. Now, the turning had to be both inwardly and outwardly, but there was a repentance that needed to take place. Turn from your idols.

And right now that they had set up idols in their heart. And then he says, renounce your detestable practices. No longer pursue the sinful outer actions that come from that heart idolatry.

[41:15] So you see what's going on here. He's calling them to both inner and outer change. Growth in godliness. And for this growth in godliness to take place in the lives of his people, they needed to recognize what was going on in their hearts.

And so that's why we focus on this lesson this week and next week. In order for God honoring, God glorifying change to take place in us, we have to recognize what's going on in my heart.

And by God's grace, the work of his Holy Spirit change that and then be able to glorify God in what we think and say and do. Well, we covered a lot of territory and our time is gone.

So let's close in prayer. Father, this morning, thank you that in your loving kindness, you've brought truth to us. Truth that as sinful human beings, we would have rejected and pushed away.

We don't like recognizing sinful things within us that move us to actions and words that aren't glorifying to you, but you and your loving kindness have come and mercy come to us and revealed, given us the counsel that we need.

[42:33] Now help us to be hearers of the word, Father, to receive it as good instruction that we desperately needed. And then, by your Spirit, grant us that wisdom and discernment and humility that we need to admit it and then to move in that direction of putting it off and replacing it with a true worship of yourself.

And we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.