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## The Heart

Nothing is more splendid or more perplexing than the human heart. It has the capacity to be filled with goodness, and it is also the very source of evil. When we use the metaphorical language of the heart we are speaking of the essence of man, but also of his self-contradiction.

Jeremiah depicts this contradiction in man as a kind of darkness of intention. "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked. Who can know it?" Our Lord spoke of it this way, "Those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart, and they defile the man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. These are the things which defile a man..." The Bible is clear in its testimony that the heart of man is our own source of wretchedness.

And yet, in the book of Psalms we find the capacity for goodness, when the Psalmist prays, "Thy word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against thee." And Jesus, during his last discourse before he suffered, enjoined the disciples, "A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another."

It is St. Augustine who best articulates the profound capacity of man for good and for evil. But it is a capacity that is not neutral. Through the great Fall the nature of man is actually beset with the tendency to selfishness. Only the grace of God can reverse the devices and desires of the heart.

For Augustine it is all finally a matter of love. Whatever the heart sets its love upon determines whether the soul will grow in wisdom or decline in foolishness. Love adheres to the beloved. And if the beloved object of the heart becomes a habit of vice, then the capacity for goodness is overwhelmed with pain and sorrow, a fool's reward. In one way or another, this is the habit of every human soul. But if the heart, by grace, finds its beloved in the kingdom of God, then wisdom and peace are the satisfaction of every thought and desire.

In actuality, our hearts suffer a contrariety of good and evil. Our loves are divided between the flesh and the spirit, and we find our motives mixed and less than pure. It is no wonder that so many of us see so little of God.

There is great wisdom, therefore, in the recognition of this contrariety. One ought not to trust oneself implicitly. When it comes to the heart alone, one must always hold the affections of the heart with suspicion. Without the guidance of the truth and the per-severance of the will, the heart is a dangerous force, "Who can know it?"

And so when we are tempted to speak or act straight from the heart, we had better be careful, and reflect, and allow reason, tutored by the divine Word, to speak first within.

The best way to proceed with the inclinations of the heart is to cultivate the habit of a good will. Perhaps the best way to look at this good will in general is to see how it is so in particular, in the marriage service of the 1928 Book of Common Prayer.

In the first set of vows in the Prayer Book, which were historically the betrothals, and were said in another setting for the engagement, the public intention is recited. The vow focuses in the promise to love. "Wilt thou love her, comfort her, honor and keep her, in sickness and in health, and forsaking all others keep thee only unto her, so long as ye both shall live?"

The promise to love extends to comfort and honor and to all the duties and responsibilities of love, with a view to the certain vicissitudes of life. But what undermines the promise to love is the good will. The answer to the question of intention is the vow, "I will."

The heart devotes itself by the powerful dynamic of the will. Emotions vary. Expectations differ. Infatuations come and go. But the will, seeking only the good, finds happiness and thanksgiving in all the chances and changes of this mortal life.

How, then, does the heart seek the good? By knowing what is good and what is not, that is by knowing the truth, which is Christ. When Jesus promised the coming of the Holy Ghost, the Comforter, He called him the Spirit of Truth, because He would recall the Lord Jesus and His gospel to our minds and hearts, that we may keep the commandments, the foremost of which is the love of God.

The only way to overcome the duplicity of the heart is by the heart holding firmly to the truth and loving it. The truth shines as light into the darkness of our self-contradiction, and allows love to cover a multitude of sins. "Thy word have I hid in my heart." And then in the light of truth, the heart can speak and act, always to forgive and to redeem, to enjoy the beloved. The heart is deceitful beyond all else, but love truly reforms it. In the words of George Herbert:

***Love will do the deed.***

***For with Love***

***Stony hearts will bleed.***

**The Rev. Dr. Michael L. Carreker**

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