

Heart Check: Start with God

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Foundational to life issues is the condition of the human heart before God.

The OT (Hebrew) word is *lev* (לֵב). In its abstract meanings, *lev* became the richest biblical term for the totality of man's inner or immaterial nature. In biblical literature it is the most frequently used term for man's immaterial personality functions as well as the most inclusive term for them since, in the Bible, virtually every immaterial function of man is attributed to the "heart." By far the majority of the usages of *lev* refer either to the inner or immaterial nature in general or to one of the three traditional personality functions of man; emotion, thought, or will.¹ The NT (Greek) word is *kardia* (καρδία). With regard to meaning *kardia* is the equivalent for Hebrew *lev* and refers thus to the inner person, the seat of understanding, knowledge, and will, and takes on as well the meaning of conscience.²

1. There is a need for my heart to experience a conversion, a fundamental change in the orientation of my life, if I am to be set free from sin and enjoy life as God intended for me to live.

This conversion is the result of a miraculous intervention of God whereby He convinces me of my errant waywardness from His will, breaks me to the point of despair with regard to any hope of escaping His just condemnation, and turns me in trust to accept His gracious provision for my undeserving estate.

In the OT, Israel was often referred to by God as "stiff-necked" (or "stubborn"), meaning that they had turned their backs on God. This is euphemistically a reference to an apostate condition, a reference to a lost generation in need of being turned to God in absolute trust. The Golden Calf defection is a crowning example (Deut 9:1-29). The remedy for this condition is spiritual circumcision (Deut 10:12-22; note the righteous standard in v. 12 invoked by God and the ethical implications resulting from the circumcision, love for God and love for others, vv. 19-22). It is God who performs the circumcision and produces a heart devoted toward Him (Deut 30:6). Consider as well passages like Hosea 6:6 and Joel 2:13.

The NT follows the same OT reasoning for conversion, using the same imagery, but identifying that the Spirit has a role in the conversion of the sinner (Rom 2:29). The Spirit convinces the sinner of his or her guilt before God (John 16:8). Additionally, the Lord Jesus Christ is the Agent of the circumcision, whereby we are no longer identified with Adam's fallen race, but are now identified with the righteous merits of our Savior (Col 2:11-15).

All of this begs the question: Is a changed heart really all that important? Can't I merely reform the heart? The Bible says that nothing other than a spiritual heart transplant

¹ *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*. Copyright © 1980 by The Moody Bible Institute of Chicago.

² *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* © 1990 by William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

will enable you to begin a life with God (Jer 17:9, the reference to the heart here is to an “incurable” condition; see also Rom 3:12, where the unrighteous are designated as “worthless, useless, or unprofitable.” God must do an internal work (John 1:13; 2 Cor 5:18). When He does it is so profound that the results are apparent to all who observe the fruit that emanates from the new person created in Christ Jesus (Eph 2:10; Phil 2:13).

2. My changed heart produces in me a new disposition toward God that compels my spirit to worship Him with unimpeded devotion (read Psalm 40; the heart set free soars heavenward).

Beware of impedances to praise. For the new Christian, praise is the byproduct of wonder at the experience of liberty in a relationship with Jesus (Mark 5:18-20; John 4:39; 9:25-31; Acts 3:6-10). When praise and devotion cease (or become infrequent or insincere/mechanical), or we become neglectful to the means for maintaining the “gaze of the soul” (prayerfulness, personal watchfulness, meditation on the Word, guarding against the enemy), it is time to humble ourselves before God and face the reality of a heart grown cold and indifferent toward Him (Isa 29:13-21; Matt 15:8-20).

3. I must maintain this path of unimpeded devotion to God in order to keep my heart in a fervent state (i.e. a heart that is passionate for God and His glory, see the goal at Phil 3:7-14 with v. 10 as key).

Hint to maintaining the “flame” of fervency. Never place the words “no” and “Lord” together in the same phrase in the same sentence, ever! It is an absolute deal breaker for the discipleship (see Luke 9:57-62). Now, consider the Lord’s example as preeminent (Matt 26:39; see also Col 2:6-7).

4. The fervency of my heart, set aflame by my devotion to God, will take root in my character (my true self) and be evident to those around me (Rom 12:1-2, 9-21, with v. 11 as key).

In Acts 4:13 it was the “courage” of the disciples that was striking to the crowds. They spoke with openness as they taught about the Lord and not with the trained rhetoric style of the Rabbis. It was apparent to all that they had spent time with Jesus and actually knew of what they spoke. Too many Christians speak of what they know not. They have a head filled with knowledge about the Bible and the Christ, but lack a heart devoted to Him and possess little experience of Him. This is shockingly all too familiar in our day.