

The Fruit of the Heart

Why do I do the things that I do, even when I don't want to do them? That sounds a bit like Paul in Romans 7....but really, why do we do the things that we definitely don't want to do?

Why do we cuss other drivers out when the cut in front of us? I don't of course, but I have a friend that does! Why am I short with my friends....with my kids, with my wife? I don't want to be. Why do guys struggle with purity? Why do girls struggle with self-image? Why don't I tell others about my faith more? These are real struggles that you and I face right?

Over the last several years, I have found myself searching deeper into my heart as to why I do the things I do. If I don't get to the root, no matter of self-discipline will really change who I am and how I respond. I have begun to see the deeper issues of my heart and how it is from my heart that my actions stem.

There is another factor that adds to the confusion. I often ask students how they are doing in their connection to God. They ponder off for a second and almost always reply based on the external factors in life. If life is busy and there is a lot going on...then they usually feel overwhelmed and far from God. If life is manageable and routine, then they feel close to God....mostly because they have found time to read their Bibles and pray during the relatively calm schedule. In my observation it seems that how we respond or how we act is almost always based on heart issues along with external factors.

But that begs the question. Can we live the way that we think we should live, the way we want to live, the way God wants us to live amidst the hectic realities of life? Certainly we should be able to find a way...but how?

Only recently have I begun to understand some deeper issues of the way my heart responds to external circumstances. Why do I cuss out the driver ahead of me? In my heart, it has something to do with control. It has something to do with my perceived rights to not be disrespected. Honestly, if you really want to know how I operate, almost all of my issues point back to the fact that I am deeply insecure and affronts to my value as a person set me off. My wife doesn't communicate respect to me...so I lash out. My kids don't obey...so I retaliate. The driver doesn't recognize that I am the superior driver....I give them the *fin*g... I mean fist! I struggle with lust....because I have a deep longing to be recognized by the most beautiful woman in the world. Our hearts are indeed deceitful and produce a world of un-health.

So that is good...to see heart, root issues. But there is even a deeper issue. In Psalm 51 David says 'against you only God have I sinned' after being confronted for and repenting of his unfaithful relationship with another man's wife, Bathsheba. One might ask....what do you mean against God only had he sinned? If you know the story, he sinned against Bathsheba, against Uriah her husband, against his own wife....against his own people... He certainly sinned against more than God. But in God's economy, our ultimate sin is against Him primarily. The reason that sin is sin is because it violates God and his character.

Honestly, normally when I see my heart issues and repent of my actions....I am saying 'God forgive me and change me so that I can be a better person'....so I can feel better about myself. Isn't that what we really mean when we ask for forgiveness most of the time? I want to be a better person so that I feel better about myself. How many times do you really repent for the things you have done, indeed that you are, to the person who has been wronged....namely God himself?

So as I examine my heart and see where true sin comes from, I see that it comes from insecurity and a longing for self worth. Others are often an affront to that security and I do things and say things that I don't want to do. I somehow think deep down that if I put others in their place, my security and longings will be met. Sounds silly even typing this but that is the way I process things at a core level.

And yet, my issues don't seem to go away. I can't change my heart and its longings. I am a slave to them!

So, here is where we need to go another level deeper. Why am I insecure? Why do I have unmet longings? I am not allowing God to meet those needs right? I am not listening to what He says about me. He tells me that He loves me and that He is the greatest love that I could ever know. If I have heard or read that and don't feel profoundly secure, then I must not be believing Him. Or maybe I don't think that He is that great. Or maybe I think that He is lying!?

Now, the normal response is to buckle down and have more faith, think more rightly about God! Well yes at some level. But what is keeping me from seeing Him rightly so that I can indeed See Myself Rightly and so Live Rightly? It is my sin against a holy God that does not believe Him! I need to *REPENT* for my affront against a Holy God that has told me who He is and who I am and yet I have not believed Him! I have told Him that His view of me is not significant and I need to find a way to feel good about myself on my own. I struggle through all sorts of attempts to restore my identity....apart from God.

Do you see it? Until we learn to *REPENT* for our unbelief. Until we learn to *REPENT* for our affront to God's beautiful character. Until we learn that our wrong actions on the outside are really wrong heart conditions of sin towards our creator, we will never unleash the power of God and so be free!

Exploring the Diagram:

1) Look at Jeremiah 17:5-10

-What are the similarities and contrasts between the environments?

(Notice the heat is present for both fruit and dryness. The heat is not the issue. Fruit needs the heat of the sun to grow. But the heat of the sun can be devastating as well).

-What are the differences between the soils and root structures?

-What are the central issues behind the production of tree vs. a dry "shrub"?

2) The diagram below is a visual model of all that I have described:

From the top- The sun bears down and provides external circumstances in life.....The "Heats" or the pressures of life. The "Tree" of our lives responds with either good; healthy trees bearing fruit or barren trees yielding dried out branches.

Below the Surface- If we go deeper below the surface we see from where the fruit stems....our view of ourselves. But we must go all the way down to the deep roots and examine their structure and the soil that surrounds them. What do you believe about God that produces health or death? What specifically do you believe or not believe about him?

3) Go to the diagram and address the “heats” in life. (ie. Pressure to succeed, pressure to fit in, parents, friends, grades etc.). What are the negative fruits that come out of these pressures? (ie. comparison, anger, isolation, selfishness). Look one layer deeper. What is going on in your heart that leads you to respond these ways? What are the ways that you think about yourself that lead to these attitudes and actions? What are your hidden idols where you don’t see God’s view of you, but have a distorted view of yourself? (ie. Your identity is based on what others say, your value is determined by your grades, your are a product of your accomplishments etc.) These views of your self lead to the dried out fruit in a desperate attempt to control how you see yourself, how others see you. Finally, go down deeper, really deep. What do these views of yourself reveal that you believe about God? Or, what are you not believing about God deep down? (ie. God’s view of me is not enough, He doesn’t really love me, He is not sufficient etc.) Now, get this. We know that God tells us that he really is enough, he really does love us, He really is sufficient. So what you are actually saying to God is that He is a liar! Sounds harsh as I say it that way right? But I think it is true of my heart so often.

4) What is the solution? How do we change? How do we grow healthy fruit? The common response might be to try harder. Believe better things about God. Think better things about yourself. You could spend a lot of money in therapy trying to develop a better view of yourself. But I think the Bible’s answer is much deeper, much more profound, and much simpler! We will never have a right view of ourselves unless we have a right view of God. And we will never have a right view of God by just trying harder. The way to change our hearts response to the heats of life is to *REPENT* of our disbelief towards God. It is to apologize to God for heart’s attitude towards Him. When we apologize it “clears the air” between God and us. It returns us to a right posture towards Him. In a relationship with a human you can’t be turning your back on them while asking them for help at the same time! He is then released to change our view of Himself through His spirit deep in our hearts. We turn and trust Him to make us believe truth about his character. As we believe His truth He helps us base our view of ourselves on what He says. We are released from frantically searching for our own identity and rest in believing His view of us. When we believe what He says, we are freed up to live healthy, fruitful lives.

5) Move up the left side of the tree. What is it that you should believe about God? What is it that you should believe about yourself based on what you should believe about God? What are the healthy fruits that a life lived in the midst of “heats” (which will never go away) might yield based on a healthy root system?

6) Finally, go back to the negative fruit area. What is an area that continues to pop up in your life? Anger? Negativity? Harshness? Lust? Try and trace what heats lead to that negative fruit. Then go down to the bottom of the tree and examine what sort of specific heart issues lead to these responses. *REPENT* and ask God to free you up to hear His voice, listen to His words and grow in Spirit changed fruitful responses.

HEAT AND THE HEART

