

A Matter of the Heart

Joe Slater

Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life (Proverbs 4:23).

Have you heard about the broken clock hanging on a wall of a church building? A sign below it said, “Don’t blame my hands; the trouble lies on the inside.”

The same is true for you and me. Our feet take us places we shouldn’t go. Our hands do things we ought not do. Our mouths utter wicked words. Why? Is something wrong with our feet, hands, and mouths? No, the problem lies deeper.

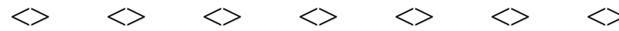
Jesus said, “*For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks*” (Matthew 12:34). Hear the Master again: “*For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies*” (Matthew 15:19). Are these actions sinful on their own merits? Indeed! Nobody even remotely familiar with the Bible would argue otherwise. Yet the outward act does not constitute the whole problem.

In the sermon on the mount, Jesus repeatedly showed that God is concerned not only with the outward behavior (good or bad), but with the condition of the heart which motivates it. That is true of murder (Matthew 5:21-26), adultery (5:27-32), honesty (5:33-37), and acts of worship and service such as charitable giving, prayer, and fasting (6:1-18). God disapproves of sinful acts, but He also disapproves of the corrupt hearts that produce them. He wants us to obey Him, but also to have pure motives.

“*The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked*” (Jeremiah 17:9). Such is the Lord’s estimation of the human heart. How, then, can we guard our hearts so that our actions are acceptable to God? The

apostle Paul taught that we must be careful with our thinking. The world is awash in vulgar, trashy, ugly, ungodly material with which we might occupy our minds. We might meditate about things immoral, things that make us angry, wrongs we have suffered, and past failures. By contrast, Paul says, “*whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy – meditate on these things*” (Philippians 4:8).

There is an old computer saying: G-I-G-O – it stands for “garbage in, garbage out.” Whatever you feed into your mind and allow to stay there will come back out in words and deeds. Remember, it’s a matter of the heart.



NO APPEAL

When I was involved in a jail ministry I noticed that some of the inmates would study the law books intently. They were looking for grounds upon which to appeal their conviction. There was always a chance that they might find something helpful. As I read of the final judgment in the Bible, I see no such opportunity for an appeal. The judgment is FINAL.

James has made it very clear to us about the standard of final judgment. We will be held accountable to the Word of God (law of liberty). There will be no consideration given to our earthly wealth, fame or power. Jesus made the word standard clear in John 12:47-48 (NKJV) “*And if anyone hears My words and does not believe, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world. He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him--the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day.*”

Why not appeal to Him now before it is too late to do so? A group of people once asked the question, “*What shall we do?*” The answer was clear. You will find it in Acts 2:38. Your decision about those words will have an impact upon your final judgment.

--Charlie Gamble (Southport, NC) via Bulletin Gold

KINDNESS IS NOT RETROACTIVE

“Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you” (Ephesians 4:32).

I would guess that you still remember some of those lessons you learned in elementary school. Such as; don't challenge a person who is seven inches taller than you to a tether ball match for "all the marbles;" don't try to slide into home plate when the catcher already has the ball; never brag about that to which you have no bragging rights; never take a Valentine card seriously (that cute little girl/boy gave a Valentine to everybody else in class).

Maybe one of the most significant lessons I learned during those formative years was that kindness is not retroactive. You cannot undo those stupid things you said or did. Most of the time when we are unkind it is the result of some selfish motive.

Sometime around 1972 a country-western singer named Glen Campbell released a song called "Try a Little Kindness." The song has never been more relevant than it is today. It is very possible that in today's world we have become so exposed to the needy that we have become calloused to their need.

We are very much aware of the kindness of God as seen through His son Jesus Christ. The duration of that kindness continues through Jesus as an ever-abiding revelation through eternity.

Have you ever wished that people would have been a little more kind to you? Have you ever wished you would have been a little more kind to them?

It is true, kindness is not retroactive, but today is a good day to start being kind. Occasionally, we sing about letting the beauty of Jesus being seen through us, but we should also let the kindness of Jesus be seen in us.

--Dennis Russell (Santa Maria, CA)