

Study 7

Topic: Made complex

Sub-theme: Made perfect, now broken (3)

Sunday date: June 9

Key ideas: Heart, will, mind, body, emotions, idolatry

Key texts: 2 Cor 3, Jer 31:33-34, Eze 36:26-27, Rom 12:1-3, Heb 10:16-17

Further reading/resources:

- http://www.fellowshipatlantic.com/editoruploads/files/Idols_of_the_Heart_by_Tim_Keller.pdf
- <https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/sdg/Chalmers,%20Thomas%20-%20The%20Expulsive%20Power%20of%20a%20New%20Af.pdf>
- <https://www.anthonysmith.me.uk/2017/10/07/that-we-may-perfectly-love-thee-cranmer-and-the-reformation-of-the-heart/>

Almighty God, unto whom all hearts be open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid: Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of thy Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love thee, and worthily magnify thy holy Name; through Christ our Lord. Amen

Book of Common Prayer 1552

Self-justification is not the same thing as lying or making excuses. Obviously, people will lie or invent fanciful stories to duck the fury of a lover, parent or employer; to keep from being sued or sent to prison; to avoid losing face; to avoid losing a job; to stay in power. But there is a big difference between what a guilty man says to the public to convince them of something he knows is untrue ("I did not have sex with that woman"; "I am not a crook"), and the process of persuading himself that he did a good thing. In the former situation, he is lying and knows he is lying to save his own skin. In the latter, he is lying to himself. That is why self-justification is more powerful and more dangerous than the explicit lie. It allows people to convince themselves that what they did was the best thing they could have done. In fact, come to think of it, it was the right thing. "There was nothing else I could have done." "Actually, it was a brilliant solution to the problem." "I was doing the best for the nation." "Those bastards deserved what they got." "I'm entitled."

Tavis & Aronson, Mistakes Were Made: But Not By Me

If you had to choose, would you describe yourself more as an *emotional* person or more as a *rational* person? Why?

Think of a disagreement - or even an argument - that you had recently. How did your emotionality/rationality contribute to resolving or escalating this argument?

What is the potential danger in thinking that we are primarily rational creatures?

Read Ex 20:1-3, Rom 8:5-6. What are the two options described here? What does it tell you that the absence of any worship at all isn't envisaged?

Timothy Keller writes: "What has captured our imaginations? What most preoccupies and engrosses the very core of our thinking and dreaming? Whatever occupies our hearts is our way of justifying and proving ourselves. It is our way of developing our own sense of value and worth, and therefore, it is our way of being our own Savior and Lord. So, what are the things you have set your mind and heart on as ways of self-justification? Whatever it is, if it is not "the things of the Spirit," it is an idol. To set the mind on the flesh is to put your mind and your heart on something besides Jesus Christ as your functional Savior. An "idol" is anything more fundamental than God to your happiness, meaning in life, and identity. Idolatry is not so much wanting bad things as it is turning good things into ultimate things. This means anything can become an idol, including good things, such as career, family, achievement, independence, a political cause, material possessions, certain people in dependence upon you, power and influence, physical attractiveness, romance, human approval, financial security, your place in a particular social circle or institution."

Read Rom 1:18-23. What happens to our grasp on the truth when we give our hearts to false gods? Where do you see this in the world? In your own life?

Read Mark 8:11-21. To what does Jesus attribute the disciples' lack of understanding? What do you think Jesus means by this?

Read Gal 5:19-20. What happens when our hearts remain unchanged?

In Ezek 36:22-31. What does God say needs to change in us? What will that result in?

Ashley Null, the leading historian of the Reformation, writes:

“According to Cranmer’s anthropology, what the heart loves, the will chooses, and the mind justifies. The mind doesn’t direct the will. The mind is actually captive to what the will wants, and the will itself, in turn, is captive to what the heart wants.

“The trouble with human nature is that we are born with a heart that loves ourselves over and above everything else in this world, including God. In short, we are born slaves to the lust for self-gratification, i.e., concupiscence. That’s why, if left to ourselves, we will always love those things that make us feel good about ourselves, even as we depart more and more from God and his ways. Therefore, God must intervene in our lives in order to bring salvation.

He says elsewhere:

“Unlike the scholastic model where the will acting in accordance with right reason in the rational soul was supposed to constrain the passions in the lower sensitive soul, [Protestant Reformer Philipp] Melanchthon argued that the affections were inextricably joined to the will in the same faculty. As a result, these inner attitudes of the human heart determined the will’s direction which then had power over the other faculty of reasoning as well...the passions of the heart ultimately determined human conduct, an affection could only be ‘overcome by a more vehement affection’. Paris had been able to put away his love for Oenone only because he became overcome by a more vehement affection for Helen of Troy. Yet because of original sin’s thoroughly corrupting legacy, humankind had one overarching affection that twisted every other affection into its service — the affection of self-love. With reason and will both captive to the concupiscence of the flesh, only the intervention of an outside force, the Holy Spirit, could give humanity a new set of godly affections... Confidence in God’s gracious goodwill towards them reoriented the affections of the justified, calming their turbulent hearts and inflaming in them a grateful love in return...when Cranmer came to the conclusion that any human goodness followed rather than preceded justification, he crossed the Rubicon, with Rome behind and Germany ahead.”

Jesus says, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind” (Matt. 22:37).

Read Titus 2:11-14. How does the grace of God change us?

Read Hebrews 8:10,16. How then does God ‘write his laws on our hearts?’