

The Heart As The Center Of Life

According to the Bible, the heart is the center of all the operations of human life. Its position in the physical body makes it an obvious metaphor for the center. Thus, Jesus rebukes the unbelieving scribes and Pharisees: "For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." Mt 12:40.

As the center of life, the heart reflects the total inner self, one's hidden core of being. For this reason, Peter admonishes wives that true holiness does not lie in external beauty but in "... the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious." 1 Pe 3:4. The heart therefore indicates the genuine self as distinguished from physical appearance, public recognition, popular reputation, and so on. Accordingly, Yahweh instructs the prophet Samuel in the latter's search for David " "... Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, .. For the LORD sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart." 1 Sam 16:7. Likewise the apostle Paul teaches the church at Corinth "We are not commending ourselves to you again but giving you cause to boast about us, so that you may be able to answer those who boast about outward appearance and not about what is in the heart. " 2 Cor 5:12.

As a person's physical and spiritual life are found in his heart, the NT describes the heart as the dwelling-place of Christ, "so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith---", Eph 3:17, as well as the place in which Christ's peace rules, "And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, .." Col 3:15.

From this brief introduction into the meaning of the heart as the centrality of one's being, we now examine

SOME EXAMPLES OF ITS FUNCTION

It is the seat of:

the conscience. Rom 2:15 "They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, .."

wisdom. 1 Ki 3:12 "... Behold, I give you a wise and discerning mind, so that none like you has been before you and none like you shall arise after you." [*Mind* is the English translation of the Hebrew word for heart]

thought and reflection. Jer 24:7 "I will give them a heart to know that I am the LORD, .."

In addition, the heart also has the following functions:

Intellectual

It Perceives. Jn 12:40 "He has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, lest they see with their eyes, and understand with their heart, and turn, and I would heal them."

It Understands. 1 Kgs 3:9 "Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, that I may discern between good and evil, .."

It also debates, Mk 2:6; reflects, Lk 2:19; remembers, Lk 2:51; thinks, Dt 8:17.

Emotional

It experiences:

gladness. Isa 30:29 " You shall have .. gladness of heart, .."

joy. Jn 16:22 " So also you have sorrow now, but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, .."

sorrow. Neh 2:2 " .., "Why is your face sad, seeing you are not sick? This is nothing but sadness of the heart." ..."

anguish. Rom 9:2 ".. I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart."

Also, bitterness, Pro 14:10; anxiety, 1 Sam 4:13; affection, 2 Cor 7:3; lust, Mt 5:28; etc.

Volitional

It:

purposes. 1 Cor 4:5 When the Lord comes he ".. will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. .."

wills. Ex 35:22 "So they came, both men and women. All who were of a willing heart brought brooches and earrings and signet rings and armlets, .."

inclines to do something. 1 Sam 14:7 " "And his armor-bearer said to him, "Do all that is in your heart. ..."."

Etc. Etc.

Moral

It is:

holy. 1 Ths 3:13 " so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints."

upright. Ps 97:11 "Light is sown for the righteous, and joy for the upright in heart."

faithful. Neh 9:8 "You found his heart faithful before you, .."

clean. Acts 15:9 " and he made no distinction between us and them, having cleansed their hearts by faith."

Etc. Etc.

The testimony of Scripture is that the heart is the most imported dimension of life. For this reason we are required to " Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life." Pro 4:23. We are to be soldiers and sentinels of our hearts. How faithful are we?