

## **"GUARD YOUR HEART" SERIES**

### **#3: "The Heart Is Deceitful"**

#### **INTRO:**

Centuries ago, through Solomon, God told His people: **"Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life."**

Last Lord's Day we looked at several scripture passages that tell us that *God knows our hearts*. From those passages we learned five things:

1. Our outward appearances do not always accurately reveal our hearts.
2. God places more value on our motives than He does on what we think and do.
3. Since God knows our hearts, His judgments are always fair, just, and merciful.
4. We need God, who knows our hearts and our thoughts, to reveal our sinfulness to us.
5. Like the Pharisees, we tend to seek the approval of others rather than that of God.

Today's message, *"The Heart Is Deceitful,"* was born of Jeremiah 17:9, where the Lord says through the prophet:

***"The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?"***

Jeremiah spoke these words of the Lord to the people of Judah, people who were among God's chosen, people whom God had chosen to reveal Himself and His will, but people who had rebelled and sinned against Him.

The *Contemporary English Version* has this verse: ***"You people of Judah are so deceitful that you even fool yourselves, and you can't change."***

The *New Living Translation* renders it: **"The human heart is most deceitful and desperately wicked. Who really knows how bad it is?"**

Have you ever been advised to "Just listen to your heart"? Or encouraged, "Go with your heart." How wise is that in light of what the Lord says here?

This morning I want to ask three questions about the deceitfulness of the human heart and, hopefully, answer them in a way that will help us all.

First,

### **HOW DECEITFUL IS THE HUMAN HEART?**

The original Hebrew here describes the human heart as **"deceitful above all things,"** so deceitful that it fools us more than we realize, **"most deceitful."**

God's message to Judah through Jeremiah was that they were so deceived by their own hearts that they thought themselves to be godly, obedient, and in no need of repentance! Their own hearts blinded them to the reality of their rebellious nature!

The Pharisees and other religious leaders of Jesus' day were victims of the same type of deception. They were deceived by their hearts into believing that their very public behavior was obedience to the law of God. In Matthew 23, Jesus pointed out that they did not practice what they taught and preached. Seven times He calls them hypocrites. He told them, **"You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside...are full of greed and self-indulgence"** (v. 25). He said, **"You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men's bones and everything unclean...on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness"** (vv.27-28).

Before Saul of Tarsus met the Lord and had his life turned around and became the apostle Paul, he had "followed his heart" and had dedicated himself to silencing the messengers of the gospel of Jesus Christ and to destroying the church. His "heart" told him that he was doing the right thing!

He later wrote in his letter to the Christians at Rome: **"...my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved. For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God** (They were following their hearts!), **but their zeal is not based on knowledge"** (10:1-2). Their hearts deceived them.

Down through the ages, so-called "people of God" have done dastardly things in the name of the Lord. In the name of the Lord, people were severely punished – even burned at the stake! People were massacred during the age of the Crusades! For the most part, people were "following their hearts"! The heart can be so deceitful.

Look at the atrocities that people have committed in modern times, believing that they were doing the right things – that they were following their hearts. O what human beings are capable of! O what our "hearts" can convince us to do! O what deceitfulness our "hearts" are capable of! There seems to be no limit.

And notice that our Jeremiah passage in the NIV says that the heart is not only deceitful but **"beyond cure"**! In other words, **WE** can't fix it! We'll get back to this later.

Second,

### **HOW DO HEARTS GET THIS WAY?**

How can the "heart" of God's human creation become so deceitful? How can we who were created in God's image have such carnal and deceitful "hearts"?

Solomon wrote in Ecclesiastes 9:3, **"The hearts of men** (people), **moreover, are full of evil and there is madness in their hearts while they live, and afterward they join the dead."**

Jesus said: **"...out of the heart come evil ideas, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander"** (Matthew 15:19).

As far back as before the flood, **"...the Lord saw that the wickedness of mankind had become great on the earth. Every inclination of the thoughts of their minds** (hearts) **was only evil all the time"** (Genesis 6:5).

But our "hearts" were not always this way, were they? How did they get this way?

Well, the human "heart" was created pure and good. **"...God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them"** (Genesis 1:27).

However, that image was tainted when mother Eve and father Adam sinned by breaking the one law that God had given them to obey: **"You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die"** (Genesis 3:3).

Paul explains in 1 Corinthians 15 that **"in Adam all die"** (v. 22), meaning that all of Adam's descendants – and that's all of us – are born and live under the "curse" brought on by Adam's sin. A part of that "curse" is our "carnality" – our "sinful heart" – which ultimately deceives us into sinning when we reach an "age of accountability." In Genesis 8:21 Moses wrote that as Noah built an altar to the Lord after the flood waters had receded and God **"smelled the pleasing aroma and said in his heart: 'Never again will I curse the ground because of man, even though every inclination of his heart is evil from childhood. And never again will I destroy all living creatures, as I have done.'"**

So we all, in due time, become victims of our "deceitful hearts," and some, due to various factors, more so than others. By "various factors" I mean things like our home environment, the influence of our society, and at what age we come to know the Lord and His plan for our lives.

Third,

### **WHAT CAN WE DO ABOUT OUR SITUATION?**

How do we deal with a deceitful heart? Let me offer some help from Scripture:

1. *Believe what the Bible says about the deceitfulness of your heart.*

Following your heart can be a foolish thing, especially if you haven't believed in your heart that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and haven't been obedient to the Gospel. It can also be a problem if

you have not studied the Scriptures and learned to handle them properly.

2. *If you haven't accepted Christ as your Lord and Savior, you need to do that.*

That's your only hope for changing your heart. After that,

3. *Ask the Lord regularly to search your heart and reveal any deceitfulness.*

David prayed, "**Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.**" We can't always tell when our heart is being deceptive, but the Lord can.

4. *Trust in the Lord and in the promises and warnings of His Word.*

Jesus said, "**Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me.**"

Paul assured Timothy that "**All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work**" (2 Timothy 3:16). The Scriptures are our "rule of thumb" for right and wrong.

5. *Study the Scriptures, leaning on the Holy Spirit for understanding, so that you will know the right way to go.*

Again, Paul exhorted Timothy: "**Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth**" (2 Timothy 2:15).

Paul wrote to the Christians at Corinth: "**We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us**" (1 Corinthians 2:12).

6. *Be prepared to stand alone, if necessary.*

Be a Joshua, who said, "**But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord**" (Joshua 24:15).

Dare to be a Daniel, who, when he was among those from the tribe of Judah taken to Babylon for training in the ways of the Babylonians **"resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine..."** (Daniel 1:8).

Society will try to get you to "go with the flow." We must be strong and willing to stand alone, if necessary, to do what's right.

*7. Be patient as God changes your heart into what He wants it to be.*

Through the prophet Ezekiel, God promised the Jews that there would come a time when He would **"give (them) a new heart and put a new spirit in (them)."** He said, **"I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws"** (Ezekiel 36:26-27). I believe this was a prophecy of the church age that began on the day of Pentecost in A.D. 30. It refers in part to the repentance and baptism of the Jews (and later the Gentiles) who accepted Jesus as the Christ and their reception of the Holy Spirit.

When we accept the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross as the atonement for our sins by faith, repentance, and baptism into Christ, we are saved or "justified."

When as penitent believers we are baptized, the Holy Spirit takes up residence in us and begins His work of "sanctification," which is the "changing" or "purification" of our hearts.

When Jesus returns, we will experience "glorification" – we will be like Him.

Our "sanctification" by the Holy Spirit is going on now. In other words, God is changing our hearts.

David prayed for mercy and forgiveness in Psalm 51, saying things like, **"Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit in me"** (v. 10) and **"The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise"** (v. 17). We should be praying as he did. Our hearts should be broken and contrite before the Lord.

God changes our hearts, but not all at once. This "sanctification" of the Holy Spirit goes on from the time we are "born again" until we

take our last breath. Only when Jesus returns will we be fully sanctified. Until then, we must *guard our hearts*.

**CONCLUSION:**

***"The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?"***

Please stand with me as we sing and pray, "Change my heart, O God."