

SOUL FOOD - The Things You Need To Know About Your Bible - Pt 23

Sunday, May 30th, 2021 - 6:30 p.m. - Teaching #2108

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THE ONE WHO TREMBLES AT GOD'S WORD (Part 5)

Isaiah 66:1-4 - "Thus says the Lord: 'Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool; what is the house that you would build for me, and what is the place of my rest?[2] All these things my hand has made, and so all these things came to be, declares the Lord. But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word.[3] 'He who slaughters an ox is like one who kills a man; he who sacrifices a lamb, like one who breaks a dog's neck; he who presents a grain offering, like one who offers pig's blood; he who makes a memorial offering of frankincense, like one who blesses an idol. These have chosen their own ways, and their soul delights in their abominations;[4] I also will choose harsh treatment for them and bring their fears upon them, because when I called, no one answered, when I spoke they did not listen; but they did what was evil in my eyes and chose that in which I did not delight."

We've been focusing our attention especially on the words of **verse 2** - "But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word." In our final examination of this subject we come to the most obvious question. Now that we've seen the **importance** of this kind of heart, is it a **possibility**? How can I have a heart like this? Where does a trembling heart come from? Last week we probed into the life of King Josiah.

When the Word of the Lord was discovered as they were refurbishing the Temple, he had it read out loud to him, and it broke his heart. He knew he was hearing **God** in the Scriptures. He wept and tore his robes in repentance. And God blessed him for his trembling heart.

Now we will make application to us. We have many advantages over Josiah. And also greater accountability. What are the steps to take? There's no magic, for sure. But there is a way. Here are at least five steps I'm absolutely certain of.

1) **EXPOSE YOUR HEART TO THE MEANS THROUGH WHICH THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL WORK**

The whole message of the Old Testament prophets was that only the Spirit can take away the heart of stone and replace it with a tender heart of flesh. Tell yourself that right now. ***Only the Holy Spirit can keep the heart flesh-like.***

I don't mean that it takes the Holy Spirit to make you more emotional in your outward response to things. We all know that the world can quickly stir up our feelings. We read sad novels. We watch upbeat movies. Those are emotional reactions shared by all. They are manifested equally by Christians and non-Christians alike.

But only the Holy Spirit can make your heart sensitive toward **God**. You can't make yourself as engaged toward God as you are toward earthly things. Only the Holy Spirit can make you and me as **inwardly awake** toward God as we are naturally toward earthly things.

But where does that leave me? Do I just cross my fingers and hope? No. True, I can't do the inward spiritual work. But I'm still involved in responding to God's grace. I need to put myself into situations where, at least to the best of my ability, I'm lessening earthly **distractions** to the Spirit's inward reforming of my thoughts and affections. I can't **do** the inward work. But I **can** open up the door to my heart as widely as I know how.

Please yield to the simple lesson here. There are so many **ordinary** things I do in my spiritual walk. I pray. I sing with the saints. I study the Scriptures. I give. I serve. I go to church. But here's the point. I don't, especially at first, do **any** of those things because I feel inclined to do them. I do them so I **will** feel inclined to do them as the Holy Spirit pours His grace through them. To expect to feel inclined **first** is to try to do the Spirit's work **for** Him. These are His means for softening and ploughing up my heart. That's how He replaces old affections with new ones.

2) TAKE MORE SERIOUSLY THE WARNINGS AND JUDGEMENTS OF GOD'S WORD

The old Puritan, **Richard Sibbes** wrote, "***Faith constantly sets the day of judgement before the believer's eyes. This causes him to live in the fear of the Lord.***"

"Well, Pastor Don, I think all of that talk about wrath and judgement is a little puritan and gloomy. I don't want to live life like that."

If those are your thoughts, you need, just like Josiah, to blow the dust off of God's Word and have it read aloud to you again:

2 Timothy 4:1 - "I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom...."

2 Corinthians 5:11 - "Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others. But what we are is known to God, and I hope it is known also to your conscience." Please take note. Paul wasn't just motivated by *love* for people. He was also motivated by the "*fear of the Lord.*"

2 Peter 3:11-12 - "Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, [12] waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn!"

Our blindly tolerant culture has made it easier for many Christians to become increasingly blind to the loving work of grace poured into our souls by remembering God's judgment and wrath. My point is you will never be more in line with the Scriptures than when you place your life - right now - before the judgment that will come to all who reject following Christ.

3) **TAKE HEED AGAINST SINNING AGAINST CONSCIENCE.**

All sin is serious. But sins against conscience do more than just stain the record before God. Sins against conscience darken the *understanding* and deaden the possibility of true godly *affections*. So a small sin committed *against conscience* is far more damaging than a grosser sin committed in *ignorance*.

We are so prone to justify what we consider small, isolated sins. "I'm not going to hell for just one sin," we say. Over 400 years ago Thomas Brooks wrote these profound words: "*Small sins make way for greater ones. We do not have the power to keep off sin as we please. By yielding to the lesser we give opportunity for Satan to tempt us with the greater....So sometimes, the lighter the temptation the more dangerous the sin. For the love of one sin some have lost God and their souls forever. This is because many times small sins are more dangerous.*"

“Great sins startle the soul and awaken repentance, but little ones breed and work secretly until they trample the conscience and the soul. Sin always grows by degrees until you cannot prevail over it.”

Study those rich words. Brooks tells well of sinning against conscience. That's why the New Testament summons us to make it one of our main goals ***not to foul up the work of conscience in any of our actions:***

Acts 24:16 - "So I always take pains to have a clear conscience toward both God and man."

1 Timothy 1:5 - "The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith."

1 Timothy 3:9 - "They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience."

1 Peter 3:16 - "....yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame."

If you were keeping track through those references you would have noted that ***faith, holiness*** and the ***leading of the Holy Spirit*** are all dependant on the conscience being clear of any offence. It's not that the life has to be absolutely perfect. We should all be ***aiming*** at that for sure.

Behold the blessings of a ***clean conscience!*** I'm not knowingly ***pretending*** with myself spiritually. A clean conscience brings something deeper than just ***moral purity***. It keeps the heart soft before God. It will effect your heart's response to the ***next*** exposure you will have toward God's Word. And that's what we're talking about - how to have a heart that increasingly ***trembles*** before God's Word.

4) **KEEP YOUR HEART TENDER BY AVOIDING SEXUAL SIN**

I'm not sure one could prove from Scripture that some sins are more ***damning*** than others.

Which sins aren't worthy of God's judgement? But I think one can prove that certain sins are more **damaging** than others.

Look at the life of **David**. He sinned in numbering the people. That's where he repented and asked for judgement from **God** rather than **man**. He comes so quickly to beg for God's mercy. In fact, that's what marked David as a man after God's own heart. He was never perfect. But he was always so quick to feel the **pain** of his sin. He couldn't bear the weight of it in his own heart.

But when he sinned with Bathsheba, it was a different story. That came very close to being the end for David. He felt guilty about what he'd done. But he never did come clean before God **on his own**. **Nathan** had to expose and reprimand David before he turned to the Lord. And the only way Nathan could bring David to even **consider** his sexual sin was **by putting David's sin into someone else's life**. When David sees his own sin in Nathan's fictional account of the poor farmer, David is incensed. Then Nathan told David **"You are the man!"**

There's a particular power in sexual sin to pull a person into darkness - to lead him or her into further paths of deception and guilt. Sexual sins, perhaps more than any other, keep a person from walking in the light. Remember the words of the Apostle John - **"If we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanses us from all unrighteousness."** (1 John 1:7). Cleansing **stops** when you persist in sin against conscience. You remove yourself from grace.

5) **TO KEEP YOUR HEART TENDER, KEEP YOURSELF IN FELLOWSHIP WITH THE BODY OF CHRIST.**

Hebrews 3:13 - "But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called 'today,' that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin."

COVID aside, these are still not good days for calling people to make a serious commitment to the local church. All sorts of trendy voices are teaching that you can be devout in your commitment to Jesus but not too crazy about His Bride, the church. That's what makes these verses so important. Just how do I keep my heart tender before the Lord? Or, to frame it in the language of our Hebrews text, how can I avoid being **"hardened by the deceitfulness of sin?"**

And the writer shocks our sense of independence by telling me *I can't do this by myself*. Some outside help - some community attachment to a local church - will always be needed. And when you think about it, the reason I need your fellowship in the community of the church is obvious. The text says sin makes its inroads into my life by **deceitfulness** - **"But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called 'today,' that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin."** (Hebrews 3:13)

"Don't worry, Pastor Don, if I think I'm being deceived by sin, I'll make sure I take care of it right away!" Listen, if you're deceived, not only will you not take **care** of it, you won't even **know** about it. That's what **deceived** means. You will be totally unaware of the whole process.

It is an enormous blunder to ever reach a point in your spiritual development where you trust yourself to stay holy on your own. The landscape is littered with broken Christian leaders who thought they could do that.

The writer of Hebrews says, to avoid the encroachment of sin's deceitfulness in my own heart, I need the input of the rest of the body of Christ in a local church. I need it on a very **regular** basis. **"Daily"** is the word actually used in the text.

There is really only one need in the Christian life. It is to keep the heart tender before God. Everything else hinges on this single endeavor.

It is the summit of wisdom to know what is essential and then focus your attention on that one thing. I sometimes think of a little story when I think of the way I can be so careless with my attention to essentials.

It's a very deep story. There was a lady who wanted to finally branch out after all the children had left home and buy a pet. Because her husband had passed away she also wanted company. A talking bird seemed the perfect choice. And she purchased a very, very expensive one.

When she brought the bird home she did everything in her power to make the bird happy, but the yellow creature seemed miserable right off the bat. Day by day the lady returned to the pet store

and bought little delights for the bird. Nothing was spared. Little swings. Bells. A tiny little set of stairs for exercise. Even a mirror. Then, one sad morning, the lady moped into the pet store. She complained to the store owner that nothing seemed to make the bird happy. And now he was dead. She had provided everything a talking bird could ever want to be happy.

“I don’t understand it,” the store owner said. This has never happened before. Especially with a talking bird of such extravagant breed. Did he say anything before he died?” “Yes,” the lady said. “The last thing he said to me was, “Don’t they sell any **bird food** in that pet store?”

You don’t have to have **everything** right to know God. But you do have to have the **essential** things right. And for **centuries**, the saints of the ages have found these Scriptural principles effective for maintaining a tender, pure heart. They must be a part of every thoughtful Christian's life:

- * Regularly expose your soul to the things of the Spirit
- * Take to heart more seriously the warnings and judgements of God
- * Avoid any sin against the clear light of conscience
- * Avoid sexual sin
- * Stay accountable in the local the Body of Christ