

3 Kinds of Heart

Genesis 1:27 New American Standard Bible (1995)

²⁷God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

Jeremiah 17:9 New American Standard Bible (1995)

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

Introduction

After 35 years in ministry, I found myself wanting to understand one subject more deeply than ever before: the heart. Not the physical heart, but the spiritual one.

Over the years, it became increasingly clear to me that everything in our lives (both good and bad) flows from the heart: kindness, for example, comes from the heart. Love also comes from the heart. So do greed, anger, bitterness, and even hatred.

The heart affects, both positively and negatively, every relationship we have---with God and with one another. So, I reasoned with myself like this: *If I understand the heart better, I will understand myself better. If I understand the heart better, I will understand others better. And, if I understand the heart better, I will relate to God and to people more faithfully.* So I began a focused study on the heart.

I will be honest with you—I still have a long way to go. I am not standing here as an expert. What you are about to hear this morning is only the beginning—my preliminary study. In fact, this message is the first in a **series** that I will be preaching over the next few Sundays.

My prayer is simple: that through this series, we will grow in understanding of our hearts, learn to care for our hearts more wisely, and experience healthier relationships with God and with one another.

Today is **Part 1: Three Kinds of Heart in the Bible.**

Defining the Heart

Before we can talk about the heart, I'd like to define what I mean by the heart. There are at least three ways the word 'heart' is commonly understood: medical, poetic/artistic, and scriptural.

First, there is the **medical definition**: The heart is *a hollow muscular organ that pumps the blood through the circulatory system by rhythmic contraction and dilation* (Oxford Dictionary).

Second, there is the **poetic or artistic definition**: The heart is seen as *the center of the total personality, especially with reference to intuition, feeling, or emotion* (Dictionary.com)

But this morning, I want to focus on the **scriptural definition** of the heart.

In Scripture, the heart is **the innermost seat of emotion, thought, will, conscience, and desire**. It is the control center of the human person.

In our Western thinking, we often separate the heart and the mind—emotion versus intellect. We say, "follow your heart" (meaning emotions) or "use your head" (meaning logic), do we not? That separation comes largely from Greek philosophy, especially Plato. But Scripture does not make such a sharp distinction.

The ancient Hebrews believed that what we now call "mind" and "emotion" were deeply connected, originating from one unified inner center—and they called it **the heart**.

So, when I use the word "heart," I am referring to **both intellect and emotion**, both thinking and feeling, both desire and decision.

With that understanding, the Bible speaks of **three kinds of heart**.

Three Kinds of Heart in the Bible

The Bible describes:

- The Heart of God (Genesis 6:6, Jeremiah 32:41, Ezekiel 28:2)
- The Heart of Man (Jeremiah 17:9)
- The Heart of Beasts (Daniel 5:21)

Let us consider each one.

1. The Heart of God

I am deeply thankful that the Bible tells us **God has a heart**.

The heart of God deserves many sermons—and God willing, I will speak more about it in the next two Sundays. For now, let me say this: out of His heart, God created the heavens and the earth and everything in it (intellect). Out of His heart, God loves us unconditionally (emotion). Out of His heart, God has chosen us to be His children (will).

To Him every soul is equally valuable, sinners and saints alike (e.g., *He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous*—Matthew 5:45). He never gives up on anyone unless they reject Him first. In fact, His loving kindness, generosity, and mercy endure forever! They blow us away! All out of His loving heart! What a comfort it is to know and worship a God whose heart overflows with love, compassion, and faithfulness.

Now that we've seen God's heart, let's check out what happened to the human heart when we settled for less.

2. The Heart of Man

In the beginning, when God created Adam and Eve in His image and likeness, He gave them a heart that reflected His own—pure, innocent, loving, kind, creative, and untouched by evil. However, when they disobeyed God, sin entered the world— and it changed everything. From that moment on, the human heart was corrupted to the core.

For instance, by the time of Noah (tenth generation after Adam), God was deeply grieved with the evil thoughts of humans to the point where He regretted that He had created humans. Listen to God's Word in Genesis 6:5-6: [“]*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. 6 The Lord was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart.”*

He wanted a new start. So, through the Great Flood, He wiped humanity off from the surface of the earth, sparing only Noah and his family, eight altogether. But even after the flood, the problem persisted. The human heart had not changed. Thousands of years later, God spoke to Prophet Jeremiah these sobering words: *“the heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; Who can understand it?”* (Jeremiah 17:9).

Nearly three thousand years have passed since Prophet Jeremiah; in the 21st century, the condition of the human heart remains the same. Our heart still is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick. Wouldn't you agree?

By the way, the Hebrew word for "desperately sick" (*anush*) can also be translated as "incurable." This emphasizes that we can't fix our own hearts; we need a transplant from God. We may advance in knowledge and technology, but the human heart is still prone to deception, pride, and rebellion.

For instance, look at how the 'desperate sickness' of the heart manifests in the anonymity of the internet. The same person who is polite in the grocery store may become a 'keyboard warrior' at night, pouring out vitriol, judgment, and hatred toward strangers online. Technology hasn't changed the human heart; it has simply given it a megaphone and a hiding place. It has revealed what was always lurking beneath the surface.

As the old saying goes: 'If you want to know what is in a person's heart, look at what they do when they think no one is watching.' Our digital lives have become the ultimate 'Jeremiah 17 test'—revealing that without God's intervention, our hearts are prone to drift into a deceitful darkness that we ourselves struggle to even understand.

Once again, I will talk more about human heart later. That leads us to the final kind of heart.

3. The Heart of Beasts

The heart of beasts is driven purely by survival instincts. There is no moral reasoning, no conscience, no reverence for life—only instinct, prey and predator, survival and domination.

The Bible refers to this kind of heart only once explicitly—and remarkably, it happened to a man. His name was **Nebuchadnezzar**, king of Babylon. (From now on, I will call him King Nebu for short).

This was the king who destroyed Jerusalem in 586 B.C. The king who carried Daniel and his friends into exile. The king who threw Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego into the fiery furnace when they refused to bow to the golden image that he had set up (Daniel 3).

Because of his pride, God removed his sovereignty. He was driven away from human society. He lived like an animal, ate grass like cattle, and lost his sanity for seven periods of time, until he learned that it is not he but the Most High God who rules over all kingdoms and gives authority to whomever He chooses.

Let's check it out how he lost his mind and declined to the heart of the beasts. (Daniel 4:29-33). One day "²⁹ ... he was walking on the roof of the royal palace of

Babylon. ³⁰ The king reflected and said, 'Is this not Babylon the great, which I myself have built as a royal residence by the might of my power and for the glory of my majesty?'

³¹ While the word was in the king's mouth, a voice came from heaven, saying, 'King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is declared: sovereignty has been removed from you, ³² and you will be driven away from mankind, and your dwelling place will be with the beasts of the field. You will be given grass to eat like cattle, and seven periods of time will pass over you until you recognize that the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind and bestows it on whomever He wishes.'

³³ Immediately the word concerning Nebuchadnezzar was fulfilled; and he was driven away from mankind and began eating grass like cattle, and his body was drenched with the dew of heaven until his hair had grown like eagles' feathers and his nails like birds' claws."

The lesson? Beware of pride. It doesn't go well with God. It does not elevate us—it dehumanizes us. The king's "beastly" behavior isn't just about acting like an animal; it's the spiritual consequence of removing God from the throne of one's life.

We might look at King Nebu and think, 'I've never eaten grass like a cow, so this doesn't apply to me.' But we don't have to lose our sanity to lose our humanity. The 'heart of a beast' manifests whenever we strip away the *Imago Dei*—the Image of God—from ourselves or others. It happens whenever we embrace a 'survival of the fittest' mentality in our businesses, our social media, or even our families. When our lives are driven purely by the instinct to dominate, to consume, and to protect our own 'territory' at any cost, we have descended into that beastly state.

Think of how we describe success in our culture. We use phrases like 'it's a dog-eat-dog world' or call a ruthless executive a 'shark.' We celebrate the predator. But biblically, a predator's heart is a fallen heart. Imagine a workplace where a manager sees their employees not as people with souls, families, and struggles, but simply as 'units of production' to be used and discarded. In that moment, the manager isn't practicing human leadership; they are practicing beastly instinct. They have traded the 'Heart of God'—which values every soul—for a transactional heart that only values what it can kill and carry. Pride not only makes us 'puffed up'; but it also makes us cold, calculated, and ultimately, less than human.

Going back to King Nebu's story.

After the seven periods passed, the human heart was restored to him. Listen to his own confession how it was restored: ³⁴ “But at the end of that period, I, Nebuchadnezzar, **raised my eyes toward heaven and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High and praised and honored Him who lives forever**” (Daniel 4:34).

There is a profound spiritual lesson in the physical posture of King Nebu. When he was at the height of his pride, his eyes were turned **inward**, mesmerized by his own reflection and the 'Great Babylon' he had built by his own power. While he lived with the heart of a beast, his eyes were fixed **downward**, focused only on the grass and his immediate survival. But notice that his restoration only began at the moment he looked **upward**.

The human heart is unique because it was designed for a vertical connection. A proud man looks in at himself; a beast looks down at the earth; but a truly healthy human heart looks up to the Creator. Our reason, our peace, and our humanity are only fully restored when we stop obsessing over our own 'kingdoms' and raise our eyes to the Most High in humility.

Conclusion

Today, we have considered three kinds of heart the Bible describes:

- **The heart of God**—loving, faithful, and gracious
- **The heart of man**—fallen, deceitful, and desperately sick
- **The heart of beasts**—what pride and rebellion ultimately reduce us to

Next week, we will focus more deeply on **the heart of God**.

For now, let me leave you with this question to ponder:

Which heart is shaping your life today? This week, when you feel a surge of pride or a desire to 'look out for number one' at the expense of others, stop and ask: Is my heart looking downward like a beast, or upward like a child of God?

Let us pray.

Note: Although the New Testament doesn't call it the heart of beasts, personally, I believe the man possessed by demons in the region of Gadara reflects a similar picture—a human life reduced to something animal-like, and then mercifully restored by the power of God.

