

A Change of Heart



The parable of the Prodigal Son is one of the best-known stories in the Bible (Luke 15:11-32). Apart from teaching about the love of God in forgiving the repentant sinner, it also stresses the need for a change of heart as seen in the sorry and rebellious son who returns to his father.

In telling this parable the Lord Jesus made it plain that all of us need a change of heart. There are many who feel that the message of forgiveness is only for those they consider are very bad people. As far as they are concerned, they hold on to the thought that God is somehow their Heavenly Father, who will receive them although they have never had a change of heart themselves. The Lord Jesus tells us this change of heart is something that only God can do. It is not the result of trying our best or living a good life. It is not the result of just “turning over a

new leaf”, or making a resolution. This change of heart is:

Called for by God

“God... commands all men everywhere to repent” (Acts 17:30). This was the message of the prophets in the Old Testament, of John the Baptist, of Christ Himself and the Apostles who followed Him. Men and women are commanded to turn from their sin, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and obey God. This message does not apply to some people only, but to all men and women, for “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23).

Needed in men and women

All of us are really self-centred and judge everything from how it affects us and what’s best for us. Self really does come first and this self-centredness appears normal. We feel entitled

to live our lives as we want, and resent any claim God may have upon us. We may be willing to pay attention to the things of God just occasionally when our conscience troubles us. The rest of the time we feel it is our right to live our lives as we want.

The Scripture tells us, “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way”, and our way is what is acceptable to us, but it is not God’s way. A change of heart is essential before we can please God.

Attempted

People are troubled from time to time by the consequences of sin, particularly when they see the damage it causes, when their conscience disturbs them or when they are found out. We often try to minimise our responsibility by putting the blame on others, excusing ourselves, or comparing ourselves with other people.

Also it’s a common mistake to try to balance good works against bad. Some will try to strike a bargain with God by turning over a new leaf and becoming religious. Some may make a

profession of conversion, and yet at the same time remain self-centred. They may copy the language and behaviour of Christians in an attempt to quieten their consciences and to deal with a condition that only God can cure by giving them a new heart.

Experienced

The Bible tells us that only God is able to perform this miracle and

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give us a new heart. The person who receives a new heart has come to see that they are a sinner who has

failed God in their thoughts, their words and their actions. They realise that they do not meet the standards that God requires in His word and that God would be quite right to condemn them. In no way do they deserve His forgiveness.

They have come to understand why it was necessary for Christ to live a perfect life and die upon the cross for sinners. It is only through Christ that they can ever be put right with God. We need His good works to gain acceptance with God, His death to cancel out our sin and His strength to enable us to live as

we should. They have asked God to save them and make them a true Christian. They are completely changed through the personal entrance of Jesus Christ into their lives. This experience the Bible describes as conversion.

*Many ...have known
this change of heart*

There are many today who have known this change of heart for themselves. Those who come to know God truly, have the needs of their souls met and know a satisfaction, a joy and a peace, which nothing in this world can be compared to or give.

Illustrated

There are many examples in Scripture of those whose lives were wonderfully changed. Some tried to patch up their old lives but failed, and others admitted their hopeless condition and became different people. This was true particularly of the Apostle Paul, but it is also well illustrated in the story of the Prodigal Son.

He lived for pleasure alone but became disillusioned. Eventually he realised how rebellious he was and saw how he appeared in the sight of God. He humbled himself and went back home. As his father said, he had been "dead" but now had become "alive again" - the change was so remarkable. We are by nature, "spiritually dead" until we are given new life by God.