

SOTERIOLOGY: DOCTRINE OF SALVATION

PART 15

THE HEAD/HEART DICHOTOMY

Many people seem to want to examine the behavior of other Christian people in order to judge whether or not they meet the judge's criteria as it theoretically proves a person to be a believer. These self-selected judges are never examining their own behavior but they spend a lot of time examining the behavior of other people. Since they can't deny the Bible which proclaims the gospel to be salvation by grace through faith alone and presented as propositional truth, they have invented a head/heart dichotomy understood as the concept that people may have mentally accepted the gospel or they have given intellectual assent to it, but they didn't really believe it in their heart [the heart part is often unstated but it logically follows]; therefore, they can't be true believers because intellectual assent alone does not result in saving faith. The presupposition is that believing only in the mind is insufficient to bring a person to faith and you must believe in your heart to be truly saved.

A dichotomy is defined as "a division or contrast between two things that are or are represented as being opposed or entirely different" [*The Oxford American College Dictionary*, s. v. "dichotomy"]. For reasons I will explain, I do not believe head faith and heart faith are a true dichotomy but those who criticize Free Grace do so that's why I've labeled this discussion the "head/heart dichotomy."

The claim is made "they [meaning Free Grace theologians] only accept the Word mentally" the implication being that we remain unsaved because the gospel message supposedly hasn't been believed in the heart. These opponents may phrase it as "intellectual assent" and that is, therefore, in their mind, insufficient to constitute saving faith. The Bible frequently uses head and heart as synonyms for one another, however, context always determines meaning. How do we ever believe anything if not with our mind? Our heart is a blood pumping muscle and it has no capacity for believing anything. What we will discover is that for the theologians who use the head/heart dichotomy, belief without obedience and belief without good works is simply what they call an intellectual exercise. They change the meaning of faith to be a faith that is proved by good works and obedience. According to them, head belief alone is not saving "heart" belief and "head" belief alone cannot save anyone. No matter how much an individual person says he is a believer, these people will not acknowledge him to be a believer unless he meets their criteria for "proving" he is saved and that behavior constitutes their definition of heart faith. Obviously, their definition of heart faith changes from person to person depending on what works the individual judge or "fruit inspector" considers sufficient proof and depending on the amount of works they consider to be sufficient proof of salvation. When faced with the proclamation of a Free

Grace gospel, they will default to this head/heart dichotomy and make the claim the other person only intellectually believes the facts of the gospel but they don't believe in their heart and are therefore unsaved because they do not have the appropriate good works or "Christian" behavior that must be associated with saving heart faith. The person who gets to judge whether the observable level of good works and obedience is sufficient to prove salvation is the one doing the judging; they will not and do not allow the individual believer to speak for himself. This is very subjective and subject to the whims of the person doing the judging and the believer's testimony and protests are ignored because they are deemed to be untrue, trivial, insincere, or unbiblical because they are not based on observable works and obedience.

The Jews, along with Aristotle, the Stoics, and others, gave priority to the heart over the mind. They believed the heart or the inward parts of a person were the seat of knowledge, emotions, and thought. That is the view exhibited in Old Testament theology and Jewish thought. The heart was considered to be the seat of life.

Others, however, such as the physicians Hippocrates and Galen followed by the philosophers Plato and Philo thought the brain directs the members of the body. Obviously, they were on to something with this line of thought; that is more in line with how we would consider things to work today.

But the fact is that in the Scriptures, heart and mind represent, for the most part and depending on the context, interchangeable concepts. Heart and mind are often synonyms in the Bible. Also, heart is often used, and actually most often used, in a figurative sense. Literal hermeneutics encompasses and allows for understanding the truth expressed by figurative language. That has not changed today; we frequently use "heart" as a metaphor for expressing emotion and sincerity both in terms of our biblical dialogue and in the everyday use of our English language discourse.

Heart in the Old Testament. Heart, לֵב, means the inner man, mind, will, and the physical heart. It usually refers to some aspect of the immaterial inner self or being since the heart is considered to be the seat of one's inner nature as well as one of its components. This word can be interpreted mind or heart depending on context.

Heart, לֵב, means heart, mind, or inner person. The primary usage of this word describes the entire disposition of the inner person that God can discern. It is also used to describe the place where the rational, thinking process occurs that allows a person to know God's blessings, to plan for the future, to communicate, and to understand God's message. These meanings are all a figurative use of the word. This word can be interpreted to mean either mind or heart.

When these two Hebrew words are used, they are frequently used in a figurative sense. That has no impact whatsoever on literal hermeneutics; figurative language is accounted for in the literal hermeneutical system. Figurative language always represents the literal meaning it is presenting.

1 Chronicles 12:38 ³⁸All these, being men of war who could draw up in battle formation, came to Hebron with a perfect heart [לֵבָב] to make David king over all Israel; and all the rest also of Israel were of one mind [לֵב] to make David king.

In this verse, the workings of the inner man are said to be of a “perfect heart” but the verse could just as easily been translated as “perfect mind.” The word translated “mind” has the more literal meaning of “heart” but “mind” is a perfectly acceptable translation. It could just as easily been translated “one heart” and carried the very same meaning.

It is quite clear that in Hebrew thinking, heart and mind here are synonyms; they are interchangeable; it is clear their thinking prefers to refer to the heart as the seat of emotions and thought. In Old Testament Hebrew “...in its abstract meanings, ‘heart’ became the richest term for the totality of man's inner or immaterial nature. In biblical literature it is the most frequently used term for man's immaterial personality functions as well as the most inclusive term for them since, in the Bible, virtually every immaterial function of man is attributed to the ‘heart’....By far the majority of the usages of לֵב refer either to the inner or immaterial nature in general or to one of the three traditional personality functions of man: emotion, thought, or will...the whole spectrum of emotion is attributed to the heart...negative emotions...idioms relating the heart to fear and bravery...Thought functions may be attributed to the heart...Wisdom and understanding are seated in the heart...The heart is the seat of the will...Some typical dispositions located in the heart are generosity, pride, and faith” [Harris, Archer, and Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, s. v. “לֵבָב” p. 466-467].

1 Kings 3:12 ¹²behold, I have done according to your words. Behold, I have given you a wise and discerning heart [לֵבָב], so that there has been no one like you before you, nor shall one like you arise after you. [Heart is a metaphor for the mind; wisdom and discernment skills originate in the mind and not in the physical heart.]

Isaiah 14:13 ¹³“But you said in your heart [לֵבָב], ‘I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God, And I will sit on the mount of assembly In the recesses of the north. [Ascending over and surpassing God is what Satan really wants to do, but it is the end result of thinking and of sinful desires which originate in his head and culminate in his actions. This is figurative speech. This could just as easily been written, “But you thought in your mind...” and we would understand it to be saying the very same thing.]

Remember, at this point, we are studying the Old Testament Hebrew manner of thought. But when those of us alive today speaking modern American English say someone is thinking with their heart, what do we mean? We mean they are thinking emotionally rather than rationally but the thoughts are still originating in the mind and not in the heart. Again, what I am describing here is figurative speech. Example: "I love him/her with all my heart!" That is figurative speech for expressing the depth of emotional commitment we have to another person. People will often say they believe something "in their heart of hearts." That is figurative speech for expressing certainty. When someone says, "I know it by heart," they are expressing the fact that they have something memorized which is an exercise of the mind. Our heart is a muscle and it cannot actually believe anything, however, we perfectly understand what a person means when they express these things in figurative language because we can discern the literal meaning behind the figurative language. We don't actually believe that we think with our heart; in our American culture today by virtue of our modern mindset, we know we think and believe with our mind. "It is common in language for a bodily part or organ to take on emotional or spiritual meanings, cf. 'heart' in both Hebrew and English" [Harris, Archer, and Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, s. v. "לֵב", p. 588].

Genesis 8:21 ²¹The LORD smelled the soothing aroma; and the LORD said to Himself, "I will never again curse the ground on account of man, for the intent of man's heart [לֵב] is evil from his youth; and I will never again destroy every living thing, as I have done. [Are intentions formed in the heart or are they the result of our thought processes resulting in intentions and desires, good or bad, which are then acted upon? These things obviously originate in the mind but we fully understand that concept even when "heart" is used as a synonym for the mind.]

Deuteronomy 8:17 ¹⁷"Otherwise, you may say in your heart [לֵב], 'My power and the strength of my hand made me this wealth.' [We say that pride is of the heart, but aren't we really saying that is the disposition of our innermost being as produced by the cumulative effect our thinking has had on the direction we take in life? This is figurative language. Our thoughts guide how we feel about ourselves and how we subsequently express those thoughts in our actions.]

Mind in the Old Testament. As we previously noted, לֵב and לֵבָב, heart, can be translated as "mind."

כִּלְיָה means the kidney and it can refer to the heart as the seat of emotion and figuratively to the innermost and most private aspects of a person. It points to the heart, mind, and spirit of a man as the core of the inner person. All of these words in Hebrew (and Greek) seem to be somewhat pointing to the fact that man is a trichotomous being composed of body, soul, and spirit.

Psalms 73:21 ²¹For my soul [לֵב] was grieved, And I was pricked in my heart [כִּלְיָה]: [ASV 1901] [The NASB translates this as “pierced within.” The NET Bible translates this as “my insides felt sharp pain” based on the literal “and [in] my kidneys I was pierced.” The NASB translates “soul” as “heart” which is probably better in terms of a literal meaning but “soul” expresses the meaning very well as a figurative expression.]

Psalms 26:2 ²Examine me, O LORD, and try me; Test my mind [כִּלְיָה] and my heart [לֵב].

Jeremiah 11:20 ²⁰But, O LORD of hosts, who judges righteously, Who tries the feelings [כִּלְיָה] and the heart [לֵב]...

1 Samuel 9:20 ²⁰“As for your donkeys which were lost three days ago, do not set your mind [לֵב] on them, for they have been found....

Heart in the New Testament. Καρδία means the heart and it can refer to the seat and center of human physical, spiritual, and mental life. It means the seat of desires, feelings, affections, passions, impulses; therefore, it can mean the heart or the mind. It also means the seat of the intellect meaning the mind and understanding. Zodhiates notes that it is used only figuratively in the New Testament [Spiros Zodhiates, *Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*, s. v. “καρδία”, p. 819]. The *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis*, 2^d ed. says “In the NT καρδία never has a strictly lit[eral] meaning, though in a few passages the physical sense lies in the background” [s. v. “καρδία”, p. 2:625]. I want to emphasize that when working out our exegesis, we must remember that figurative language always represents a literal truth.

Ephesians 1:18 ¹⁸I pray that the eyes of your heart [καρδία] may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, [By using figurative imagery, doesn't the enlightening of the eyes of the heart refer to a mind that understands? We don't have eyes in our heart and our heart understands nothing; our mind is enlightened to these spiritual truths Paul is proclaiming. But we perfectly understand what the apostle means because we understand how to interpret figurative language as we use it every day of our lives.]

Luke 3:15 ¹⁵Now while the people were in a state of expectation and all were wondering in their hearts [καρδία] about John, as to whether he was the Christ, [Isn't this figurative language for thinking these things in their minds? They were considering in their minds by virtue of intellectual thought processes based on their knowledge of the Scriptures and of the Messianic expectation that was present at the time whether or not John the Baptist was the Christ. They were not actually thinking with their hearts. This expression is telling us that the people were really seriously pondering these issues.]

Matthew 13:15 ¹⁵For the heart [καρδία] of this people has become dull, with their ears they scarcely hear, and they have closed their eyes, otherwise they would see with their eyes, hear with their ears, and understand with their heart [καρδία] and return, and I would heal them. [A dull heart is a metaphor for a mind that does not understand or perhaps refuses to understand. Understanding with the heart is used here as figurative language for comprehension with the mind.]

Romans 1:21 ²¹For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart [καρδία] was darkened. [Foolish is a reference to the mind of God rejecting people who are in rebellion against Him. Darkened refers to a deliberate lack of understanding which is a characteristic of the mind. These people know God but they have deliberately rejected Him which is a function of our thinking and that originates in the mind.]

Mind in the New Testament. *διάνοια* means the mind, disposition, thought, understanding, intellect, intellectual faculty, or thought. It can refer to intelligence or insight. It represents the mode of thinking and feeling, the feelings, affections, or disposition of the mind. *νοῦς* means mind, understanding, or reason. It means the mind which is the organ of mental perception and apprehension, of conscious life, of the consciousness preceding actions or of recognizing and judging them, or of intelligent understanding. It can refer to the seat of emotions and affections, the mode of thinking and feelings, disposition, or moral inclination; it can be equivalent to the heart. In most places in the Greek New Testament where *καρδία* is used, *διάνοια* or *νοῦς* could just as easily have been used. "The heart is the seat of doubt and hardness as well as of faith and obedience. In this connection, a striking feature of the NT—derived from the term's equivalence with the Heb. *לֵב/לֵב*—is the close connection between *καρδία* and *νοῦς*, 'mind.'...the element of knowledge is more heavily emphasized with *νοῦς* than with *καρδία*, which highlights rather the emotions and the will. Thus it is the person—the thinking, feeling, willing ego—with partic[ular] regard to the individual's responsibility to God, that the NT denotes by the use of *καρδία*" [*New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis*, p. 625]. Context needs to be taken into consideration when making interpretive decisions using these words.

Romans 1:28 ²⁸And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind [*νοῦς*] to do those things which are not proper, [If heart had been used here, it would not have changed the meaning; its meaning would still be perfectly clear to us as we read the Scripture.]

We cannot believe anything we do not know, and belief is predicated on understanding a fact or a proposition or a set of facts or propositions. Understanding occurs in the mind. If we say we believe something in our heart, isn't that a metaphor for believing something with our mind? It is an intellectual and not an emotional

exercise that takes place, or at least should take place, when we are evaluating facts and propositions. True thinking which results from intellectual comprehension can be overruled when we allow our emotions to control our mind and direct us to ignore the intellectual understanding of the facts. That is not, however, the proper way to make decisions. The gospel of grace is a propositional set of facts presented by God through the Word of God. Whether we read them ourselves or whether we are informed of them by others, they are still a set of propositional facts we must evaluate using our intellectual capabilities that reside in the mind. Upon hearing the gospel, each person must decide for themselves the veracity of the facts presented and they will either believe them or not. Rejection of those facts leaves a person in unbelief. Believing those facts and making the volitional decision to appropriate or trust them as applicable to one's personal situation results in salvation and eternal life.

Romans 10:17 ¹⁷So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.

But certainly a person can believe a set of facts or propositions without appropriating or trusting them as applicable, personal truth. People who know the facts of the gospel but reject them as inapplicable to their own personal being have made a volitional decision of the mind to reject the work of Christ on their behalf and it is not a decision of the heart; the heart cannot make volitional decisions.

"What faith really is, in biblical language, is receiving the testimony of God. It is the *inward conviction* that what God says to us in the gospel is true. That—and that alone—is saving faith" [Zane Hodges, *Absolutely Free! A Biblical Reply to Lordship Salvation*, p.31]. The inward conviction that Hodges refers to here is the application of the truth of the gospel of God's grace to one's personal situation as they exist vis-à-vis God. If you want to think of that as heart faith, go ahead, but I think that is introducing an element that is unnecessary and confusing. People who want to demand "heart faith" are really demanding proof of salvation in the form of works and obedience; they are not talking about whether you believe or not. They are talking about your behavior. That obviously adds human effort and merit to the salvation process which produces a false gospel. The truth is that when we talk about believing and when they talk about believing, we are talking about two different things. We mean belief; they mean belief plus observable "Christian" works and behavior.

Faith resulting in eternal life comes about when (my summary):

1. we hear and intellectually believe a set of facts we call the gospel, that is, salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone who was and is the sinless God-man who paid the sin debt for every human being by dying on the cross and who was resurrected from the dead as proof that His sacrifice was acceptable to God on our behalf, and

2. we believe these facts to be personally applicable to us as individuals in relationship to and with God, and
3. as a result of believing these facts we place our faith or trust in the proper object of faith, that being the Lord Jesus Christ, who grants us eternal life when we believe, and
4. this volitional decision to believe results from the mental processing of this information (the gospel of grace), from an acceptance of the truth of its tenets as set forth in the Word of God, from the application of a personal appropriation and trust of that truth, and from the placing of faith in the appropriate object of faith, Christ Jesus, completely independent of any work or merit on our part both before and after we make this decision, then
5. we have passed from death into eternal life.

Another related issue has to do with assurance of salvation. Many people have emotional and/or mystical displays of their faith and people who don't experience those manifestations may wonder whether or not they are saved. For the sake of this discussion, whether or not those emotional and mystical experiences are even true is beside the point. True assurance of faith is the belief that the propositions of the Bible which postulate God's promises in regards to the new birth are true and that you as an individual have believed them and appropriated them for yourself. Please do not think you are not saved because you do not experience an emotional or mystical upheaval on a regular basis. The display of emotions upon belief and conversion is common and not unexpected but that doesn't last. That's simply the grateful realization that you have been set free from sin's bondage and you are now in Christ. At that point, you are free to engage your intellect as it pertains to biblical truth because you now possess spiritual discernment skills and as you engage the Word of God you grow in knowledge. That is an intellectual process. It may well be Spirit directed and led but the intellect is not left out of the process. Mormon theology claims to derive their assurance from a burning in the bosom; we aren't Mormons.

Why is all this important? Why have I taken the time to make these distinctions between heart and mind? Those of us who understand the biblical truth of the Free Grace gospel are often accused of preaching an intellectual assent only gospel and that, they claim, is a false gospel. The theologians making those accusations demand that people must not only intellectually believe the gospel but they must additionally believe it in their heart in order to be saved. We have seen that when the Bible refers to understanding with the heart it is expressing the truth of belief concerning a set of biblical propositions by using figurative language. We don't believe with the heart; we believe with the mind. We don't understand truth to be applicable to our personal situation with the heart; we understand it to apply to our personal situation with the mind. We don't trust the object of our faith with our heart; we make a volitional decision to entrust our life to

Him and that decision is arrived at in our mind. Faith is a matter of the mind. Do we believe the gospel truth and do we believe it is applicable to our personal situation as we stand before God and if we do, we are born again. If we reject that truth in substance and/or in application, then we remain unsaved.

In terms of Soteriology, a person can believe the biblical salvific propositions about Christ and yet volitionally reject them in terms of personal application and trust. But that is not what our critics complain about when they accuse us of requiring only intellectual assent to a set of gospel facts in order to be saved. They mean we are not requiring works and obedience as the heart proof of salvation. When you break this all down to its most basic parts, the real issue with these critics is works. They will say they are saved by grace alone through faith alone, but then they will add that the only true saving faith is a faith that works. There is no provision in their mind or in their theology for the fact that a born again person can be a carnal Christian who is disobedient and who is not a channel for bearing the fruit the Lord expects those who belong to Him to produce. But that situation is a biblical and experiential fact.

One critic of our position subtly redefines faith as a working faith in his criticism of the Free Grace gospel. "We only note that, when Christ uses the words *believe*, or *faith*, or *trust*, He means 'believe' or 'faith' or 'trust.' [In that we can wholeheartedly agree but he goes on to contract what he just said.] That is, He means the real thing, a working faith and not a merely nominal faith. In fact, the faith that Christ speaks of has everything to do with works. The faith that Christ is talking about is a genuine, that is, a working faith" [John H. Gerstner, *Wrongly Dividing the Word of Truth*, p. 262]. Note his denigration of what he calls "nominal faith." But isn't it true that a person either believes or does not believe? There is no such thing as nominal faith; there is faith or there is no faith. Please notice that in order to maintain his theology he has to redefine faith to mean that the only viable faith is a working faith, but also notice that he has to use a bait and switch to do it. He acknowledges that salvation is through faith just as Christ said it is but then he redefines the meaning of faith. If a theologian redefines faith in order to justify his theology, is he really being true to the text of God's Word? I'm suggesting he is not. I'm also suggesting that the accusations this man makes against dispensationalists and Free Grace theology is baseless and unbiblical.

John MacArthur may not have coined the phrase "easy believism" but if he didn't, he has certainly popularized it. In one paragraph, he uses three different pejorative terms to describe our position: "intellectual assent," "easy believism," and "cheap grace." "By separating faith from faithfulness, it [the Free Grace presentation of the gospel] teaches that intellectual assent is as valid as wholehearted obedience to the truth. Thus the good news of Christ has given way to the bad news of an insidious easy-believism that makes no moral demands on the lives of sinners....The church's witness to the world has

been sacrificed on the altar of cheap grace"[John F. MacArthur, Jr., *The Gospel According to Jesus*, p. xxi]. Notice that MacArthur adds "wholehearted obedience" to the gospel which invalidates grace and produces a false gospel.

"This is no doubt one of the most pernicious blunders within dispensationalism, namely, the easy believeism [sic], for many in their churches are dying and going to hell. And all this with the blessing of their leaders" [Curtis I. Crenshaw and Grover E. Gunn, III, *Dispensationalism today, Yesterday, and Tomorrow*, p. 84].

It is obvious that all these theologians add works to the gospel and accuse those of us who hold to a grace alone gospel of preaching a false gospel and subsequently sending people to hell. That's why this head/heart dichotomy issue is so important. We have to understand what it means to believe and be saved. Ultimately, the problem that led to the adoption of the concept of the head/heart dichotomy is the rejection of the truth that saving faith is completely independent of any work or merit on the part of the unbeliever. The imposition of the head/heart dichotomy is entirely due to a desire to judge whether or not a person is a justified believer based on their observable behavior which is not a justification issue but is rather a sanctification issue. That defeats grace. These people accuse us of reducing the gospel to "intellectual assent" only because we do not impose works or obedience or anything else on a person as proof they are saved. It is also a fundamental refusal to consider the distinction between justification, a once for all time event that places a person in Christ based on faith, and sanctification, the believer's walk after and distinct from justification.