

Lesson 23

The Hearts of Man

Our hearts are wicked, but Jesus can help.

Overview

Lesson Focus

The bad news is that we all have sin in our hearts. But the good news is that God made a way through Jesus so he can clean our hearts, and we can be forgiven.

Key Passages

Romans 3:23; Jeremiah 17:9; John 3:16

Memory Verse

John 10:9 I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture.

Prepare to Share

Scriptural Background

Prepare to teach by preparing your heart. Read the key passages for this lesson along with this background.

We saw the effects of sin begin to ravage the world in the children of Adam and Eve. The first murder occurred when Cain killed his brother Abel most likely out of jealousy, selfishness, and hatred. The Bible tells us that evil company corrupts good habits (1 Corinthians 15:33), and it appears Cain was quick to influence those around him.

The Bible tells us of Lamech—the fifth generation from Cain. We know that he took two wives (Genesis 4:19) in rebellion to God's ordinance of marriage (Genesis 2:24). We read how he spoke with seeming pride of another murder—one he committed (Genesis 4:23). As the moral fiber decayed from generation to generation, we can only imagine what the Lord saw as He looked upon the earth. For He was grieved in His heart that He had made people and knew that He must destroy them (Genesis 6:5–7).

And what does the Lord see today? More sin, evil, and corruption. Since Adam and Eve were sent from the garden, the sin nature that provoked them to disobey God has been passed on to all humans. The Bible states that death spread to all men through the sin of Adam (Romans 5:12).

We have all inherited a sin nature. David knew that He was conceived in sin—an inheritance from Adam (Psalm 51:5). And Jeremiah reminds us that the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately sick (Jeremiah 17:9). Our sin demands judgment by a holy God. Jesus tells us that judgment is coming. Speaking of the final judgment, He warns that just like it was in the days of

Noah, so it will be also in the days of the Son of Man (Luke 17:26). He is coming to judge the world in righteousness and faithfulness (Psalm 96:13).

So what are we to do? We know that our holy, jealous God is a consuming fire who will not tolerate our loyalty, love, honor, and respect being placed anywhere else (Deuteronomy 4:23–24). He is intolerant of sin, and we are all sinners (Romans 3:23).

“But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 15:57)! For God had always known that He would send His Son so that whoever believes in Him would not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16). Through Christ alone we are brought from darkness into light and from the power of Satan to God. Through Jesus our Savior we receive forgiveness of our sins and a place in eternity with Him (Acts 26:18).

Historical/Apologetics Background

It is not surprising that just 1,600 years after Adam and Eve were sent from the presence of God, He once again had to judge the sin of the world. This time, it was a worldwide Flood that would destroy all but Noah and his family (Genesis 6:13, 6:18). Sin continued to pervade the lives of the people.

It was just over 100 years after God destroyed the world that His judgment fell at Babel. The people were disobedient to God’s direct commands and desired to build themselves a city and a tower to the heavens. They longed to make a great name for themselves (Genesis 11:4). These plans angered the holy God, and He judged them by confusing their language and scattering the people across the face of the earth (Genesis 11:7–8).

And man continues to sin. God is now withholding His judgment on the unjust—but it will come (2 Peter 2:9–11). He is coming to judge the earth in righteousness (Psalm 98:9). His judgment is real, eternal, and will come by fire. He tells us as much: “But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly” (2 Peter 3:7). But thanks be to God that we can escape God’s wrath and judgment through faith in Christ (Romans 5:9; 1 Thessalonians 5:9).

Man has always suffered from a self-centered arrogance that bristles at the very thought of being sinful at heart. Many truly believe that humans are inherently good and that it is unthinkable that we are born into sin. Couple this thinking with the self-esteem-building rhetoric that maintains that we are great, and we can see that we are raising a generation that can’t fathom that they are deceitful, wicked, and rebellious against God (Jeremiah 17:9).

Children are told to follow their hearts. Whatever they imagine they can do, they can do. Their dreams are theirs if they only wish for them. Whatever they feel in their heart is okay—and they must pursue their heart’s desire. However, this is not what God’s Word tells us. We are leading our children astray with this type of teaching. Our feelings cannot lead our decisions. Our hearts are fickle and wicked. Our lives should be directed by Scripture alone. The Word of

God will direct us in all righteousness. The righteousness of His testimonies is everlasting—with understanding in these, we shall live (Psalm 119:144).

Without a proper understanding of the depth of the sin in our hearts, how can we properly rejoice at the forgiveness that is ours through Christ? If our sin is minor or inconsequential in our eyes, what would make us turn from it and accept the free gift of forgiveness and salvation from God? If we long for the pleasures of our heart and pursue those desires without considering God's Word, how would we make Him the Lord of our lives? With our own needs and comforts so much in view, how would we ever be able to properly humble ourselves before God to plead His mercy and forgiveness? Do you see? The very gospel is at stake when we consider the self-esteem-building philosophy so many are accepting.

The Apostle Paul sums it up well this way: "For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out" (Romans 7:18). We are sinners. Our righteousness is like a polluted garment before the Lord (Isaiah 64:6). And it is only through humble repentance and belief in the gospel of Jesus Christ (Mark 1:15) that we will escape the judgment and condemnation of our sins.

But the good news is that God promises a new heart for those who trust in Christ and thereby become partakers of the New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:33–34; Hebrews 8:6–12). We become new creations in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17) and can walk in newness of life, no longer living as slaves to sin (Romans 6:1–7).

For more information on this topic, see the Online Resource Page.

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