

LAWS FOR SPIRITUAL GROWTH

Part 2: The inside is more important than the outside

There is no statement that I can make that is any more counter cultural than the title of this sermon "The inside is more important than the outside". The amount of time that people spend trying to make their inside better is only a fraction of the time that is spent trying to look better on the outside. People will go to any length necessary to try to measure up, to try to be one of the beautiful people in this world.

Today, you can have your face resurfaced with a laser. Or, you can get permanent makeup for your eyes, lips and brows. You can even get a partial face transplant, and I understand doctors are working on doing a full face transplant. I am not saying that God wants us to look like something the dog just drug in. That is not the point. The point is that we don't have the inward/outward thing in balance. In God's eyes, the inside is far more important than the outside. God is concerned about the inner man that is in scripture called, "the heart."

The term "heart" is a metaphor of the inner person. It speaks of who you really are deep down within. The heart is the pilot of the airplane, the quarterback of the huddle, the engineer of the train. If my heart is controlled and empowered by the Holy Spirit, my eyes will be pure, my words will be kind, my magazines, my movies, my music, my television will be pleasing to Him.

It is interesting to note that similar words are used in many cultures to refer to the inner person. In some societies, the word "kidneys" or "bowels" are used to speak of the inner person. Imagine singing "I left my kidneys in San Francisco" or "Deep in the bowels of Texas."

GOD'S WORK IN OUR HEART

1. *God searches and examines our hearts*

Proverbs 15:11 "Even the depths of death and destruction are known by the Lord. How much more does He know the human heart!"

The psalmist is saying, "death is mysterious to us, but God knows all about it." And, if God knows all there is to know about death, surely He sees our hearts and knows all about us.

Jeremiah 11:20, "O LORD Almighty, you who judge righteously and test the heart and mind."

It doesn't matter to God that you have had your face lifted or your tummy tucked. God doesn't care if you are bald or if your nose is bigger than your hand. All of that stuff doesn't matter one bit to the Lord. The thing that matters to the Lord is the heart. If the heart is not right and pure, God is not pleased, no matter what else we might do or not do.

For example, we would be very happy if all of the theft in our society suddenly disappeared. But if people's hearts were still covetous, God would not be pleased. We would be glad if there were no more murder in our world, but if people still hated one another, God would not be pleased. It would be a wonderful thing to live in a world where there was no immorality, but if people still lusted for that kind of thing, God would not be pleased. That's because when God looks at a person, He is looking on the inside, at the heart.

2. God deals with us according to what He sees in our hearts

God doesn't just search the heart to gain information. He searches the heart in order to respond to what He sees in it.

Jeremiah 17:10 "I the LORD search the heart and examine the mind, to reward a man according to his conduct, according to what his deeds deserve."

In Revelation 2:23 Jesus says, "I am the one who searches out the thoughts and intentions of every person. And I will give to each of you whatever you deserve."

More than we will ever know, God makes decisions regarding our lives based on what He sees in our heart. That is the way He has always dealt with people. When God decided to destroy the world in the days of Noah, it was because of what was going on in the hearts of people.

Genesis 6:5, "Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually."

God responded with a worldwide flood that wiped out the entire human race, except Noah and his family. If the hearts of people would have been right, there would have been no flood.

First Kings 11 tells us what happened to David's son, Solomon later in his life.

1 Kings 11:4, "As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other Gods, and his heart was not fully devoted to the LORD his God, as the heart of David his father had been."

When Solomon turned in his heart to other Gods and multitudes of women, God responded by removing the kingdom from his descendents. More than we will ever know, God is making decisions about what He is going to do in my life and in your life based on what He sees in our hearts.

God responds to your heart condition in the same way you respond to the conditions of the weather. If the weather is hot, you wear short sleeves. If the weather is cold, you wear a coat. What you do is determined by what you see happening in the weather. In the same way, what God does in your life is determined by what He sees happening in your heart.

The most important thing in determining the outcome of your life is not the amount of money you make. It is not your job security or anything else-it is the state of your heart before the Lord.

GOD'S DESIRE FOR OUR HEARTS

If the heart is so important to God, we need to know what it is that He wants our inner person to be like.

1. God wants us to have a pure heart

[Matthew 5:8](#), "*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.*"

The word "pure" can be defined as being "unmixed." If you like to drink milk, you probably don't want that milk to be mixed with anything else. You are probably not going to get a glass of milk and pour motor oil in it. You probably will not want your milk mixed with orange juice or cool aid-you just want milk.

A pure heart is one that seeks God and God alone. Søren Kierkegaard wrote a book called *Purity of Heart Is to Will One Thing*. That is not a bad definition, provided that the one thing we will is the glory of God.

Notice that Jesus gives a promise to those who are pure in heart. He says that they will "see God." That is an interesting statement. How is it that people who are pure in heart will see God?

a) To see God means to be admitted to his presence

After the plague of darkness on Egypt, Pharaoh said to Moses:

*"Get away from me; take heed to yourself; never see my face again; for in the day you see my face you shall die." Moses said, "As you say! I will not see your face again."
([Exodus 10:28-29](#))*

When a king says, "You will never see my face again," he means, "I will never grant you admission again into my presence." In the same way we call the doctor and say, "Can I see Dr. Brown today?" We don't mean, Can I see him from a distance. Or, Can I see a picture of him? We mean, Can I have an appointment to be with him? Can I come and be in his presence? Seeing God means is being admitted to his presence.

It is sin that keeps us from being in the presence of God, and it is purity of heart that allows us to be in his presence.

b) To see God means be awestruck by His glory

After God confronted Job in the whirlwind, Job said, "I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you; therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes."

Sin is like a very dark, thick cloud which keeps us from seeing the light of the sun. When that cloud is moved away, you are able to see the sun in all of its brilliance. When sin is removed from our hearts, we are able to somehow experience the Glory of God. Why is it that some Christians seem to be so excited about their walk with God where others are not? It is because some are pure in heart and being pure in heart, they are able to experience the Glory of his presence and it leaves them craving for more.

c) To see God means be comforted by His grace

Again and again the psalmists cry out to God that he not hide his face from them. For example in [Psalm 27](#) (verses 7-9) David says,

Hear, O Lord, when I cry aloud, be gracious to me and answer me! Hide not your face from me.

The psalm writer is in deep distress, and he knows that his only hope for comfort is found in the lord. When you're in the presence of God, there is a peace that transcends all understanding. That peace brings comfort to a troubled heart, and it is available for those who have a pure heart.

2. God wants us to have an undivided heart

When David was old, he gave a charge to his son Solomon who was to inherit his kingdom. He said in

1 Chron 28: 9 "And you, my son Solomon, acknowledge the God of your father, and serve him with wholehearted devotion and with a willing mind, for the LORD searches every heart and understands every motive behind the thoughts..."

Serving the Lord wholeheartedly is to have all of my heart centered on Him. Solomon may have started that way, but unfortunately he didn't finish that way. Solomon's devotion became divided. It wasn't that he didn't believe in God-he did. He was just divided in his affections, and that was his downfall.

When someone asked William Booth, founder of the Salvation Army, the secret of his success, Booth remained silent for several moments. Finally, with tear-filled eyes, he said, "There have been men with greater brains or opportunities than I, but I made up my mind that God would have all of William Booth there was." That's wholeheartedness. It means that God has all of you that there is to have.

3. God wants us to have a steadfast heart (spirit)

Psalm 51:10 Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

Many times our problem is not that we don't know what we should do. Our problem is not even that we don't want to do what we should do. Many times our problem is that we start doing what we should do and then little by little slide back into the old habit patterns. We start; we slow down, and then we stop. We start; we slow down, and then we stop again. If you go through that cycle for long enough, you will become too discouraged to try any more.

We need to pray that the Lord will give us a steadfast spirit. When I think of something being steadfast, I think of a metronome. A metronome is a little device that sits on the piano and keeps time. Its arm goes back and forth, back and forth so that the pianist can stay on beat. The important thing about the metronome is not how fast it goes; it is that it is steady in what it does. It just keeps on keeping on, beat after beat, and that's what God wants from our lives. It matters very little that we seek the Lord fervently one week and then barely pray the next week. The Lord wants us, like that metronome, to be steadfast in our love and devotion to Him.

SPIRITUAL HEART SURGERY

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1. Don't put in what you should keep out

If you want to have a heart that is pleasing to the Lord, you must be careful as to what you allow to enter into it.

Annie Dillard, in her book Pilgrim at Tinker Creek, writes: at the end of the island, I noticed a small green frog. He was exactly half in and half out of the water. He was a very small frog with wide eyes. And just as I looked at him, he slowly crumpled and began to sag. The spirit vanished from his eyes as if snuffed. His skin emptied and drooped; his very skull seemed to collapse and settle like a kicked tent. The frog skin bag started to sink.

I had read about the water bug, but never seen one. "Giant water bug" is really the name of the creature, which is an enormous, heavy-bodied brown Beetle that eats insects, tadpoles, fish and frogs. Its grasping four legs are mighty and hooked inward. It seizes its victim with these legs, hugs it tight and paralyzes it with enzymes injected during a vicious bite. Through the puncture shoots the poison dissolves all the victim's muscles and bones and organs-all but the skin-and through it the giant water bug sucks out the victim's body, reduced to juice." That is exactly what sin does to our hearts. It sucks the spiritual life out of us. That's why you have to be very careful about what you allow into your heart. If you watch a movie that is planting seeds of sin in your life, you are draining yourself of spiritual strength. When you read or get around other people, be sure that you are putting things into your heart that will cause you to grow strong in the lord and not be depleted of spiritual strength.

2. Spend regular, quality time alone with God and his word

Psalm 51:10 Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

David was saying, "Lord, make my mind clean. Let me think thoughts that will please you." We all need to pray that prayer. How many times do you find your mind replaying the sins of your past? Those sins hurt you then, and they are still hurting you because you keep thinking about them. How many times do you find yourself drooling in self pity instead of having faith in God and in what He is going to do in your life?

The word David used for the word "create" is the Hebrew word "bara." That is the same word that is used in Genesis when it says God "created the heavens and the earth. The thing that is significant about that word is that it means to create out of nothing, and only God can do that. David was saying, "Lord, I am asking you to do something in me that I could never do myself. Give me a clean heart." There is no way that any of us will ever

be able to have the kind of heart God wants us to have unless we are looking to Him and depending on Him to do the miracle within us.

3. *Make no excuses*

Psalm 51:17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

The word "contrite" means that you are deeply sorry for your rebellion against God and that you want to do differently. There is no rationalization; you are not trying to defend yourself or to blame anyone else. You simply say "I'm wrong, and God is right." That's all. If you have that kind of brokenness, and you are casting yourself upon the Lord, He will cleanse you and make you into someone that you would have never been otherwise.

In the last few weeks, there has been a major renovation project going on in my office. The walls have been painted. The bookshelves have been painted. The floors have been redone. But a major part of the project has been just throwing away stuff that I don't need. Some of that stuff has been around for decades, and it has done nothing but clutter my office. It was not enough to paint the walls and the bookshelves. The garbage had to be removed, and it is that way in our lives. No matter how much you paint the outside, it is not going to work unless you throw away the garbage. Throw away the anger, the bitterness, the unforgiving spirit. Get rid of the lust, the covetousness and greed. Ask God to remove the pride, the stubbornness and the self will from your heart. Say with a psalm writer, "create in me a pure heart, O God."