

Where is the Spiritual Battleground?

Heart and Flesh: Biblical Definitions

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Heart Versus Flesh

There are hundreds of passages that use the term “heart” to describe the seat of human emotion, intelligence, morality, volition and religious life in general. However, most often, “heart” is used in Scripture as an idiom for the mind.

There is also present in scripture the heart of the unredeemed and the heart of the redeemed. Oftentimes the characteristics of the unredeemed heart are applied to the redeemed. I believe this is a critical error. The chart below shows the context of the unredeemed versus the redeemed and how the term “heart” is applied. It is by no means exhaustive, but certainly is representative of all passages. Notice, the application of the description of the unredeemed heart is never applied to the redeemed.

Characteristics of the Heart of the Saved and Lost

Unredeemed

Ge 6:5

Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually *.

Ge 6:6

The LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart.

Ge 8:21

The LORD smelled the soothing aroma ; and the LORD said to Himself, “I will never * again curse the ground on account of man, for the intent of man’s heart is evil from his youth; and I will never again destroy every living thing , as I have done .

Ex 4:21

The LORD said to Moses, “When you go back to Egypt see that you perform before Pharaoh all the wonders which I have put in your power; but I will harden his heart so that he will not let the people go.

De 5:29

Oh that they had such a heart in them, that they would fear Me and keep all My commandments always, that it may be well with them and with their sons forever !

De 8:14

then your heart will become proud and you will forget the LORD your God who brought you out from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

1Sa 7:3

Then Samuel spoke to all the house of Israel, saying, “If you return to the LORD with all your heart, remove the foreign gods and the Ashtaroth from among you and direct your hearts to the LORD and serve Him alone; and He will deliver you from the hand of the Philistines.”

2Ch 12:14

He did evil because he did not set his heart to seek the LORD.

2Ch 25:2

He did right in the sight of the LORD, yet not with a whole heart.

2Ch 26:16

But when he became strong, his heart was so proud that he acted corruptly, and he was unfaithful to the LORD his God, for he entered the temple of the LORD to burn incense on the altar of incense.

Ps 73:1

Surely God is good to Israel, To those who are pure in heart !

Ps 78:8

And not be like their fathers, A stubborn and rebellious generation, A generation that did not prepare its heart And whose spirit was not faithful to God.

Jer 5:23

But this people has a stubborn and rebellious heart; They have turned aside and departed.

Jer 17:9

The heart is more deceitful than all else And is desperately sick; Who can understand it?

Eze 14:4

Therefore speak to them and tell them, Thus says the Lord GOD, “Any man of the house of Israel who sets up his idols in his heart, puts right before his face the stumbling block of his iniquity, and then comes to the prophet, I the LORD will be brought to give him an answer in the matter in view of the multitude of his idols,

Eze 20:16

because they rejected My ordinances, and as for My statutes, they did not walk in them; they even profaned My sabbaths, for their heart continually went after their idols.

Mr 7:21

For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries,

Lu 6:45

The good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth what is evil; for his mouth speaks from that which fills his heart.

Ac 8:21

You have no part or portion in this matter, for your heart is not right before God.

Ro 1:21

For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened.

Ro 2:5

But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God,

Eph 4:18

being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart;

Redeemed

Ge 20:5

“Did he not himself say to me, ‘She is my sister ‘? And she herself said, ‘He is my brother.’ In the integrity of my heart and the innocence of my hands I have done this.”

Ge 20:6

Then God said to him in the dream, “Yes, I know that in the integrity of your heart you have done this, and I also kept you from sinning against Me; therefore I did not let you touch her.

2Ch 16:9

“For the eyes of the LORD move to and fro throughout the earth that He may strongly support those whose heart is completely His. You have acted foolishly in this. Indeed, from now on you will surely have wars.”

Ps 7:10

My shield is with God, Who saves the upright in heart.

Ps 66:18

If I regard wickedness in my heart, The Lord will not hear;

Ps 73:1

Surely God is good to Israel, To those who are pure in heart !

Ps 86:12

I will give thanks to You, O Lord my God, with all my heart, And will glorify Your name forever.

Jer 24:7

I will give them a heart to know Me, for I am the LORD; and they will be My people , and I will be their God, for they will return to Me with their whole heart.

Jer 31:33

“But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,” declares the LORD, “I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people .”

Jer 32:39

and I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear Me always, for their own good and for the good of their children after them.

Eze 11:19

And I will give them one heart, and put a new spirit within them. And I will take the heart of stone out of their flesh and give them a heart of flesh,

Eze 36:26

Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.

Mt 5:8

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

Mt 12:34

You brood of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak what is good? For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart.

Mt 15:18

But the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile the man.

Lu 6:45

The good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth what is evil; for his mouth speaks from that which fills his heart.

Ro 2:29

But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God.

Ro 6:17

But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed,

Heb 10:22

let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

1Pe 1:22

Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart,

1Jo 3:21

Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God;

Addendum

Romans 6:17 - But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed,

Romans 7:25 - Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.

Hebrews 10:22 - let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.

As you look at the references on the preceding pages, you'll easily see that the Bible never applies the ugly characteristics of an unregenerate heart to a redeemed person. Why then, should we? God has renewed the heart of a believer and it is unbiblical to accuse the Body of Christ of having hearts that are unregenerated.

Where then, is the battle? The Bible teaches that the battle against sin is in the flesh, NOT the heart. Notice, please:

Mt 26:41

“Keep watching and praying that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

Jesus is speaking to a redeemed person. He shows them that the danger is in the flesh, not the heart (perhaps synonymous with spirit in this passage).

Ro 7:5

For while we were in the flesh, the sinful passions, which were aroused by the Law, were at work in the members of our body to bear fruit for death.

Paul teaches here that our sinful passions are from the flesh.

Ro 7:18

For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not.

A critical passage! We know the Bible teaches that our flesh was not redeemed at salvation and, in fact, awaits the glorification described so clearly in 1 Corinthians 15. Therefore, we have a “redeemed heart” incarcerated in “unredeemed flesh.” This is exactly why we struggle. Notice:

Ro 7:14

For we know that the Law is spiritual, but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin.

Ro 7:25

Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord ! So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin.

Ro 8:3

For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh,

Ro 8:4

so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

Ro 8:5

For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit.

Ro 8:6

For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace,

Ro 8:7

because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so,

Ro 8:8

and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

Ro 8:9

However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him.

Ro 8:12

So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh –

Ro 8:13

for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

The heart is not mentioned anywhere in this key teaching. Romans 6 through 8 contain the key teaching on our struggle against sin. And, it is clear; the struggle is centered on the flesh, not the heart.

Further evidence of this:

Ro 13:14

But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts.

1Co 3:1

And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to infants in Christ.

How do we cleanse ourselves and appear holy before the Lord?

2Co 7:1

Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

Ga 5:13

For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.

Ga 5:16

But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.

Ga 5:17

For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please.

Ga 5:19

Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality,

Ga 5:24

Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

Ga 6:8

For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.

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