

Heart Surgery

Dear Ray,

Early on I was committed to discipling others in the faith. I wanted them to enjoy the full benefits of being a member of God's family. I did my best to help them understand what it meant to be a fully devoted follower of Christ. Some got it; others did not.

So I redoubled my efforts. I taught them the basics about the character of God, the atonement of the cross, the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, the importance of prayer, the authority of Scripture, spiritual disciplines, the community of faith, the stewardship of our giftedness, and so on. Some experienced the abundant life that Christ promised; others did not.

Then one day I was reading the Bible and I came across a passage that changed my life and my ministry from that point forward—*Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life* (Proverbs 4:23). For all those years it appears that I had focused on the wrong battlefield. I had been pushing for a change in outward practices, without realizing how much these actions flow from a healthy Christian heart.

What passes as discipleship in many circles today is no more than behavior modification. If we can get people to do the right things, they will become the right people. Boy, was I wrong. The battlefield for transformational change is the heart, not behavior.

Well meaning efforts to control our behavior seldom last. Removed from self-imposed restraints, our tendency is to lapse back into actions that we despise. In desperation, we make sincere commitments to read our Bibles *more* . . . to pray *more* . . . to witness *more* . . . to go to church *more* . . . only to find out that *more is producing less* in our lives. We're on the wrong battlefield.

When Samuel visited the house of Jesse to anoint the next king of Israel the eldest son, Eliab, was paraded before him. He had all the appearance of a king—regal stature, bearing and presence. But God stopped Samuel in his tracks. He reminded him: *Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart* (1 Samuel 16:7).

The enemy wants us to think the battleground is our behavior, while he knows it has always been the heart. And he desires to use us as a means to an end. His objective is to corrupt us, so that our behavior brings discredit upon the Father and keep others from coming to a saving knowledge of Christ. After all, if our behavior is no different from the worlds, why would anyone be interested in salvation offered through Christ? Winning the battle for the heart is essential to freedom from bondage, Christian maturity and godly leadership.

When I studied the scriptures on the heart, I was astounded by the richness of its meaning. The heart, you see, is comprised of our beliefs, values, attitudes and motives. Outward behaviors can act as an influence on the heart. And behaviors can solidify what is stored in the heart, like an internal feedback loop. But what originates in the heart is actually what motivates external actions.

I should have realized this earlier. After all didn't Jesus teach: *For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and make a man unclean* (Mark 7:21-23). If our beliefs, values, attitudes and motives are not formed and refit by God's scapel, the Bible, they will likely be shaped by other influences including friends, circumstances, the world and the adversary himself.

Christian transformation happens as the mind of Christ permeates our inner selves. As His Word forms our beliefs, we begin to value what He values. As we follow the leading of the Spirit, He renews our attitudes and motives. And from this growing Christ-like character outwardly flows behaviors that glorify God. To change behavior, we must have a change of *heart*.

Not too long ago, I was asked to address prominent pastors in a particular denomination. I asked them what was the primary function of their role. They responed with declarations of their life purpose or of their vision for their church. I countered by telling them that I believed their primary function was heart surgery. We are called to be heart surgeons. We are called to facilitate heart transformation in the lives of Christ followers. With the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, the authority of God the Father and the strength of Jesus Christ, we are to move others toward victory by focusing on the source of our behavior, the heart.

So brother, you are really a heart surgeon commissioned by God to perform heart surgery with His help. The world doesn't really care what we have to say until they observe how we live. We are called to live in bold relief against

the backdrop of our culture, always prepared to give a defense for the hope that is in us.

In His Strength and to His Honor,

Greg Bourgond

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For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men.

*It teaches us to say 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions,
and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age,*

while we wait for the blessed hope-the glorious appearing

of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ,

who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness

and to purify for himself a people that are his very own,

eager to do what is good.

Titus 2:11-14