

THE BLIND and HARDENED HEART

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An ever growing number today have absolutely no desire to examine the Scriptures to see if their actions meet God's approval. The worldly desire to please self and satisfy one's own wishes is so entrenched in today's society that more and more folks harden their hearts to the word of God.

One's attitude is of utmost importance when confronted with spiritual matters. The Lord states that folks are not just to "hear" (Matthew 13:9), but also to give heed to "what" (Mark 4:24) and "how" (Luke 8:18) they hear. Following this teaching of Christ will prevent the religious confusion and error that runs rampant today.

Spiritually speaking, the only "seed" the Bible commands to be sown is "the word of God" (Luke 8:11). It is not difficult to understand the principle that seed will always reproduce after its kind (Genesis 1:11; Galatians 6:7-8). In the physical realm, if one sows the wrong seed he will not have the harvest he envisioned. Likewise, in the spiritual realm, the sowing of the wrong seed will not produce the harvest (a heavenly home) that so many are anticipating. The Word of God (proper seed) in its purity must be taught, believed and obeyed if the promised blessing of a home in heaven is to be realized.

Yes, God's promised blessings are conditional, and even a casual reading of the Bible should impress one with this truth. The heart being discussed is not the physical blood pump, but the mind or intellect of man. It is important what man thinks in his heart (Proverbs 23:7) "for out of it are the issues of life" (Proverbs 4:23). The apostle Paul writes that "with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation" (Romans 10:10). Jesus teaches the first and great commandment is to "love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind" (Matthew 22:37).

The parable of the sower depicts different types of hearts or soils (Matthew 13:38; 18-23). The types of soils commented on in the Bible represents different attitudes toward the precious Gospel. This article will focus on the attitude of one who possesses a blind and hardened heart.

The devil, "seeking whom he may devour" (I Peter 5:8), knows that sin will separate one from God (Isaiah 59:1-2). The writer of Hebrews warned Christians, "but exhort one another day by day, so long as it is called To-day; lest any one of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin" (Hebrews 3:13, ASV). When Paul spoke in the synagogue at Ephesus, there were some who were "hardened and disobedient, speaking evil of the Way..." (Acts 19:9, ASV). Isaiah prophesied about people with fat hearts, heavy ears and shut eyes, "lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and turn again, and be healed" (Isaiah 6:10, ASV). Jesus mentioned this prophecy in noting people who refused to believe the truth He taught even though they had seen the miracles He worked (John 12:37, 39-40).

Today, countless millions refuse to "see" and "hear" the Word of God! In the parable of the sower, some seed that was sown fell by the "way side" (Matthew 13:4). Even though contact is made with the seed (Word of God), certain people will refuse to understand (Matthew 13:19). The Bible message is the same for every human being, and all mankind can understand the Bible alike! Paul admonishes, "Wherefore be ye not foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is" (Ephesians 5:17, ASV).

Again, Paul implores of Bible believers, "Now I beseech you, brethren, through the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfected together in the same mind and in the same judgment" (I Corinthians 1:10, ASV). It is not that folks cannot understand what God would have them to do, but that they have no desire to understand and be doers of the word (James 1:22).

One may harden his heart to the point that he will not allow God's word to penetrate it. Why would an intelligent person do such a thing? There are many things that can contribute to one possessing a blind and hardened heart.

First, pride can keep one from submitting to the commands of God. The Jews of Jesus' day are classic examples of pride causing people to refuse and reject the truth. The Jews were eagerly anticipating the coming of the Messiah, but foolish pride led them to resist Christ when He came. The problem was clearly identified by Christ when He was confronted by the religious leaders of His day. "...*The Pharisees and the scribes ask him, Why walk not thy disciples according to the tradition of the elders, but eat their bread with defiled hands? ... he said unto them, Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites. ... This people honoreth me with their lips, But their heart is far from me. But in vain do they worship me, Teaching as their doctrines the precepts of men. Ye leave the commandment of God, and hold fast the tradition of men. And he said unto them, Full well do ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your tradition*" (Mark 7:5-9, ASV).

Multitudes today allow tradition to blind them to God's glorious truth. They base their religion upon the religion of their parents or grandparents. While claiming to believe in the Bible, they worship and serve according to the tradition of their ancestors. Pride will not allow many to cast aside man-made tradition and simply follow a "thus saith the Lord." This is the plight of those in denominationalism today who refuse to give it up when confronted with the word of God. They cannot find "their church" in the Bible. It is hundreds of years too late to be the church promised and established by the Lord (Matthew 16:18; Mark 9:1; Acts 2). There is only one body (Ephesians 4:4), and Christ is the head of that body, the church (Ephesians 1:22-23). The name church of Christ simply shows ownership, and denotes those congregations who are abiding by His will (Romans 16:16). Man-made churches, by the very names they wear, give the glory to man instead of Christ. It is not that folks cannot see and understand this truth, it is rather that most will not swallow their pride and cast aside the traditions of their families.

Second, prejudice and bias allows many to continue to cultivate a blind and hardened heart. Many are guided by their feelings and emotions instead of logic and reasoning. But the way of man is not in himself (Jeremiah 10:23), and just because a thing feels right does not make it so (Proverbs 14:12)! People are influenced by their environment and by what they are taught. The way they "feel" becomes the standard by which they live. It is difficult, at best, to lay aside all prejudice and bias and be determined to be influenced only by the word of God.

Those within and without the Lord's church must strive to have the attitude of the noble Bereans. "*Now these were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of the mind, examining the Scriptures daily, whether these things were so*" (Acts 17:11, ASV). One's mind (heart) must be ready to receive the word of God. The Gospel was proclaimed to thousands in Acts chapter two, but only those who "gladly received" (Acts 2:41) the word was baptized into Christ.

Those who have accepted man's invitation to salvation ("Just accept Jesus into your heart as your personal Savior") while rejecting the Gospel's invitation to salvation (*Hearing*, Romans 10:17; *Believing*, Hebrews 11:6, John 8:24; *Repentance*, Luke 13:3, Acts 2:38; *Confession*, Romans 10:9-10; *Immersion for remission of sins*, Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; Acts 22:16; Rom. 6:4; Galatians 3:27) need to cast aside bias and prejudice and determine to follow Christ. Those within the Lord's body who are rejecting a standard of authority and a God-given pattern need to repent and determine to be guided by the word that will judge all mankind at the last day (John 12:48).

Third, a heart without strong convictions will become blinded to God's truth. One's allegiance will either be to God or to man — to things spiritual or to things material. Jesus

said, “No man can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon” (Matthew 6:24). The Master also said, “He that is not with me is against me...” (Matthew 12:30). There is no middle ground that is safe and secure.

Strong conviction for God’s Word is woefully lacking among people today. Oh, people have strong convictions but not for the Word of God. The “situation ethics” philosophy and the “end justifies the means” concept is alive and well in the hearts (minds) of many. The response by most people as to whether something is right or wrong is based upon emotion and feeling rather than reason and conviction. Such will always lead to division, confusion and every man doing what is “right in his own eyes” (Judges 21:25).

A blind and hardened heart to God’s truth will argue that one church is as good as another and encourage people to attend the church of their choice. Please lay aside your “feelings” for just a moment and let us reason from the Scriptures. Christ promised to build His church (Matthew 16:18). He purchased His church with His blood (Acts 20:28). He is the head of the church which is His body (Ephesians 1:22-23). How many “heads” does a body have? How many “bodies” does a head have? It is no wonder that the Bible affirms that there is “*one body, and one Spirit, even as also ye were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all, and through all, and in all*” (Ephesians 4:4-6, ASV). This is why the Scriptures affirm, “*For in one Spirit were we all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether bond or free...*” (I Corinthians 12:13). Folks, at least have the integrity to admit that all man-made religious groups wear different names, believe different doctrines, worship and serve in different ways, and have different interpretations of the Holy Scripture. How can people convince themselves that so many diverse beliefs compose the “one body?”

A blind and hardened heart will argue that the Bible does not say “thou shalt not use instrumental music in worship.” Again, please lay aside emotion, feeling and personal likes and let us reason from the Scriptures. Instead of appealing to what the Scriptures do not say, one must appeal to what they do say. Christ, as head of the church, has the right to command. The Bible teaches, “*And whatsoever ye do, in word or in deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him*” (Colossians 3:17, ASV). To do something “in the name of the Lord Jesus” is to do it by His authority! Christ has authorized “singing,” not “playing” on an instrument (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16). One will search in vain for Bible authority of instrumental music! Neither must one forget that he cannot, with divine approval, “add to” or “take from” God’s Holy Word (Deuteronomy 4:2; II John 9-11; Revelation 22:18-19).

An ever-growing number today have absolutely no desire to examine the Scriptures to see if their actions meet God’s approval. The worldly desire to please self and satisfy one’s own wishes is so entrenched in today’s society that more and more folks harden their hearts to the word of God. The appeal is made to all to have the conviction to be guided by the Holy Scriptures (Psalm 119:105). The noble Bereans were commended because “*they received the word with all readiness of the mind, examining the Scriptures daily, whether these things were so*” (Acts 17:11, ASV). Our prayer is that their tribe might increase!

To be pleasing unto God, one “*must worship...in spirit and in truth*” (John 4:24). This means that a person will have the desire to do the right thing, in the right way, for the right reason. God’s Word reveals what is right to everyone and can be understood by all who do not possess a blind and hardened heart.

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