

BECOMING LIKE JESUS

The Ethical Dimension

Introduction

- “In his book *Mere Christianity* C.S. Lewis observed that every person born into the world possesses *bios*, or biological life, that is sustained by oxygen, water, and food. But only those who are born again by God’s Spirit move beyond natural existence to possess *zoe*, new spiritual life that endures forever” (Demarest 1997, 277).

Inside-Out Spirituality

- Our root problem is the heart: “the human heart was only evil all the time” (Gen 6:5)
- “I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. ²⁶ I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws” (Eze 36:25-27)
- “I will give them a heart to know me, that I am the LORD. They will be my people, and I will be their God, for they will return to me with all their heart” (Jer 24:7; cf. 31:31-34)

Inside-Out Spirituality

- Foundational to growth as a disciple, Jesus emphasised that a person must be born again (Jn 3:1-8)
- “Jesus answered, ‘Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit’” (Jn 3:5)
- “I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. ²⁶ I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws” (cf. Eze 36:25-27)

Inside-Out Spirituality

- Jesus corrected the Pharisees for their concern of external religion:
- “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean ‘Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of the bones of the dead and everything unclean. In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness’” (Matt 23:25-28)

Inside-Out Spirituality

- Jesus emphasized that the heart is the source of what we are on the outside
- ³³ “Make a tree good and its fruit will be good, or make a tree bad and its fruit will be bad, for a tree is recognized by its fruit. ³⁴ You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of. ³⁵ A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him. ³⁶ But I tell you that everyone will have to give account on the day of judgment for every empty word they have spoken. ³⁷ For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned” (Matt 12:33-37)

The Heart of a Disciple's Ethical Life

- Jesus's disciples are to focus on the ultimate ideal
- “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matt 5:48)
- “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!” (2 Cor 5:17)
- The Gk aorist tense indicates “a decisive change in direction” that salvation brings in life

The Heart of a Disciple's Ethical Life

- Jesus' radicalization of the OT law for his disciples (Matt 5:21-47)
- Murder stems from anger (vv. 21-22)
- Forgive immediately (vv. 23-24)
- Adultery comes from lust in the heart (vv. 27-28)
- Sexual immorality is grounds for divorce (vv. 31-32)

The Heart of a Disciple's Ethical Life

- Love is the driving force of the disciples' life
- “You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’⁴⁴ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,⁴⁵ that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous” (Matt 5:43-45)

Guarding the Heart

- “Above all else, guard your heart, for everything (issues of life) you do flows from it” (Prov 4:23)
- The term “heart” refers to the whole of one’s being—mind, emotions, and volition
- The context of 4:23 refers to the path or direction of one’s life
- Why should we guard our hearts? For from it flow the direction of life
- The heart is the place where God speaks to you by the Holy Spirit—the source of knowing God’s will
- The condition of the heart determines the paths and actions in life

Getting the Truth into the Heart

- “Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. ² Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will” (Rom 12:1-2)
- “Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things” (Phil 4:8)

Getting the Truth into the Heart

- “You, God, are my God, earnestly I seek you; I thirst for you, my whole being longs for you, in a dry and parched land where there is no water. ² I have seen you in the sanctuary and beheld your power and your glory. ³ Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you. ⁴ I will praise you as long as I live, and in your name I will lift up my hands. ⁵ I will be fully satisfied as with the richest of foods; with singing lips my mouth will praise you. ⁶ On my bed I remember you; I think of you through the watches of the night. ⁷ Because you are my help, I sing in the shadow of your wings. ⁸ I cling to you; your right hand upholds me” (Ps 63:1-8)

Discussion Questions

- If the heart determines a disciples' actions, how can we guard the heart?
- What are some practical ways for you to get truth into the heart?

Nature of Regeneration

- Whereas conversion involves a synergism of divine and human working, regeneration is a monergistic act of God, not based on human effort (Jn 1:12-13)
- Recipient is passive and unconscious (Jn 3:8)
- It is instantaneous (Jn 5:24; Lu 23:39-43)
- Agent is the Holy Spirit (Jn 3:5-8)
- Instrument used is the Word (1 Pt 1:23-25)
- Result is a new creation in Christ (2 Cor 5:17)

Evidences of Regeneration

- Believers in Jesus (1 Jn 5:1)
- Establishes a new direction of life (2 Cor 5:17)
- Overcomes the world (1 Jn 5:4)
- Does not practice sin (1 Jn 3:9; cf. 2:29)
- Manifests the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22)

A Comparison

CONVERSION

- Involves a synergism of divine and human works (Phil 2:12-13)
- One's conscious act of turning to God in faith
- A process that occurs over a period time
- Repentance from sin may be repeated again and again

REGENERATION

- God's monergistic work, independent of human effort (Jn 1:13)
- An unconscious work of the Holy Spirit (Jn 3:8)
- An instantaneous work of the Spirit
- An unrepeatable event in the life of a true believer