

Smooth Criminals - Straight From The Heart - Troy Knight

June 21st, 2020

1. Read, reflect, and discuss each of these passages individually.
 - Matthew 15:16 - 20
 - Genesis 6:5
 - Jeremiah 17:9
 - Deuteronomy 28:47
 - 1 Samuel 1:8
 - 2 Kings 6:11
 - John 14:1
 - Matthew 12:34
 - Psalms 51:10
 - Proverbs 3:5-6
 - Romans 10:9
2. As you reflect on these passages as a whole, what stands out the most to you? Why?
3. As you reflect on the message, what one principle or insight stands out as being particularly
 - helpful?
 - insightful?
 - difficult to grasp?
 - challenging?
4. What do the passages and the message teach you about God? What do they teach you about yourself?
5. How could the next week be different if you incorporated these truths into your life?
6. If time allows, read and discuss this article on the 2nd page from gotquestions.org "How should we live our lives in light of our identity in Christ".

Question: "What does the Bible mean when it says that we will receive a new heart?"

Answer: The Bible speaks often of the heart. The word heart can mean different things depending upon the context. Most often, the heart refers to the soul of a human being that controls the will and emotions. The heart is the "inner man" (2 Corinthians 4:16). The prophet Ezekiel makes several references a "new heart" (e.g., Ezekiel 18:31; 36:26). An oft-quoted verse is Ezekiel 11:19 where God says, "I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh." So what does this mean?

In Ezekiel 11, God is addressing His people, the Israelites, promising to one day restore them to the land and to a right relationship with Himself. God promises to gather the Hebrews from the nations where they had been scattered (Ezekiel 11:17) and give them a new, undivided heart (verse 19). The result of their receiving a new heart will be obedience to God's commands: "Then they will follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. They will be my people, and I will be their God" (verse 20). This prophecy will be fulfilled in the millennium, when Jesus the Messiah rules from Zion and Israel has been restored to faith (Romans 11:26).

Someone whom God has given a new heart behaves differently. Saul is an example of this in 1 Samuel 10:1 and 9. God had chosen Saul to be the first king of Israel. Saul was a nobody, but God chose him anyway and sent the prophet Samuel to anoint him king. "Then Samuel took a flask of olive oil and poured it on Saul's head and kissed him, saying, 'Has not the Lord anointed you ruler over his inheritance?'" Samuel made several predictions to prove to Saul that God had sent him, and verse 9 says, "As Saul turned and started to leave, God gave him a new heart, and all Samuel's signs were fulfilled that day." The new heart God gave Saul transformed him from an average nobody to the king of Israel. Not only was his status changed, but his entire outlook was transformed by the power of God.

The human heart was created to mirror God's own heart (Genesis 1:27; James 3:9). We were designed to love Him, love righteousness, and walk in harmony with God and others (Micah 6:8). But part of God's design of the human heart is free will. That free will carries with it the opportunity to abuse it, as did Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:11). God desires that we choose to love and serve Him. When we stubbornly refuse to follow God, our hearts, which were designed to communicate with God, are hardened. God compares rebellious hearts to stone (Zechariah 7:12). A heart of stone finds it impossible to repent, to love God, or to please Him (Romans 8:8). The hearts of sinful humanity are so hardened that we cannot even seek God on our own (Romans 3:11), and that's why Jesus said no one can come to Him unless the Father first draws him (John 6:44). We desperately need new hearts, for we are unable on our own to soften our hard hearts. A change of heart toward God requires a supernatural transformation. Jesus called it being "born again" (John 3:3).

When we are born again, God performs a heart transplant, as it were. He gives us a new heart. The power of the Holy Spirit changes our hearts from sin-focused to God-focused. We do not become perfect (1 John 1:8); we still have our sinful flesh and the freedom to choose whether or not to obey it. However, when Jesus died for us on the cross, He broke the power of sin that controls us (Romans 6:10). Receiving Him as our Savior gives us access to God and His power—a power to transform our hearts from sin-hardened to Christ-softened. When we were separated from God with hardened hearts, we found it impossible to please Him. We tended toward selfishness, rebellion, and sin. With new hearts we are declared righteous before God (2 Corinthians 5:21). The Holy Spirit gives us a desire to please God that was foreign to us in our hardened state. Second Corinthians 3:18 says that we "are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit." God's desire for every human being is that we become like His Son, Jesus (Romans 8:29). We can become like Jesus only when we allow God to rid us of our old, hardened hearts and give us new hearts.