

God's work in the life of a believer is an internal work. It begins in the *heart* of man and results *first* in internal, and *secondly* in external changes. The good works produced by His Spirit are not required for salvation but are evidence that salvation has already occurred on the inside. This sets Christianity apart from all other religions of this world.

The religions of this world offer salvation based upon the external performance or good works of it's adherents. The Christian does not inherit Heaven based upon his good works (Titus 3:5, Eph 2:8-9). On the contrary, he obtains salvation by declaring his utter inability to earn salvation by his own merits and by expressing faith in Jesus Christ and His righteousness as the only basis on which to enter Heaven (Matt 18:4, Rom 4:4-5, 2 Cor 5:21). Christianity is unique in that it's veracity is entirely dependent upon the supernatural, transforming work which God does in the heart of it's followers (1 John 2:5, 1 John 3:14).

Because salvation by grace alone excludes the works of men and exposes man as sinfully unable to save himself, it has always been met with opposition in this world. Man is self-righteous. He is content to invent his own religion which smiles upon his efforts to earn salvation. This is true today, just like it was true in Jesus' day.

📖 Matt 23:23-28. Q. v23. How did Jesus describe the scribes and Pharisees?

Q. What were the "weightier matters of the law"?

Q. What do you think Jesus meant when he said "Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel."?

The Jews in Christ's day were very concerned with the outward ceremony of the law. They paid close attention to every detail of every rule concocted by their religious class. They would go through the pains of giving precisely ten percent of even their smallest spices, but neglected the matters of the heart, like faith and mercy.

Q. In your own words, what do verses 25 and 27 mean?

Q. v26. What did Jesus tell the Jews they *should* have done?

Q. v28. What was the difference between how the Jews appeared externally and how they appeared internally?

During Jesus' earthly ministry he continually rebuked the Jews for their religious hypocrisy. He reserved his harshest words for the religious crowd who celebrated external legalism in place of heart-felt devotion to God (Matt 23:13-33).

📖 Matt 15:7-9. Q. How did the Jews honour God?

Q. What was far from God? _____.

Q. How did God describe their worship? _____.

Q. What were they teaching as doctrine? _____.

The Jews had allowed their religion to become so corrupt that they had begun to value and teach their *tradition* above God's explicitly revealed word. They became so enamored with rules and commandments that they replaced faith with works and lost the heartfelt motivation that was intended to drive their obedience. Jesus repeatedly confronted this gross corruption of Judaism and as a result incurred the wrath of the self-righteous Jews (Matt 15:12).

Always a Matter of the Heart

Jesus was not really teaching anything new. His message was entirely consistent with God's revelation in the Old Testament – a relationship with Him begins in the heart!

In Deuteronomy 6 we find what is commonly called the *Shema*. This portion of scripture is the centerpiece of Jewish morning and evening prayer services. The Shema is often spoken as a Jew's last words and is diligently taught to Jewish children.


📖 Deut 6:4-6. Q. According to the Shema, how were the Jews to love God?


📖 Joshua 22:5. Q. In this chapter Joshua is dismissing the eastern tribes to their homeland after assisting in battle. Joshua gives them a charge before they

leave. In it he quotes Deuteronomy 13. He told them to _____
the Lord their God. How did he encourage them to serve God?

God has always sought men and women who would worship Him in love, with their whole hearts. This is a consistent theme throughout all of scripture.


New Heart Needed


There is a problem however with the command to love God with all of our heart, soul and might. What does  Jeremiah 17:9 say about the heart of man?


 Matt 15:18-20. **Q.** According to Jesus, what comes from the heart?

The fact is, man cannot truly and fully worship God in the sincerity of his heart while his heart is in bondage to sin (Rom 8:7-8). Man's mind, emotions and will have all been tainted by sin (Rom 8:20-23). As a result, his sinful heart naturally tends toward self-righteousness and legalism. What is needed to bring men into fellowship with a holy God is not more commandments or stricter rules, it *is a renewed heart*.

This is the main truth that the *schoolmaster* of the law was meant to teach us, specifically, that man cannot please God in and of himself (Rom 8:8). He must be given a new heart (John 3:3). Man's need for a renewed heart is the driving force behind God's redemptive plan. Jesus Christ lived, died and rose again all so that man can be made new, from the inside out.

 Ezekiel 11:19. **Q.** Here Ezekiel speaks of the *new covenant* which God would one day make with His people. What did God say He would take from them? What would he replace it with?

 Jer 24:7. **Q.** What would God give Israel? How would they return to Him?

 Jer 31:31. **Q.** What did God say he would make with Israel?

Q. What would this covenant *not* be like?


Q. What would God do with His law?


God promised that he would make a covenant with his people unlike the covenant which he made with the patriarchs. This new covenant would involve not just the giving of the law, but the writing of the law on the heart of man. He would take out the stony heart and give him a renewed heart. All of this was accomplished through Jesus Christ.

 Heb 9:15, Heb 12:24. **Q.** What is Christ the mediator of?


God's new covenant was not simply that he would be a God to his people, but that he would give his people a new heart that they would have the desire and ability to worship him in the Spirit. When we speak of *the heart* we are really talking about the inward characteristics of man, his mind, his will and his emotions. All of these must be salvaged from the curse of sin and be spiritually renewed.

Salvation – The Renewing of the Heart

 John 3:3,5. **Q.** What must a man be, in order to see the kingdom of God?

 2 Cor 5:17. **Q.** If a man is *in Christ*, what is he? What have *all things* become?

When a man receives Jesus Christ as his Saviour and Lord, the Bible teaches that he is made spiritually alive (Eph 2:1,5). He is literally renewed on the inside (Titus 3:5, Col 3:9,10). This is a fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecy regarding the *new covenant*.

 Titus 3:5. **Q.** What is it that renews us at salvation?

The fulfillment of God's new covenant was accomplished by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. When Christ rose from the dead, having defeated death, sin and Satan, he sent the Holy Spirit of God to dwell inside of God's people (John 14:17, John 16:7, 1 Cor 3:16). It is by the Holy Spirit of God that he *took away our heart of stone and replaced it with a heart of flesh*, that He *wrote his law on our hearts*.

When a man is saved, there is a real change which happens on the inside. God literally makes a spiritual transformation inside of him. Now, having been made spiritually new, man has the ability to submit to the leading of the Holy Spirit and to please God by obedience.

📖 Eph 2:8-10. **Q.** v10. Who's workmanship are we? _____.

Q. v10. What has he created us for? _____.

Q. v8,9. What part did we play in this transformation? _____.

God is very clear. Salvation is the result of his divine action on the inside of man. He makes us spiritually new and enables us to exercise good works. Our ability to please Him comes only after salvation and is the result of his work in our hearts. This is profoundly different from those religions which teach we must, by our own ability, earn favour with God.

Attitudes of the Heart – The Spirit's Fruit

Upon salvation, man is made spiritually new. He has been given a new heart, yet he remains in a sinful body in a sinful world (Rom 7:24, John 17:15). The Spirit's work does not stop at salvation but continues until the day of redemption (Eph 4:30).

📖 Gal 3:3. **Q.** What did Paul tell the Galatians was a foolish thing to do?

The Spirit's continued work remains in the realm of the heart. He continually seeks to bring man's thoughts, emotions and will under his control. The same Spirit that made us spiritually new in an instant at salvation, continues His work of making us more and more like Jesus Christ on a daily basis (Rom 8:29).

📖 Gal 4:19. **Q.** What was Paul laboring to see done in the lives of the Galatians?

This is, in a nutshell, the work of the ministry. All the spiritual gifts given to the church are for the purpose of bringing men and women into spiritual maturity, that is, Christ-likeness (Eph 4:11-16). And this work happens in the heart.

The focus of the Church's work then, is not the outside of man, but the inside.

📖 Eph 3:14-21. In this passage we find Paul's prayer for the Ephesian church. This offers valuable insight into Paul's approach to ministry. Answer the questions below to see what Paul's emphasis and concern was.

Q. v16. Paul wanted the Ephesians to be strengthened by what? Where?

Q. v17. What would the result of this spiritual strength be?

The word "dwell" here means to "settle down". To be strengthened by the Spirit means to have Christ settled in our hearts. That is, he is comfortable, and at home. This happens as our lives line up with his will by obedience to his commands (John 15:7, John 14:21).

Q. v18-19. What else results from being strengthened by the Spirit in the inner man?

Q. v20. God is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to what?

Paul desired that the Ephesians be strengthened on the inside by the Spirit. This was the focus of his ministry. We should also seek to promote the work of the Spirit inwardly. How then should our church go about this? Do we use guilt, gimmicks, programs or pressure to help develop the *heart attitudes* of faith, hope, and love? Do we devise rules to help people live disciplined lives of unity, humility, joy, and thankfulness? Do we offer incentives and rewards if people exhibit compassion, contentment and self-discipline? Or is there a better way? What is the Biblical way?

Spiritual Fruit, by Spiritual Means

📖 John 6:63. **Q.** What are Christ's words? _____.

📖 Hebrews 4:12. **Q.** What is God's word a discernor of?

📖 1 Thess 2:13. **Q.** What is at work in believers? _____.

Since man's *sanctification* or increasing Christ-likeness is an internal work produced by the Spirit of God, it only makes sense to use God's means to encourage that growth. His main method of promoting spiritual growth is the

ministry of the word. This is why it is absolutely essential that the Christian avail himself to the word of God (Luke 4:4). This also gives the church a mandate to focus on strong, accurate Biblical teaching and preaching. If God's chief work is internal, by the Spirit, through the word of God, than it makes no sense to deemphasize Biblical teaching or to seek new means or methods to produce growth (1 Thess 5:20)!

Secondly, God does His internal work through the *ministry of spiritual gifts*. God has given every believer a spiritual gift (Eph 4:11, Rom 12:5-8) for the purpose of edifying or building up the church (1 Cor 12:7). These gifts produce *spiritual maturity* (Eph 4:13), *doctrinal stability* (Eph 4:14) and, *loving unity* (Eph 4:15-16). Each of these occur on the inside of man.

Conclusion

God desires men and women to worship Him in *Spirit and in truth* (John 4:24). Man's sinful heart has prohibited him from worshipping God in this way. He continually falls back into sin, self-righteousness, and legalism. But, from the beginning of time, God planned on remedying man's sin problem by providing him a new heart. This is what he called the *new covenant*. He accomplished the new covenant through the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Upon Christ's ascension to Heaven he sent the Holy Spirit to dwell in believers. It is through the Spirit that God renews the hearts of men and women, reconciling them to God and enabling them to worship Him in spirit and in truth.

God's work is an inside job! As a church we must seek to encourage and promote this inner work by using God's means and methods. Emphasizing outward conformity to rules is not God's way. He has not told us to manipulate, threaten or guilt people into obedience, but to preach, teach and practice His word in the power of His Holy Spirit.

The faithful teaching of God's word and the production of *spiritual heart attitudes* is a long process. Paul compared it to labouring in birth! But it is God's way and we dare not deviate from it. As a church that means we will continue to make the teaching and preaching of God's word the centerpiece of our ministry. We will seek to promote inward transformation to Christ-likeness and not outward conformity to rules, preferences or the standards of men.

The life of a growing Christian will be predominantly characterized by spiritual heart attitudes. Outward changes will occur in every believer's life, but this is the evidence of an internal work and not a replacement for it.

Review

1. Why do you think man tends to create religions which rely on good works?
2. What type of ungodly attitudes do you think a works-based religion might lead to?
3. What type of worship has God always desired?
4. Why can't man worship God in a way that pleases Him?
5. How did God solve that problem?
6. What work is God continually doing in the life of a Christian? Where does He do it?
7. How might we help or hinder the work that God is doing in us?
8. If we lost sight of the fact that God's work happens in the heart of man by his Holy Spirit, how might our church become imbalanced?