

THE POISON WELL WITHIN

“When God writes upon the heart, He writes by His Holy Spirit and uses His Word as the pen.”

“I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me.” Rom. 7:21

“I will put my law in their minds, and write it on their hearts.” Jeremiah 31:33.

By Del Wray, Pastor

Let this exposition be in no way a license for Christians to continue in sin, God forbid! But may it motivate those who read by the love that Christ has for them and cause each one to a greater mortification of sin in their own bodies. Because we all do battle with that old sin nature that dwells in every one of us as long as we live. Here, in Romans chapter seven I am relying on a Jewish preacher’s written letter to the early Jewish Christians of the First Century Church, the Apostle Paul and his letter to the Roman believers in Romans chapter 7 verse 21, we find his great expository that refers to the remainder of indwelling sin in believers as a “law.” In chapter two he discusses at length what sin as a law means. He argues that in contrast to a law imposed from the outside, indwelling sin is a law from within and hence it has greater power to motivate, compel, and impel us into its service. It always abides in the soul; is always ready to apply itself with rewards and punishments; and always affects the mind with darkness, the affections with sensuality and the will with stubbornness. As Paul says, “When I would do good sin is right there with me.” It is ever present.

The power of indwelling sin is omnipresent, always present, especially as it has reference to the seat of sin, namely, the heart. Defining the nature of man, the “heart” according to Scripture will be my purpose for this expose and it demands the truth as revealed in Holy Writ by our Creator God, it being *“deceitful above all things and desperately wicked”* this too adding to the power of indwelling sin.

What does the Bible say about the condition of the human heart? In Scripture, the heart is the seat of indwelling sin as well as its subject. It is from the heart that indwelling sin springs in a person’s experience. Indeed, sin has invaded as an enemy and now possesses the very throne of God himself. So says the preacher:

“This is an evil among all things that are done under the sun, that there is one event unto all: yea, also the heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness is in their heart while they live, and after that they go to the dead.” Ecclesiastes 9:3

This is the unfortunate thing about everything that happens on earth: the same fate awaits all of us, everyone; the hearts of all people are full of evil, and there is madness in their hearts during their lives, and they die. Man will not acknowledge the truth.

The writer of Ecclesiastes says that the hearts of all people are not just tainted by sin, but indeed, full of sin. He likens it to madness that goes on during the whole of their lives. It is a sad picture indeed. In his evaluation of the sinfulness of the human heart, Jesus says essentially the same thing:

“But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man.” Matthew 15:18

But the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these things defile a person.

“For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies:” Matt. 15:19

For out of the heart come evil ideas, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander.

“These are the things which defile a man: but to eat with unwashen hands defileth not a man.” Matt. 15:20

It is true that there are many outward temptations that come upon us as human beings, but the problem we have comes essentially from within. It is from within that our fallen, darkened hearts gush forth evil and corrupt the whole of our lives, seriously damaging the lives of those to whom we are most connected. In Genesis Six verse 5 the text pulls no punches, describing the depths to which the human heart can sink apart from God:

“And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.” Genesis 6:5

But the Lord saw that the wickedness of mankind had become so great on the earth and that every inclination of the thoughts of their minds was only evil all the time.

“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

Jesus said that “the good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil...” The good treasure Jesus speaks of comes by grace, but the evil treasure is the best that man, in his pitiful, fallen state can produce apart from God’s grace. These two treasures, ironically enough, do not run empty the more men draw upon them. Indeed, the more a person under God’s grace draws on Christ’s riches through faith and obedience, the more the principle of grace is strengthened in that person. On the other hand, the more a person feeds his sin through unbelief and disobedience, the more the sin’s power grows within, establishing a foothold and then a fortress.

“The more men exercise their grace in duties of obedience, the more it is strengthened and increased in them; and the more men exert and put forth the fruits of their lust, the more is that enraged and increased in them; it feeds upon itself, swallows up its own poison, and grows thereby. The more men sin, the more they are inclined to sin. It is from the deceitfulness of this law of sin, whereof we shall speak afterward at large, that men persuade themselves that by this or that particular sin they shall so satisfy their lusts as that they shall need to sin no more. Every sin increaseth the principle, and prepareth the habit of sinning.”

There is no more realistic picture of the deceitfulness of sin than here presented. How many times have you heard people, me or yourself? Say: “I’ll just do it this time and get it out of my system?” Nothing could be more deceitful than this. “Do it once and you’ll do it twice” is much closer to the truth. Our sinful lusts, which live and thrive in our heart, gain ground through use, but by the Spirit they can be put to death Rom 8:13.

Thus the Bible is everywhere realistic in its evaluation of the human heart. It recognizes the good from creation and the grace of God, but it is utterly straightforward about the sin and folly bound up within us as well. Amen.

What is the nature of the human heart according to Scripture? Generally speaking, “**heart**” in Scripture refers to the whole of a man considered in his desires, decisions, and plans; it refers to man viewed as a morally responsible being. “The heart in the Scripture is variously used; sometimes for the mind and understanding, sometimes for the will, sometimes for the affections, sometimes for the conscience, sometimes for the whole soul. Generally, it denotes the whole soul of man and all the faculties of it, not absolutely, but as they are all one principle of moral operations, as they all concur in our doing good or evil.

Now in relationship to the “heart” as the principle of men’s good or evil actions, two things may be said. First, there is suitableness or pleasantness to the heart in what is actually done. Both God and men are said to do things wholeheartedly. Second, there is a resolution or constancy in the things that are done. Men’s hearts constantly draw on the treasure within which they feel they need or intend to use. Thus there is both suitableness and constancy in the workings of the heart.

Certain Properties of the Fallen Human Heart

Since sin is lodged within the very heart of man and is no way peripheral to his experience, it is indeed capable of exerting enormous influence over his life. There are many properties that give sin its power in the heart; here are two, both of which are drawn from Jeremiah 17:9:

The human mind is more deceitful than anything else. It is incurably bad. Who can understand it? The Lord, probes into people’s minds. He examines people’s hearts. And He deals with each person according to how he has behaved. Thus He gives them what they deserve based on what they have done. Jeremiah 17:9-10

The Heart is Unsearchable

The heart is virtually unsearchable to human beings. Certainly no one can fully understand the heart of another person and no person can fully understand his/her own heart either. The human heart is fully pervious to God alone; only he can plumb the depths of our hearts and render an accurate verdict as to what he finds there. And, remember, it is in that unsearchable heart that the law of sin dwells.

Much of the strength of indwelling sin, then, lies in this fact, namely, that the heart itself is beyond understanding. This allows sin to have its sway and power. Thus we may suppose a certain sin to have been defeated when in reality it has only temporarily slipped out of sight-where we cannot follow it and destroy it, only to reappear at a more convenient time.

It **SIN** can lie so close in the mind's darkness, in the will's indisposition, in the disorder and carnality of the affections, that no eye can discover it. The best of our wisdom is but to watch its first appearances, to catch its first under-earth heaving's and workings, and to set ourselves in opposition to them; for to follow it into the secret corners of the heart, that we cannot do.

The Heart is Deceitful

The heart is desperately deceitful. One need only look at the affairs of men in the world, including their actions toward others and the advice they offer to others. But Jeremiah's reference to the heart as deceitful is not in connection with the deceitfulness of sin in society, as prevalent as that is. Rather, the prophet speaks of the deceitfulness in a man's heart toward himself.

But how does this deceitfulness manifest itself? First, the heart abounds in contradictions. Sin has laid such a hold on the faculties of the heart that it has corrupted all of them causing them to act in ways outside their created order and harmonious workings. The **mind** was designed to discover truth, the **emotions** and affections to set themselves on the beauty of the truth and the **will** to perform the truth out of love for God. But sin has entered and a beautiful creation has been seriously marred. We still have all these faculties but they seldom function according to their design.

Sometimes the affections get the sovereignty, that is, they run off into sin and only later the mind recognizes the error. At other times the will refuses to love and obey the truth the mind discovers. There are also times in which the mind is too weak to investigate truth even though the emotions are crying out for it, the will is waiting for it, and the conscience is demanding it.

The mind and the reason were in perfect subjection and subordination to God and his will....That being disturbed by sin, the rest of the faculties move cross and contrary to one another. The will chooseth not the good which the mind discovers; the affections delight not in that which the will chooseth; but all jar and interfere, cross and rebel against each other. This we have got by our falling from God.

In conclusion that the “frame of the heart is ready to contradict itself every moment.” Things can be going well, so to speak, with the mind, affections, and will at peace and operating properly, but in the very next breath the emotions can seize sovereignty and all can descend in turmoil and contradictions. This is not the way in which God created us, but it is the sad reality of the impact of sin on us.

There is a second way, besides contradictions, that deceit operates in our hearts. Deceit operates in the heart by also making full promising at the first appearance of things. Sometimes our affections or emotions are touched upon and all seems to be well with the heart. But, within a short time, our whole disposition or countenance is shaken, indicating that our mind had not also been touched or changed by God. Once the emotion is gone, all the “fair promises” we made regarding reform and holiness are gone with it. This, is another great deceit of the heart wherein lies sin.

When we consider that the very “frame or order of operations of the faculties of the soul are dislodged by sin, and thrown violently into confusion, and that the heart makes promises it cannot keep, we are not surprised to hear Jeremiah call the heart “*desperately wicked*.” We are also not surprised that God should warn us numerous times in Scripture to watch our hearts!

Final Considerations in Light of the Condition of our Hearts

There are three considerations which this pastor wants to remind us of in light of the deceitfulness of our hearts: (1) never think our work of mortification has come to an end; (2) such great deceitfulness requires perpetual watchfulness; (3) in our struggle we must commit all things to God.

Mortification Never Ends in this Life

The redeemed soul, by the grace of God and his indwelling Spirit, Rom 8:13 must press on toward perfection. To this it has been called. Thus, our role is one of co-operation with God, in which we put to death the misdeeds of the body Phil 2:12-13. And we shall do this for as long as we are in this body. Only at glorification, in the next life, will there be no need for mortification. How much more do we realize this now, since we have come to understand that the very home of sin, is in our hearts, and is deceitful? The person, who dies fighting this fight, dies a victor.

Never let us reckon that our work of contending against sin, in crucifying, mortifying, and subduing of it, is at an end. The place of its habitation, the heart is unsearchable; and when we may think that we have thoroughly won the field, there is still some reserve remaining that we saw not, that we knew not of. Many conquerors have been ruined by their carelessness after a victory, and many have been spiritually wounded after great successes against this enemy...Let us, then, reckon on it, that there is no way to have our work done but by always doing of it; and he who dies fighting in this warfare dies assuredly a conqueror.

We Must be Watchful Because of our Heart's Deceitfulness

Sin has its residence in that which is inconstant, changing, and habitually deceitful, i.e., in our hearts. This means that we must be on constant vigil for its acting's; we must be in a perpetual state of watchfulness, not fearfulness or hyper-activity. If we were fighting against an enemy who presented himself in the open, that would be one thing; we could rest in peace knowing that he was far away at times or incapable of striking at others. But we wrestle not against such a foe. Sin living in the heart is deceitful, deals treacherously, and often comes by stealth. Therefore, we must be vigilant; we must watch and pray as the Lord himself repeatedly taught us. "Though the morning gives a fair appearance of serenity and peace, turbulent affections may arise, and cloud the soul with sin and darkness."

We Must Commit the Whole Matter to God

Realistic discussions about sin and its power in our lives could lead us, if it were not for the gracious provision and presence of our Lord, to feelings of despair and anxiety. This need not be the case, however, for God desires that we commit the whole matter to him, and that we do so with care and diligence. "*Casting all your care upon him; for He careth for you.*" 1 Pet 5:7.

He is able to search our hearts to the uttermost to know exactly what lies beneath the surface ready to undo us. He is able to make things known to us so as to protect us and deliver us from the enemy. He knows the ways of our fallen hearts and is not the least bit fooled by them. He also loves us deeply, as the cross once-and-for-all teaches us. We need only follow the course set out for us by Israel's great king, David:

Psalm 139:23 Examine me, and probe my thoughts! Test me, and know my concerns!
139:24 See if there is any idolatrous tendency in me, and lead me in the reliable ancient path!

Summary

Every one of us has this relationship between indwelling sin and the human heart as the seat and subject of sin. The heart in Scripture refers, generally speaking, to the whole of man considered as a moral being choosing evil or good. It has several faculties including mind, emotions, will, and conscience. These were designed to function in a hierarchy of harmonious agreement, but not so since the fall.

The heart in its "deceitfulness" and its "unsearchableness" increases the impact and power of indwelling sin upon us. Thus we are commanded to never let up from mortification and to remain watchful for sin's uprising in the heart. Finally, we are to commit all these realities over to God who knows our hearts thoroughly and is able to uncover sin for us. In this process we are to follow the example of David in Psalm 139.

"Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts:

And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.”

Psalms 139:23-24