



# What Is The Bible “Heart”?

DISCOVERING GOD’S WORD BIBLE STUDY SERIES

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What is the Bible “heart?” We tend to think of the heart as the organ that pumps blood to the rest of the body. However, the Bible often uses the word “heart” in reference to something that cannot be just a physical organ that pumps blood. For instance, Jesus said, “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matthew 6:21). So, let’s investigate the Scriptures to learn how the Bible uses the word “heart” and consider the significance of the Bible “heart.”

## **Examining The Scriptures**

When the Bible uses the term “heart” it usually means something quite different than the physical blood pump. *Nelson’s Illustrated Bible Dictionary* says that the Bible “heart” is: “the inner self that thinks, feels, and decides. In the Bible the word heart has a much broader meaning than it does to the modern mind. The heart is that which is central to man. Nearly all the references to the heart in the Bible refer to some aspect of human personality” (page 466) [Lockyer, Herbert Sr., et al. *Nelson’s Illustrated Bible Dictionary*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1986. Print].

Some Bible passages will help you to see this to be true. Examine each one of these passages closely and notice the specific things that are said to be functions of the “heart.”

(1) John 16:6: “But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart.” As Jesus was preparing His disciples for His departure from the earth (saying that He was going to the Father), He said that sorrow filled their hearts. Now, this cannot be literally true. The physical heart is an organ filled with blood to pump into other parts of the body. It is not filled with any kind of emotion! However, whatever the “heart” is (according to the Bible), it is something which can be filled with sorrow.

(2) Acts 11:23: “When he came and had seen the grace of God, he was glad, and encouraged them all that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord.” When individuals in areas well beyond Jerusalem heard the word of God, many turned to the Lord. Then, when the church in Jerusalem heard about their obedience, they sent out Barnabas to go as far as

Antioch. Whenever, he arrived and saw those who had received the grace of God, he encouraged them to continue to follow the Lord with “purpose of heart.” Now, the physical heart (the blood pump) only works to sustain our physical lives. It cannot do anything to influence our spiritual lives and service to God! However, the Bible here speaks of purposing our hearts to follow the ways of the Lord!

(3) Colossians 3:15: “And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful.” As Paul wrote to the Christians in the ancient city of Colossae, he told them to let the peace that comes from God rule in their hearts. In Philippians 4:6-7, this peace is described as surpassing all understanding. Furthermore, we are told that it will guard our “hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” Certainly, the physical blood pump of the body is not guarded by the peace of God! However, the Bible “heart” can be guarded by this peace which surpasses all understanding – and it can be given complete rule in our hearts!

(4) 1 Peter 1:22: “Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart.” Here is a God-given commandment concerning how we must use our hearts. We must have pure hearts to use to love our brethren fervently. Yet, as we noted earlier regarding sorrow, our physical blood pumps are not capable of any kind of emotion. Though our physical hearts are often used in our culture to depict the idea of love, they are actually incapable of such an emotion or decision! However, God commands us to use our hearts for the purpose of loving our brethren fervently. Is He commanding something we cannot obey? Certainly not! The Bible’s use of the term “heart” makes us fully capable to use our hearts in this way.

From these (and many other passages) we can plainly see that the Bible frequently does not use the word “heart” to identify functions of the physical organ located in our chests. Instead, as demonstrated in the quote from *Nelson’s Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, the Bible “heart” refers to the various functions of the mind – including our thoughts, our emotional responses, our decisions, etc.

Hebrews 4:12 should help to make this clear. The passage states: “For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.” Notice that God’s word is a discerner of the “thoughts and intents of the heart.” So, the Bible “heart” is applied to the same part of man which can think and have intentions. Obviously, this is a reference to our minds – as each of the previous examples have also demonstrated.

### **Everything You Are Stems From The Heart**

Now, let’s consider why it even matters where your heart is (i.e. what it is focused on). The fact of the matter is that where your heart is *does* matter – because of its impact on everything that you do in your life! You see, if your heart is not in the right place, your life will not be pleasing to God. However, if your heart is in the right place, you will dedicate your life to please God!

Look closely at Matthew 6:19-21: “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” Specifically, focus on verse 21. Jesus says that when you locate your treasure, you will have located your heart. This is because your treasure (the result of the things you have done) has been determined internally!

Other passages also identify the connection between our hearts and our actions. Consider the teachings of each one of these passages.

(1) Proverbs 4:23: “Keep your heart with all diligence, For out of it spring the issues of life.” While this passage is focused on the importance of keeping your heart, it demonstrates the connection between your “heart” and all of the “issues of life.” Put another way, the NIV (2011) says, “Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.” So, there is no “issue of life” that is unconnected with the location of your “heart”!

(2) Proverbs 23:7: “For as he thinks in his heart, so is he. ‘Eat and drink!’ he says to you, But his heart is not with you.” The connection between your heart and your actions could not be more clear than it is stated in this passage! Your life (i.e. your decisions, actions, words, emotions, etc.) are going to reflect the things that are in your heart (for the good or for the bad).

(3) Matthew 15:19: “For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies.” Notice the kinds of wicked things which are brought about by the “heart.” A focus on evil things will produce evil thoughts. A focus on things like greed, envy, hatred, and lust will produce murders, adulteries, fornications, false witnessing, and blasphemies. Certainly, the things mentioned in this passage just scratch the surface. However, it does provide wonderful insight into the types of activity that is produced because of a heart that is not focused on God!

The Scriptures could not be any clearer about this truth – that our hearts are intimately connected with the decisions that we make and the ways in which we will live our lives. However, in addition to *stating* the truth that our hearts determine our actions, the Bible also *demonstrates* this truth – in positive and negative ways. Consider this with me briefly.

Consider each of the following negative examples to see the connection between the heart and actions. I would encourage you to read each one of the passages listed with a specific focus on this point. (1) Cain killed his brother Abel because of the envy that was in his heart (Genesis 4; Hebrews 11:4; 1 John 3:10-12). (2) Joseph’s brothers sold him into slavery because of their jealousy (Genesis 37). (3) The Israelites determined not to go into the land of promise initially because they believed the discouraging report 10 of the spies brought back to them (Numbers 13-14). (4) Naaman initially did not dip in the Jordan River so as to be cleansed of his leprosy because he had thought he would be healed another way (2 Kings 5). (5) David’s adultery with Bathsheba stemmed from his lust for her (2 Samuel 11). (6) Ananias and Sapphira lied to God because of

their determination to deceive and keep back part of their profit for themselves (Acts 5). (7) Jesus Christ was crucified because of the envy of the Jews (Matthew 27).

Now, consider each of the following positive examples to see the connection between the heart and actions. Again, I would encourage you to read each one of the passages listed with a specific focus on this point. (1) Joseph did not commit adultery with Potiphar's wife because he had determined not to sin against God (Genesis 39). (2) King Josiah tried to restore many things in Judah to be pleasing to God because his heart was tender and he humbled himself before the Lord (2 Kings 22-23). (3) Paul's faithful life of preaching and service for the Lord stemmed from his dedication to give himself as a living sacrifice to God (Galatians 2:20). (4) Jesus Christ did not sin because He had determined to accomplish the Father's purpose (Matthew 4:1-11; John 17:1-5).

So, as you consider all of these passages and examples, it should be entirely clear that where your heart is will greatly impact how you live your life – and whether you will be pleasing to God or not! Ultimately, whether your heart is focused on doing the will of God or living to pursue your own fleshly desires will make a difference in your eternal home – whether you will live in Heaven or in Hell!

## **Conclusion**

The Bible "heart" clearly has reference to the various functions of the mind. Therefore, as Paul instructed in Colossians 3:2, "Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth." If you will set your heart on the things of God and live accordingly, you will have great spiritual treasure that will never be taken from you. But, if you set your heart on earthly things and live accordingly, your treasures will only be temporary.

### **Discovering God's Word Bible Study Series**

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