



Series: Ruin to Renovation	Reference: Luke 10:25-28	Title: Understanding	Date: 02.11.18
Website Writeup:			
Understanding is the foundation of care. And if we're to care for our hearts, then we need to understand what our hearts are in relation to human nature, and to God.			

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Thanks to Dallas Willard, this series is born out of his book, *Renovation of the Heart*. Many of his thoughts & words make it into these sermons; read the book as you follow along.

I think God has bigger fish to fry than taking sides on the football grid. However, I do recognize, with so many Eagles players living Christian values & influencing their teammates, there may have been an effect. Making the team stronger, unified & apt to work well - after all, that's part of what this series speaks of - spiritually healthy people creating spiritually healthy communities; constantly influencing others for Christ.

Not that I'm saying God had a hand in the win, but godly values in the lives of the players, very well could have - since they may've been operating in a holistic healthy manner. Not looking out for self, but for the good of the whole. Even though I typically don't have a horse in the race when it comes to football, I was very much into this game. Hopefully the faith of some of these Eagles players will now influence their fans!

We'd say the Eagles played with heart last Sunday. Putting their all into it - lives revolving around the game & the winning of it. They were passionate, and backed it up with action. They practiced hard - went at it with every fiber of their being. And all that devotion showed on the playing field!

I'm sure their devotion, love of the game, team & teammates is real. Although, over time it will wane...run dry. Even if just due to age & we must admit their devotion is partly driven by paycheck. When they're traded, affections will shift to a new team & city. It doesn't diminish what they did last Sunday, it's just life. That love & passion is dictated by outside factors. Factors which change, morph, or diminish & alter the affections of players over time. Cheers subside. Normalcy ensues. The day the Eagles won the Super Bowl will always be remembered fondly, but it will be remembered from a distance without the same intensity as in the moment.

On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" "What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?" He answered, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart & with all your soul & with all your strength & with all your mind"; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" "You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this & you will live." (Luke 10:25-28)

This love is all encompassing. Not club devotion; it surpasses Eagles fan & player devotion alike. This is 'everything I am' devotion, revolving around a Being claiming to be the beginning & end of all human life & endeavor.

Remember - Scripture uses the words heart & mind in the English interchangeably. They're one & the same. God calls the faithful to a true 110% surrender of the whole self; heart, soul, strength & mind - followed by complete love of neighbor. In that order. Since to love others well, we first have to understand ourselves in relation to God. Otherwise, it'll wane when something better comes along, luster wears thin & there's no life & death aspect driving our love. To have this kind of love, we must understand our hearts in relation to God & also from what we've been 'saved', since it is a matter of life & death.

Understanding is the foundation of care. What we care for we must understand. If we're going to care for our heart, we must understand it. The heart, will & spirit are one & the same, although they refer to different aspects of the central core of a person.

The *will* is the power to initiate, create & to bring about what didn't exist before. The Spirit is that about us independent of physical reality. And the heart refers to the central core of a person to which all else in us owes it's functioning.

The three reminiscent of the Triune God; Father, Son, Holy Spirit - one God expressed in three persons. And a person having at their center - the heart, will & spirit - three distinct terms, referring to one essence expressed in 3 differing aspects.

This care for the heart, will or spirit is made difficult due to all the conflicting viewpoints of what Human Nature is in society. These conflicting viewpoints vie for our attention through all the various forms of media, relationships & spiritual gurus who surround us. We live in a noisy opinionated world.

Intellectual humanists today will say there's no distinct human nature; we're nothing but animals. Once dead, we cease to be. Or, we're in essence good, with no inherent sin. Or, we shouldn't be told what to do, and therefore, are free to make all our own choices as individuals. That human beings don't have a nature & human classifications are solely social constructs springing from judgement & motivations from groups or cultures. Cultural & religious differences are fine as long as they're celebrated & one group doesn't proclaim their beliefs to be true for everyone else. Philosophies contradictory to the Scriptural estimation & claims of what humans are & our central dilemma is.

I was recently watching *Curb Your Enthusiasm*, and Larry David says to his wife, "Why do Christians always have to push their faith on others?" Well, it's not only that we're commanded to share our faith, but that we love people & believe this to be a life & death issue for everyone. We believe Jesus is the only way to right relation with God, and to enjoy eternal fellowship with Him.

Postmodern society rages against the Christian notion that we have a basic shared human identity, and especially against the Christian notion of identity in Christ - it's too limiting. Although there are pithy songs, commercials & poetic creations touting human oneness & togetherness, as if we're all in the same boat in life (as we saw in the Super Bowl ads this past Sunday) - but, these expressions can *only* be in the positive & cannot

acknowledge the theological differences at the core. We kick against the idea that anything, or anyone else, can define humanity, or what is right for it. We live by the statement, "That may be okay for you, but it's *not* okay for me." Jesus' exclusive claims of salvation are an unwelcome message in this world today.

The idea of a basic human nature, as Scripture defines the human condition, just isn't within the vernacular of the postmodern mind. So when the Christian speaks in terms of the 'spiritual', we're not speaking as the Postmodern agnostic, Muslims, Buddhists, or any others do. Our ideas of the spiritual sprout out of a concrete biblically eternal understanding of God & Human Nature, and the heart as related to Jesus.

'Spiritual' for the Postmodern person is ethereal & elusive; all over the place; ever changing; waves on the ocean tossing to & fro. Therefore, to understand human nature is of great importance - and the sad truth is, the web of deceit over society is so thick, we rarely even get to discuss the human predicament, or identity, with any real seriousness. We get cut off before we can plumb the depths due to social groupthink.

As in CS Lewis's work, *The Screwtape Letters*, the demonic goal is to keep the human from realizing his need for God in order to rescue him out of his inherent human predicament; the sinful self. Wormwood, the demon, under the instruction of his uncle Screwtape, keeps the man from realizing his own human depravity & need of God through distraction in any form he can throw at the guy.

In one letter Screwtape writes, "Indeed the safest road to Hell is the gradual one - the gentle slope, soft underfoot, without sudden turnings, without milestones, without signposts,..."

Then in another he writes, "It is funny how mortals always picture us as putting things into their minds: in reality our best work is done by keeping things out."

In conversations today, that idea of human need for the divine is flippantly batted away. People willingly stay distracted through entertainment, or pride of intellect, in order not to see the true self. Keep it out. Keep things soft underfoot!

To love God & others in the way in which Luke 10 speaks, our heart, will & spirit must first be fully given over & begin conforming itself to Christ, otherwise it's an impossibility. That means accepting first off our desperate need for Jesus, not just in the moment of being saved from our depraved human condition of sinfulness. But also on a daily basis as we grow in faith & likeness of him.

We're told this in Romans 8:5-8...*Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life & peace. The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God.*

We're also told in Ephesians 2 the same, *"As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world."*

But just as Romans 8 v9 speaks hope to those who've given themselves to Jesus in saying, *"You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you,"*

Ephesians 2:4-5 does the same, *"But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions."*

Firstly, without the Spirit of God residing & moving within us, we're spiritually dead unable to respond to, and conform to God's will. We certainly don't expect perfection in our devotion once we've been brought over the threshold of faith, but everyone must begin with a sincere giving into the will of God & an openness to transformation into his likeness. *Jesus himself called this 'being born again' when talking with Nicodemus when he said, "Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again."* In other words, God births new spiritual life within you.

Salvation's a work of God, meaning we're woken up from spiritual death; made spiritually alive; hearts, that nonphysical part of self, revived. Or as Jesus puts it, we're born again into the heart of God! Which brings with it the power of the Spirit of God at work in us to form & shape our heart into Christ's likeness. (PRAY!)

God's heart is expressed in his thoughts. His thoughts are his heart. As we come into Christ we take on the heart of God, which is to think like him, react like him & begin to act like him as we grow deeper. Since in time his heart bleeds out into our behavior & what we do with our time, talents & treasure. An all encompassing love - loving God with all our heart, soul, strength & mind! With every fiber of our being we play the game driving farther towards Christ-likeness, never giving up, never giving in. Playing until the clock runs out on life, making disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son & Holy Spirit - teaching them to obey all that Jesus has commanded!

But at times, it's as if we're living Screwtape letters in real time - we get distracted by all things demonic - anything the world throws in our way. Like running a marathon with someone rolling tires down the hill straight at us over & over again, whatever your distraction may be, it seems to come at you full force.

The heart is the executive center of the person, the thing which can dodge the tires if divinely directed. For the most part it's what drives us, although there are many factors at play. It's the central driving factor. Get the heart in line with Jesus, and all else follows suit. *That is what is meant by the Lordship of Christ in this old image (explain).*

Jesus, by his death & resurrection enlivens our spiritually dead hearts, and empowers us unto a life of love we see in Luke 10. The benefits of which include the creation of

individuals who are prepared & capable of responding to life in ways which are good, healthy & right. Lives in order & with life & death purpose. Living in ways which make life better, not only for themselves, but for others. Ways which are in line with God's heart, and therefore, naturally are loving of people around them. Not perfect people, but people in progress, moving deeper into becoming like Jesus. Growing in Christ makes one less violent, increasingly less selfish, appreciative & excited about cultural differences & peoples, increasingly light-hearted & less anxious, more apt to give & sacrifice time, talent & treasure for the good of others, kinder, gentler, etc. Why would we keep Jesus to ourselves - he's not only the key to our ills, but everyone's.

Yet, we can, like we've said in the past treat salvation trivially, like fire insurance. Which by the way, probably reveals we need to reevaluate whether we truly know Jesus in the first place. However, those who do, but do the bare minimum of the Christian life, find themselves living by distraction; fractured lives. He's Savior, but not Lord. The heart isn't in line with God's, and as a result all the other members of our physical body seem not to have direction & begin making decisions on their own. We have terms & sayings for this. 'He's led by his stomach'. 'Her feet are swift to lead her into trouble'. 'He's got a wandering eye'. 'Their so emotional'. 'She's a nervous Nelly'. Etc.

Like any badly run organization, it's not long before this kind of body just falls apart in some way. Or, limps along only realizing 20% of it's total potential in life. We see why Proverbs 25:28 says, "*Like a city that is broken into and without walls is a man who has no control over his spirit.*" When spiritual formation of the heart hasn't been tended well, we're subject to almost any whim or philosophical wind which blows. And we can see why people say you can't help anyone else before you help yourself - there's truth in that statement. But the Christian understanding is that to help yourself, is to let yourself be helped by Jesus daily.

No matter how disjointed life has become, when we step deeper into our relationship with Jesus, we become a person of maturity, solidity, calmness, wisdom, clarity & discernment - we bring ourselves into harmony with ourselves, God & life. And in doing so we promote life & harmony in the communities in which we live & interact. So...if so many of those Eagles players are walking well with the Lord, it doesn't mean God's an Eagles fan, but it may mean that what God has said all along actually works. Life lived well with Jesus, produces harmony, peace, love, grace & unity all around us; healthy systems!

Human Nature's made up of 6 essential aspects of our lives.

1. Thought (images, concepts, judgments, reasoning & conclusions we make)
2. Feeling (sensation, emotion)
3. Choice (will, decision, character)
4. Body (actions & interaction with the physical world)
5. Social context (personal & structural relations to others)
6. Soul (the factor that integrates all of the above to form one life)

The ideal spiritual life is one in which all these things are ordered around God & being restored, renewed & sustained by him. So, spiritual formation's the process leading to that end, and the result is love of God with all heart, soul, mind & strength - and also the neighbor as oneself! That's why just trying harder, just waiting on God to make the move, or just getting more information don't work as we spoke of last week. Rather we want to be the person fully integrated under God. Our hope for self, and everyone else.

Think on your nature - do a personal inventory of these six things.

1. Thought - What do my thoughts center around & where do they naturally go? Are they worthy of Christ, do they honor yourself & others as God's creation?
2. Feeling - Which feelings identify or govern my life most? Why? Are they positive uplifting healthy feelings?
3. Choice - Is my will easily swayed, are my choices healthy? Do my choices reveal strong Christ-like character? How can I make better choices?
4. Body - are the members of my body used in ways which are unhealthy, or sinful? What are my involuntary bodily responses? And what do they reveal about my heart? (not looking others in the eye, wandering eye, salivating at unhealthy things)
5. Social context - How are my relationships? Am I influencing & moving others towards Christ? Who are my influencers? Who do I follow? And should I be? Am I making things better in the social contexts I live within?
6. Soul - Overall how's my soul? Do I feel at peace, content, fulfilled, living with purpose? (*How's Your Soul?* booklet) Am I restless?

Prayerfully consider those 6 things & these questions this week, maybe take one a day, going to prayer with it, asking the Holy Spirit to speak to you about it. What are the Scriptures which reinforce Christ-likeness in these areas, pray those, own them & believe them for yourself. Pray Christ's Lordship over these various areas of life.

Sometimes we need to hear how others do this...let's end today with a few words from David as he wrote in Psalms 16:7-9. Let's notice all the aspects of the human self he touches on in short passage as we prayerfully read it; the mind, the will, feelings, soul & body are all mentioned. let's let David lead us now in stepping deeper into the waters of *faith in Christ as we read Psalm 16:7-9...*

*I bless the Lord who gives me counsel;
in the night also my heart instructs me.*

*I keep the Lord always before me;
because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved.*

*Therefore my heart is glad, and my soul rejoices;
my body also rests secure.*