

Harden Not Your Heart

Challenges on Our Spiritual Journey

John O. Reid (1930-2016)

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In this world in which we live, there are many things against which we all fight. This season, with its foolishness, anger, and frustration, certainly is one of them. However, it is basically all of the things that Satan influences as prince of the power of the air that he promulgates on the world around us.

One of the most dangerous things that we must face comes from within us: our heart. This correctly governs our approach and our attitude toward living this life that we have been given.

John Ritenbaugh has recently given us sermons on the new heart that God is trying to give us to replace the heart with which we were called. When we find ourselves in a wrong attitude or desiring wrong things, it should be a reminder to stop and consider which heart is motivating us. Is it the new heart that we are being given or the old one with which we were called?

I would like us to take a look, for a moment, at the heart with which you and I have been called. I know that some do not believe this, but it is true.

Jeremiah 17:9 The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?

I know people who say, "My heart is not that way." Well, I had better tell you that my heart is, and I am sure yours is, as well.

Matthew Henry has the following to say:

There is that wickedness in our hearts which we ourselves are not aware of and do not suspect to be there...it is a common mistake among the children of men to think themselves, their own hearts at least, a great deal better than they really are. The heart, the conscience of man, in his corrupt[ible]...state, is deceitful above all things. It is subtle and false; it is apt to supplant.... It calls evil good and good evil, puts false colours upon things, and cries peace to those to whom peace does not belong. When men say in their hearts (that is, suffer their hearts to whisper to them) that there is no God, or he does not

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see [that is something that the heart will often say], or he will not require, or they shall have peace though they go on; in these, and a thousand similar suggestions the heart is deceitful. It cheats men into their own ruin; and this will be the aggravation of it, that they are self-deceivers, self-destroyers. Herein the heart is desperately wicked; it is deadly....

I would like to quote from Adam Clarke on the same verse.

[The heart is deceitful] "The heart is supplanting-tortuous-full of windings-insidious;" lying ever at the catch; striving to avail itself of every favourable circumstance to gratify its propensities to pride, ambition, evil desire, and corruption of all kinds. [Our old self does not want to stay buried, brethren: it just does not. It is desperately wicked] and is wretched, or feeble; distressed beyond all things, in consequence of the wickedness that is in it...[Shrewd is the heart of man; and unsearchable: who shall know it?][Who can know it?] It even hides itself from itself; so that its owner does not know it. A corrupt heart is the worst enemy...it is full of evil devices—of deceit, of folly, and abomination; and its owner knows not what is in him till it boils over, [and until he has made some tremendous mistake,] and is often past remedy before the evil is perceived. ["How could I have done this? How could I have said that?"] Therefore, trust not in man, whose purposes are continually changing, and who is actuated only by motives of self-interest.

In short, what he is saying is that our trust should be in God and His instructions to us. This is the heart that God wishes to replace, the heart about which we have been reading here.

An approach toward any situation or challenge can be positive or negative, depending on the attitude that we have. Our attitude, by definition, is "a position of the body suggesting some thought [starting with the mind or your heart feeding your actions], state of mind, behavior or conduct regarding some matter as indicating opinion or purpose." The synonyms—*attitude*, *position*, *posture*, and *pose*—refer to the physical aspects of a body and, by extension, the mental outlook. It all goes back to the heart, which is the mind.

Thus, brethren, when we find ourselves filled with stubbornness, jealousy, hatred, lust for sexual things or alcohol, or finding excuses for not doing what is right, then we feel superior to others, wanting to do our own thing, having a pity party, resenting some of

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the brethren, wanting to accuse others rather than loving them, justifying selfishness, justifying skipping prayer and study, being filled with fears, finding fault with the ministry or, in general, just in a rotten attitude, what should we do?

If we can somehow stop in the middle of our mindset for a moment we should get on our knees and ask God to help us to see and truly realize which heart we are displaying. Is it the one with which we came out of the world, that still wants the world, and still wants to do things its way, or the one that God is trying to give us? It has been said that our heart, or our human nature, is like a coiled spring; and as long as we stand on it with our full weight, it stays compressed and does not give us any trouble. However, the moment that we take our eyes off God and relax, that spring springs up and we find ourselves in the attitude of doing things that we did prior to being called.

Proverbs 4:23-27 Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life. Put away from you a deceitful mouth, and put perverse lips far from you. Let your eyes look straight ahead, and your eyelids look right before you. Ponder the path of your feet, and let all your ways be established. Do not turn to the right or the left; remove your foot from evil.

A better translation would be "guard your heart." This all starts with the heart that you and I have. We have to guard the new heart that God is trying to give us.

John 6:63 It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life.

Jesus is telling us that it is His teaching, coupled with the Spirit of God, that is the new heart that makes us alive. The flesh, or old heart, our old way of thinking and acting, truly profits us nothing. We have to understand that.

When something is given once it is important; when it is given twice, it is even more so; three times, it is very important; but when something is given four times, it is exceedingly important in God's Word.

Psalms 95:1-8 Oh come, let us sing to the LORD! Let us shout joyfully to the Rock of our salvation. Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving; let us shout joyfully to Him with psalms. For the LORD is the great God, and the great King above all gods. In His hand are the deep places of the earth; the heights of the hills are His also. The sea is His, for He made it; and His

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hands formed the dry land. Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the LORD our Maker. For He is our God, and we are the people of His pasture, and the sheep of His hand. Today, if you will hear His voice: "Do not harden your hearts, as in the rebellion, as in the day of trial in the wilderness."

This is the first place in the Bible where it says, "Harden not your hearts."

The author of Hebrews, who appears to be the apostle Paul, is writing to a people who are not being persecuted in the way that we view persecution. They were not being threatened at that time by torture or death but by the old religion of the physical works—washings and so forth—of the law. They were being persecuted to go back into the world, in a sense, back into the old way of living; and they were letting down. They were a lot like the church of this age. They had been given the truth and were excited about it; then the time was going on, and they began to drift away.

Hebrews 2:1 Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away.

To me, this is so graphic. I used to skin dive a lot when I was younger, and once in a while you would see a boat that had come untied resting against a pier. At first, it seemed just to sit there. You think, "It is right where it should be. It is just right on track." Then you go off and do something, and you look back and the boat is about six feet away. When you look back again, the boat is maybe twenty-five or thirty feet away. Then, when you look back again it is on the horizon. It slowly drifts away. This is what was happening to the Hebrews.

Hebrews 2:2 For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him...?

In short, the first love, the zeal, the excitement about what was done for them and what the future held for them was slipping from first place in their life into second, third, fourth, and fifth. The world slipped in, and they were just going through the motions.

In chapters one and two, Paul describes their awesome Savior, the One who saved

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them, and how He upholds all things by His power and how He now sits at the right hand of God the Father. Paul was building a case about how He is higher than the angels and all of the angels worship Him, how He loves righteousness and how He hates sin, how He laid the foundations of the earth and the heavens, showing His awesome power and ability. All things were put under His feet. This is the One that was their God and their Savior.

Hebrews 2:9-10 But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone. For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.

Christ has experienced personally the sufferings, trials, and fears through which we go. He has been made our merciful and faithful High Priest, in things pertaining to God, to reconcile us to Him. He is leading up to something here. In chapter three, he becomes very personal.

Hebrews 3:1-6 Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Christ Jesus, who was faithful to Him who appointed Him, as Moses also was faithful in all His house. For this One has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as He who built the house has more honor than the house. For every house is built by someone, but He who built all things is God. And Moses indeed was faithful in all His house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which would be spoken afterward, but Christ as a Son over His own house, whose house we are if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end.

Paul starts out by referring to us as holy brethren. Out of all of the earth, we have been selected to be holy. He is reminding us of who we are and to whom we belong. We do not belong to the world; we belong to God the Father and Jesus Christ. We are called with a heavenly calling; and because of that, we should consider the High Priest of our profession and the path that we are called to follow. Christ is both our High Priest and our Apostle. Then, as an example to us and all of mankind, we are to notice that He is faithful to His Father who appointed Him. Because of this, He was counted worthy of more glory than Moses.

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He goes on to say that every house has a builder. The term *house* not only means a place where a family lives, but it means the family itself. We, who are called today, are the house that is being built in Jesus Christ. We, out of the entire world, have been selected to build a Family that has never existed before, the Family of God.

Just so that we will have the confidence, He tells us in verse 4 that the One who built His house, or Family, is Jesus Christ, under the direction of the Father. He is the One who is building it with each one of us. He tells us, past and present, that Moses was faithful in all His house, as a servant, but that Jesus Christ as a Son is "over His own house, whose house we are if we hold fast the confidence and rejoicing of hope firm to the end." We can just read over the word *confidence* and not give it much thought. The confidence to which we are to hold fast is the liberty of access to God the Father. Of all the people in the world, we have access to God the Father. We must not drift away.

Hebrews 3:7-10 Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says: "Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, in the day of trial in the wilderness. Where your fathers tested Me, tried Me, and saw My works forty years. Therefore I was angry with that generation, and said, 'They always go astray in their heart, and they have not known My ways.'"

That is where the error always comes from: the heart.

Hebrews 3:11-14 Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; but exhort one another daily, while it is called "Today," lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end...

Here the word *confidence* means to hold to our foundation—to the base from which we live, from which we operate—steadfast to the end.

Hebrews 3:15-16 ...while it is said: "Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion." For who, having heard, rebelled? Indeed, was it not all who came out of Egypt, led by Moses?

To sum it up, if we choose not to hear God's Spirit urging us to pray, study, fast, meditate and obey, putting God first in our lives, then indeed our heart will slowly

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become hardened. God's Word and God's way of living will not become important.

In Deuteronomy 8, God gave Israel trials on their trip to the Promised Land to see if they would obey Him or not. I do not know that we often stop to consider that we are on a journey. You can picture Israel going through the desert from Egypt to the Promised Land, and you can picture when they stop, and you can picture the miracles that took place. However, do we consider that we are on a journey? We have the sin of the world dangling all around us. Whether we believe it or not, we are on a journey just like Israel—but our journey is far, far more important. We are on a journey to the Kingdom of God; and though we are not being tested with the hardships of the desert, we are really being tested in this permissive, end-time environment. It is dynamite, brethren.

Why was God grieved with our forefathers? They erred in their hearts, from which came the issues of life. They set their heart on the lust of eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life; and they first went astray in their hearts.

Indeed, Paul said that we are to encourage each other "daily, while it called 'Today.'" In short, use the time wisely that you have been given, while you have it. For us, who have been called in this age, it will be the only time we will ever have. We may get second chances during our calling and during our life, but time-wise, this is the only chance.

We are told that we are to be partakers of Christ, and that entails if we hold to the beginning of our confidence with the foundation, as I mentioned. We are told not to neglect our salvation or let this world take your crown. We must not allow our hearts to become hardened. He tells us that we should not be like those that came out of Egypt. They saw the miracles of God and the awesome power of God, and then rebelled against Him and troubled Him forty years and died short of the rest that was set aside for them.

Hebrews 4:1-11 (New English Bible) Therefore, we must have before us the fear that, while the promise of entering His rest remains open, one or another among you should be found having missed his chance. The rest is set before you that you can go to, but take heed: some may miss the chance. For indeed, we have heard the good news as they did. (We were all excited about it.) But in them the message that they heard did them no good because it met with no faith in those who heard it. It is we who have become believers who enter into the rest referred to in the words, "As I vowed in my anger, they shall never enter my rest."

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Yet God's work has been finished ever since the world was created (for do not the scriptures say that God rested from all work on the seventh day?), and once again we read the passage about "they shall never enter my rest, those who hardened their heart." The fact remains that someone must enter it. Since those who first heard the good news failed to enter through unbelief, God fixes another day. Speaking through David, after many long years, he uses the words, "if you hear His voice, do not grow stubborn... Do not harden your hearts or let them become hardened."

If Joshua had given their rest, God would not have spoken of another day after that. Therefore a Sabbath day of rest still awaits the people of God. For anyone who enters God's rest rests from his own work as God did from His. Let us, then, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by following this evil example of unbelief.

Our journey, brethren, is to the Kingdom of God and our rest *is* the Kingdom of God. Who is it that could not enter that rest? Those who hardened their hearts.

The apostle Paul knew that he was on a journey, and that he had two hearts, or two ways of living, in him. One of these hearts was to fight against and the other was to fight for.

Romans 7:22-25 For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.

Paul knew, that as Jesus Christ said in Philippians 1:6, that He started a work in him and He was going to finish it. I am going to read a quote concerning these verses, from the Berean by John Ritenbaugh:

The apostle Paul was one of the most mature Christians who ever walked the face of the earth, but he saw himself being torn with flesh lusting against the spirit, and the spirit lusting against the flesh. Paul was in the middle, having to make the choice. If he had not grown spiritually, he would never have seen the conflict. His mind would have passed right over it. Thus, on

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the one hand, Paul delighted in his understanding of the purpose and perfection of God's law and yet, on the other hand, that insight produced such dismay in him because he could see how far short he fell and from time to time from his perfection. The existence of this inward conflict is not a sign that a person is not sanctified. As long as we are in the flesh we will never be entirely free of this struggle.

The world wants our heart, brethren; it really does. Human nature does not go down without a fight, for it must be overcome. In a way, this entity within us actually becomes part of the means of our perfection.

Overcoming is a long process. It requires diligent humbling effort to subdue our human nature. However, we must never allow ourselves to fall into the attitude that all of our efforts are somehow justifying us before God, even though it pleases Him and gratifies us. The holiest of our actions or the holiest of the saints is still full of imperfection and defects. Even some of these are done from wrong motives and can be qualified as nothing more than a splendid sin in God's sight. Nevertheless, we are saved by grace through faith. However, even with that, God requires that we make effort to do our part.

Quite often, you can read Romans 7 and say, "God understands." Yes, indeed, He does—far better than we do. Did the apostle Paul, with the understanding that Jesus would save him though he had two ways pulling at him, just sit back and do nothing? The answer is, no, he did not.

I Corinthians 9:24 Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it.

Paul alludes to the athletic exercises called the Isthmian games that came about every fifth year. Today, we would recognize this as something like the Olympics. Paul wants us to understand that, not only are we on a journey, but we are in a race toward victory over this world.

I Corinthians 9:25 And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown.

Those who compete in the Olympic games go through a long, hard, and difficult regimen

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under the eye of a trainer or coach. We have all seen training camps where the athletes go through their exercises before dawn. They go on long runs, working with javelin or weights. They adhere to difficult diets, carefully watching what they allow in their bodies, and much more. They even have to have a positive mindset that will bring them to victory.

Those called by God are expected to be balanced, temperate, and disciplined in how they live their lives. It is not a matter of competing with someone else; it is gaining victory over the old self, the old heart, and Satan. The world around us strives for the material crown, but we for the Kingdom of God. That is the crown for which we are heading.

I Corinthians 9:26 Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.

Each runner ran uncertainly, and the reason that he did was that only one could obtain the prize. Thus, they were uncertain of who would win. However, in this Christian race of those called by God, all can win if they run correctly.

The word *adelos*, which is translated *uncertainly*, has other meanings as well. It says, "I do not run like one ignorant of what he is about, or the laws of the course. I know that there is a Kingdom of God, and the way that leads to it; therefore, I run with that in mind." We in this race are not ignorant of what God expects, and we can never claim that.

This word *adelos* can also signify one that does not run without being observed. Paul knew that other eyes were upon him. Certainly his enemies wanted to see him falter. Those persecuting Paul longed to see him destroyed. The church of God looked on him with concern for all that he went through as their leader, the suffering and the strain that he under which he put himself. They watched and were encouraged by his example. The apostle Paul knew that God's eyes were firmly fixed upon him. Paul gives us the example of one who has disciplined his body, because he disciplined first his heart that he might not become disqualified after he has preached the truth to others, to all of the brethren, and even to us today.

Brethren, we know that we are living in the Laodicean era of God's church, and this time is so well depicted by the parable of the ten virgins, in which everyone slumbered. That

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should include you and me, as well. All slumbered, and half fell away.

Revelation 3:20 Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.

Our job is to answer, to respond. What must we do to open the door and develop the new heart that God wants us to have? As a result of Jesus giving Himself as an offering, His body to be torn to shreds for us, we should come out of all fornication, dirty movies, uncleanness, covetousness, foolishness. Paul reminds us that those who do these things have no part in the inheritance of the Kingdom of God.

Ephesians 5:14 Therefore He says: "Awake, you who sleep, arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light."

He equates sleeping, or letting down in this time, with death, and that is something that we should remember. Paul says that you are to leave off slumbering again and put your back into your calling. We must pray and study and ask God for forgiveness and zeal, and He will give you the life that you might not perish.

Ephesians 5:15 See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise...

Circumspectly means "to look around on all sides, being very watchful and cautious." The original word, *akribos*, signifies "walk correctly, accurately, consistently, or perfectly." In short, as you run the race, walk carefully by the rules that God has given us.

Ephesians 5:16 ...redeeming the time, because the days are evil.

We must be buying back those moments that others seem to throw away. We must continually be improving, that we might gain some of the time that we have lost in the past. Why? Because, brethren, we live in the Laodicean era, where so many drift away.

Ephesians 5:17 Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

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This requires study, prayer, fasting, and meditation. It is God's will that we be sober, chaste, holy, and pure. This is what God is after in each one of us. God wants us to get a thorough understanding of His will that we each might glorify Him in how we live.

Brethren, there is only one thing that can stop us from accomplishing this, and that is allowing our heart to become hardened and rejecting the new heart that God is working to give to us.

I Corinthians 16:13-14 Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong.
Let all that you do be done with love.

In short, never let your heart become hardened. Never let down!