

547 Is My Heart All That Matters?

Phil Sanders

God's Answers to Life's Questions

Solomon said in Proverbs 4:23, "Watch over your heart with all diligence, For from it *flow* the springs of life." The heart of man is so very important, and keeping our hearts right with God is essential if we wish to go to heaven. God certainly does look on the heart. But is the heart the only thing God looks at, when He looks down on us? Is it true that all God cares about is our hearts? Can we enter heaven just by having a good heart, or does God wish more of us? Our hearts are precious in God's eyes, but is our faith more than just a heartfelt thing? What does God want from our hearts and lives?

When you speak of the heart, you generally think of that physical organ, which pumps our blood and gives life and oxygen to every cell in our bodies. The word "heart" as it is generally used in the Bible refers not to the physical organ but to a person's entire inner being. At times it is used as a synonym for one's spirit or attitude. That's why it is so necessary to take extra care of keeping the heart right in God's eyes. David said in Psalm 22:26 "Your heart shall live forever." The heart, inner person, or spirit is that God-given part of us that makes us who we are. That's why studying and keeping our hearts makes such a difference to God.

"Heart" in the Scriptures usually refers to the inner person, where we are most genuine. The heart is that part of our being where we desire, deliberate, and decide. It is where we are conscious and where we choose. It is the place where our spiritual activity occurs, where we worship. Our hearts have feelings, desires, passions, thoughts, understanding, and a will. This is why God wants us to love Him with all of our hearts. God knows that if He genuinely has our hearts, that He has our inner person. Without the heart, God knows He has nothing. Your heart is very important to God. That's why we must keep our hearts right.

Jesus spoke very openly about the nature of the heart. Some hearts are good, and some are not. In Matthew 15:8-9, Jesus said, "This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men." Going through the motions without the heart keeps one from truly worshipping the Lord. Heartless worship is insincere. No one likes to receive a praise from someone who doesn't mean it. God wants worship from our hearts. Jesus said in John 4:24, "God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." Worship to be real must come from the heart.

Jesus further criticized the Pharisees of his day because they gave too much emphasis to appearances. In Matt. 23:27-28, Jesus said, "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people's bones and all uncleanness. So you also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness." Jesus knew that the heart was where one must also be clean if one is to be righteous. Looking good doesn't get very far with God. God wants the heart to be pure as well. God sees both the outside and the inside.

Our obedience to God must also be from the heart. It does little good to obey Jesus in forms or ritual if we do believe or love Him from our hearts. In Romans 6:17-18, Paul said, "But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness." Obedience without the heart is duty, but it is not love. God wants our hearts to be loving. Jesus said in John 14:15, "If you love me, you

will keep my commandments." How we show our love to God is by keeping his laws from our hearts.

Sometimes people have faith in their hearts but are unwilling to act on that faith, because their hearts are divided. Jesus tells of some Jews like that in John 12:42-43, "Nevertheless, many even of the authorities believed in him, but for fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it, so that they would not be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God." God is not satisfied to have our hearts when it is convenient to us. He wants a total submission to and love for Him and His will. God does not want to compete for your heart or your loyalty. He wants you to serve Him fully.

Jesus said in Matthew 10:34-39, "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a person's enemies will be those of his own household. Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it."

Faith in God is not just a heartfelt thing. It is not a secret between God and the individual. Just having a right heart is not enough, if one is not willing to act upon his faith and love for God. James said in James 2:14-17, "What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead." A dead faith will not save anyone, even if one holds it in his heart.

James continues in chapter 2:18-21, "But someone will say, 'You have faith and I have works. Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.' You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder! Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar?" Abraham did not merely talk faith, he acted it out. His faith was not some hidden secret of the heart but was willing to sacrifice his son Isaac on the altar. Faith alone is never sufficient.

James concludes in 2:22-26, "You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works; and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness"—and he was called a friend of God. You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. And in the same way was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead." We don't need a dead, useless faith. We need a living, active one.

In Hebrews 11, we have we commonly call the hall of faith. Several of the verses of this chapter with the words "by faith." Verse 4 says, "By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending

him by accepting his gifts.” Verse 8 says, “By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going.” Faith in our hearts are supposed to move us to do more than merely say we believe. We must act on what we believe, if we are to please God and live according to His will.

In Heb. 11:24-26, the Hebrew writer said, “By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward.” Believing in God with his heart Moses chose the reproach of Christ over the treasures of Egypt. No one had to ask Moses, “Moses, do you really believe?” No he showed it by the way he lived. It is not just a matter of the heart; it is also a matter of how we live. We must live our faith not merely claim it.

Hebrews 11:1 says, “Now faith is the assurance of *things* hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it the men of old gained approval.” Faith in our hearts is so very necessary, but the thinking that it is all that is necessary is an error. Jesus also said, “I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish” (Luke 13:5). Jesus also said, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God” (John 3:5). While it is true that one is saved by faith; it is not the whole truth. There are other passages that must also be taken into account. Faith is essential, but so is repentance and baptism.

Jesus said, “He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned” (Mk. 16:16). Believing *and* being baptized are prerequisites to our salvation in this passage. The idea that one is required and the other optional is false; both are required. You see, God tests our hearts and our faith to see if we are willing to be obedient to his will. It is not enough to talk faith, one must be willing to act upon it. Now, no one can make that decision for you. That is why we do not read of baptizing infants in the New Testament. Only people old enough to believe and commit were baptized.

I wouldn’t want to baptize someone who didn’t believe; it wouldn’t do any good. I wouldn’t want to baptize someone who would not repent of his sins; it wouldn’t do any good. You see, the heart must be right, filled with faith and penitence for past sins, before one is ready for baptism. God wants our obedience from the heart, but let’s not suppose that the intentions of the heart can replace that obedience. Faith in the heart is not a replacement for obeying God’s will. Jesus is the author of eternal salvation to all them that obey Him (Heb. 5:8-9). And God will take vengeance on them that obey not the gospel (2 Thess. 1:7-9)

I hear people say that we are saved by “faith only.” But *Jesus said*, “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven” (Matt. 7:21). Now, who am I supposed to believe? I choose to believe Jesus. He is my Lord. Jesus said, “The one who rejects me and does not receive my words has a judge; the word that I have spoken will judge him on the last day.” To receive his words means

to welcome and act upon them. I don’t want to be judged by the words of Jesus for having failed to do what the Lord said to do. I love the Lord and want to do His will. If I believe, I will act.

Perhaps one of the reasons our country, our families, and even our own lives are in such a mess is because we have not believed the Lord strongly enough to do His will. There is much religious talk in America, but people don’t often live the way they believe. Some say they believe but never attend church. Some say they believe but never give to the church. Some say they believe but continue with their sinful ways. Some say they believe but will not forgive another. Some say they believe but will not openly say so. Some say they believe but believe in every other religion too. In the end our faith doesn’t mean much, because we don’t practice it.

I don’t know where you are, my friend, in your spiritual walk. I know this that saying you are close to God and living close to God are two different things. Don’t just tell about your heart; show in your life that you belong to the Lord Jesus Christ. Live your faith. Get to church. Study your Bible. Pray daily. Love others. Forgive. Be kind to all. Give of yourself. I also urge you to obey the gospel by believing Jesus is the Christ, repenting of your sins, confessing the name of Jesus as your Lord, and being baptized in water for the forgiveness of sins. Won’t you do that today?

God said through Ezekiel in chapter 18, verses 30-32, “Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, declares the Lord God. Repent and turn from all your transgressions, lest iniquity be your ruin. Cast away from you all the transgressions that you have committed, and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! Why will you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Lord God; so turn, and live.” My friend, do you need a new heart? Faith in God is not a smorgasbord, where we can pick and choose when we will believe or not or when we will obey or not.

God wants every person, every man, every woman, every boy, and every girl to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth (1 Tim. 2:3-4). He takes no pleasure at all in the death of a wicked person. Don’t ruin your life by thinking that loving God inwardly is all that matters. It takes more. It takes your living a life that shows God you really do love Him with all your heart, and all your soul, and all your mind, and all your strength. If you love Him, you will keep His commandments. I hope that loving the Lord means enough to you to put Him first in everything. May the Lord help you to love Him that much every day.

If you would like to do some serious study of God’s will for your life, write to us and ask for the free series, “Upon the Rock” Bible study. There are six lessons in this series, and each one takes about an hour to complete. They are simply a guide allowing you to use your own Bible to discover what God’s will is for you. You can call us at 1-877-226-5747 or write me at phil@God-answers.org. If you can’t wait, you can download the studies at www.God-answers.org. They can make an eternal difference in your life as you study from God’s holy Word.

Copyright 2005, Phil Sanders
Concord Road Church of Christ
8221 Concord Rd., Brentwood, TN 37027
1-877-226-5747

phil@God-answers.org

www.tv.God-answers.org