

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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The Growth Environment For Love: A Clean Heart

By Dan Trygg

“Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me.”

Psalms 51:10

“Happy are the clean ones in heart, because they will see God.”

Matthew 5:8

“Peter... said..., ‘Brothers and sisters, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the message of the gospel and believe. And God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them, giving the Holy Spirit, just as He did to us; and He made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith.’” Acts 15:7-9

“...the focal point of the instruction is love out from a clean heart, and a good conscience, and ‘unphony’ faith, ...concerning which some people, having lost this aim, have turned off toward empty talk...”

I Timothy 1:5,6

“Having dedicated your selves toward an unhyprocritical brotherly-love, out from clean hearts, as with constant earnestness, choose-to-esteem-and-give-preference-to one another.”

I Peter 1:22

The Meaning and Value of a Clean Heart

Having a clean heart is not a new concept. It is as ancient as human self-awareness. Biblically, it goes back to Genesis 20:5, where King Abimelech, when confronted by God concerning Sarah, asks for His mercy, claiming that he did not know that she was Abraham’s wife, “I did this in the integrity of my heart and the innocence of my hands.” Certainly, the concept of innocence, of unmixed motives, is there. The Septuagint Greek (LXX) translators chose to render the Hebrew with the Greek word, katharos, which has **two fundamental meanings**:

- (1.) “**clean**” or “**pure**” in regard to the object itself, either in the sense of
 - (a.) being outwardly “free from dirt” (metaphorically, “free from wrongdoing or sin”), or
 - (b.) inwardly being “free from any admixture”, that is, something of the same unadulterated substance through and through (metaphorically, “integrity”; “pure motives”).
- (2.) “**free from defilement**” in regard to the object or person in relation to another, either in the sense of
 - (a.) being ritually “clean” (e.g. certain foods being considered “clean” or “acceptable” instead of “defiling”); or
 - (b.) being morally and spiritually “approved of” in the sight of another, e.g. Acts 10:28,35; Gal. 3:28.

The Heart: The Wellspring of Life

The significance of this problem is only deepened by an understanding of the Hebrew conception of the heart. In their understanding of human make-up, the heart was considered the well-spring of all of the rest of one’s life (Prov. 4:23). Consequently, if your heart was evil, the outworking of that would become evident in what flowed out of your life, i.e., the works of your hands, or the words of your mouth. **Everything comes from the heart**, so if the heart is sick, perverted, or “mixed” (Jer. 17:9), then **the fruit of one's life will eventually give outward expression to the true, inner nature of the heart**, by producing evil, unhealthy behaviors. **A “clean heart” is one free of any blots of sin in behavior, and free of impure motivations.**

OT Glimpses of the Hope of a Clean, Transformed Heart

Thus, the prayer of **David**, as he repented of his affair with Bathsheba (Psa. 51:10), had a two-fold purpose, as well. First, it was a petition to be cleansed and restored from the ritual defilement of his sin, so that He could be reinstated into God's good graces. It was also an appeal to be transformed, to be cleaned up inside, so that he really could be a man of God, pure in motive, behavior, and, for those reasons, acceptable and pleasing to God. More than merely asking for a heart that “looked clean”, the best that could be offered by the atonement (lit., “covering”) of animal sacrifices, his **faith looked with longing to the possibility of having a clean (unmixed, unadulterated) heart “created” within him**, ...truly an inkling of what was going to happen under the New Covenant.

Jeremiah was the first to really follow up on this theme. In 24:6, he spoke of how the Lord will “give them (Israel) a heart to know Me”. God outlines a New Covenant in 31:31, one that is inward in nature, one that will actually “put My law within them, and on their hearts I will write it”. In Ezekiel 11:19,20 and 36:25-27, God prompts the prophet **Ezekiel to further describe this very thing, a cleansing that will be both outward and inward, the almost incomprehensible possibility of being made new, of having a new heart and a new spirit** (the animating force of one’s being). Clearly, God’s plan for “cleansing” His people is complete, totally countering the effects of sin within the person.

The NT Fulfillment of OT Longings -- A New Creation

Actually, the verbal form of the Greek word, katharos, means “to cleanse”, to take away the outward dirt or the inward impurity, to remove the offensive qualities that made something defiling or abhorrent (thus making it acceptable and even available for use). This was the word Peter used to describe the work of salvation that happened to the first Gentiles. God “cleansed their hearts” as they responded in trust to His grace. At that point they were given new hearts, void of any mixture of sinful motives, ...new natures which were not capable of doing sin, because it was not consistent with their essential nature (cf. I Jn. 3:9). Outward dirt was washed away by the blood of Jesus, and the cleansing water of the Holy Spirit, and inward impurity was removed by virtue of the creation of a clean heart. This reality is referred to several times in the New Testament, utilizing a number of varying word pictures. The message is clear, however, **we are not the same as we once were. There has been something new deposited within us, something that is created fresh and entirely different, something that does not participate in sinful behavior and sinful motives.**

Where does the sinful stuff come from, then? Well, we live in a time when the “old man” is “unemployed” or “idled down”, but *not* where it is totally removed. The old life-dynamic, with the power of sin, will be “with us” until we leave these mortal bodies. It is part of the legacy of our old Adam-nature. When Jesus returns, our redemption will be completed, and all remnants of the old, unredeemed life will be forever gone. Now, however, we live with both realities present with us. **We are *not* bound to live out the old dynamic, however. We can live in, and walk out, the life that comes from the new, clean heart.** Romans 5-8 describes some of how that is possible, and Ephesians 4-6 brings it down to a practical level. There is one other aspect of maintenance mentioned in John 13:10, which is very much like what the same author writes about in I Jn. 1:5-7. What it boils down to is to recognize sin when it does become evident, acknowledge it, and return to walking in the light, by the power of the new life, in the fellowship of God.

The Importance of the New Heart to Agapē

What does all of this have to do with agapē?

It is an essential foundation, without which agapē cannot occur. **Love comes from a clean, pure heart.** This is basically saying the same thing John referred to in I John 4, “...love is out from God; and everyone loving is born of God and experientially knows God” (4:7). The clean heart is a gift from God. It is born from His seed and energized by His Spirit. The law of God is inscribed in its living flesh, a spiritual-genetic imprint, which produces life consistent with its own Christ-like nature.

Every Christian *has* a pure heart. It is part of who we are by nature. Consistent with every other teaching about maturity in the Christian faith, God *has given* us all that we need. We do not need to go out and get a clean heart. We already have one granted to us as a free gift when we believed. God “cleansed our hearts by faith”. In the same way as the past tense is used to describe other new creature realities (e.g., we *died* to sin), it is employed also of this aspect. We have been washed. We have been purified. God *has created* in us a new heart. We should not keep seeking for something we already have. We must recognize what has been given to us and learn to abide in it, and operate from it.

Renewing Our Minds, and Learning to Live Out From the New, Clean Heart

Every Christian will experience distraction and confusion about this. If this were not the case, why would NT writers spend so much time dealing with this topic? Because we live in this “overlap period”, this time where the Kingdom of God has invaded this present evil age, we experience the phenomenon of the “already, but not yet” on many fronts. **Walking by faith is *learning to walk by Kingdom principles*, ...even when they conflict with the messages of the world system we live in, as well as our own self-perceptions.** When we do not “feel” the new heart, does that mean it is not there? No. God *says* it is there, and He does not lie. The faith-struggle exists because the realities of the Kingdom are not readily apparent to our eyes.

Learn to ... Reckon, ...Return, ...and Refocus. When we fall, or when we are just “out of touch” with the clean heart, we can go through these steps to get “back on track”. “*Reckon*” means to “add it up”. It refers to the idea that we are to look at what God says about things and draw our conclusions from that. Then, we *return* to abide in the new heart, and *refocus* on our motivations which come from there, leadings of the indwelling Spirit.

A clean heart will be free of shame and unhealthy self-interest. It will know it is accepted by God, and will be unmixed in its motivation to give, to serve God and others.

Work out what God works *in* you. God prompts the idea; *you* must engage the will to do what is prompted.