

Preaching to *All* of the Heart

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Abstract

There is little controversy over whether preaching should aim for the heart, but the question arises about how it should be done. This article provides an answer to this question by clarifying the biblical understanding of the heart in its fundamental unity and in its threefold complexity. Appreciating how the heart works in this way sheds light on preaching effectively to the heart.

Keywords

Preaching, heart, mind, desires, affections, will, word of God

“Did not our hearts burn within us ... while he opened to us the Scriptures?”
(Luke 24:32 ESV)

Introduction: Why Preach to the Heart?

When asked why he spoke in parables, the Lord gave a twofold answer. First, he explained that many would not receive his word because their hearts had become dull. Their ears will not hear, their eyes will not see, and thus, their hearts will not understand (Matt 13:13–15). Second, he said that those who would receive his word are those whose hearts are like good soil that receives a seed and holds it fast. They hear the word, understand it, and bear fruit as a result (Matt 13:23).

There is an inseparable link between the sowing of the word of God and the human heart—whether for good or for ill. The heart is where that word is rejected (Matt 13:15; Luke 8:12), and the heart is where the imperishable seed of the word brings new life—and this word is the preaching of the good news (1 Pet 1:23–25). The coddling of new life and the nurturing of spiritual life take place in “an honest and good heart” (Luke 8:15). The word could not be more “near you” than by being “in your heart” (Rom 10:8).

We aim at the heart in preaching because the totality of our inner self is governed from this one point—everything we think, desire, choose, and do is generated in this one “controlling source.”¹ The heart comprehends the one source of all our spiritual faculties and moral operations.² It is the fountainhead of every motive, the seat of every passion, the center of every thought, and the spring of conscience.³ It is the “hidden control center” in every person.⁴ Abraham Kuyper said that the heart is “the common source from which the different streams of our human life spring.”⁵ All of your inner life begins here. It originates from this one point of unity, from which “flow the springs of life” (Prov 4:23). It is the helm of the ship. The bearing it sets will be the course that your life will follow.⁶ Why would a preacher aim at anything else?

I. *What Is the Heart?*

1. *The Heart's Unity and Complexity*

“Heart” is the word used most often in the Bible to describe our inner person. It appears just under one thousand times.⁷ Scripture presents it as

¹ John Flavel, *Keeping the Heart: How to Maintain Your Love for God* (Fearn, Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2012), 8; cf. Murray Capill, *The Heart Is the Target: Preaching Practical Application from Every Text* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2014), 97; Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, trans. John Richard deWitt (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 120.

² John Owen, *The Nature, Power, Deceit, and Prevalency of the Remainders of Indwelling Sin in Believers, in Temptation and Sin*, vol. 6 of *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1967), 170.

³ O. R. Brandon, “Heart,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter E. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 499.

⁴ John W. Cooper, *Body, Soul, and Life Everlasting* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 42; cf. Peter Hubbard, *Love into Light: The Gospel, the Homosexual and the Church* (Greenville, SC: Ambassador International, 2013), 32; C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (1942; repr., New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 28.

⁵ Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1943), 20.

⁶ John Owen, *Spiritual-Mindedness* (1681; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2009), 134.

⁷ The Old Testament uses the Hebrew terms לֵב (*lev*) 598 times and לֵבָב (*levav*) 252 times, and the New Testament's Greek word καρδιά (*kardia*) appears 156 times. Bruce Waltke with

the crucial ingredient in what you treasure or say (Matt. 6:21; Luke 6:45), in your inner beauty (1 Pet 3:4), your repentance (Deut 30:2, 10; 1 Sam 7:3; 1 Kgs 8:48; Jer 24:7), and your faith (Prov 3:5–6), service (Deut 10:12; 1 Chr 28:9), obedience (Ps 119:34), covenant faithfulness (1 Kgs 2:4), worship (Ps 86:12; Zeph 3:14), love (Deut 10:12; Matt 22:37), daily walk (Isa 38:3), and seeking of the Lord (Deut 4:29; 2 Chr 15:12; Jer 29:13)—which, in most cases are to be performed “with all your heart” (Deut 6:5; Matt 22:37). Like other biblical words that describe humankind’s inner life (like “soul,” “spirit,” “conscience,” and “inner man”), the word “heart” is a comprehensive term. It reflects our inward integrity and cohesion. As Kuyper stated, the heart is “that point in our consciousness in which our life is still undivided and lies comprehended in its unity.”⁸

Within this unity of the heart resides a triune complexity of functions: the mind, the desires, and the will.⁹ That is to say, the heart includes what we *know* (our intellect, knowledge, thoughts, intentions, ideas, meditation, memory, imagination), what we *love* (what we desire, want, seek, crave, yearn for, feel), and what we *choose* (whether we will resist or submit, whether we will be weak or strong, whether we will say yes or no).¹⁰ As opposed to other biblical words that describe our inner life (like “soul,” “spirit,” “conscience,” and “inner man”), the heart “combines the complex interplay of intellect, sensibility, and will.”¹¹ This threefold scheme of the heart (as mind, desires, and will) was foundational to Puritan theology and preaching. They understood the importance of aiming for the heart.¹² Their Reformed

Charles Yu, *An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 225; Hans Walter Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), 40; Alex Luc, “לב,” in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. Willem A. VanGemeren (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 749; Theo Sorg, “Heart,” in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Colin Brown (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 2:182; Abraham Evan-Shoshan, ed., *A New Concordance of the Bible* (Jerusalem: Kiryat Sefer, 1989), 582–88.

⁸ Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*, 20.

⁹ Sorg, “Heart,” 2:181; Waltke, *Old Testament Theology*, 225; Owen, *Indwelling Sin*, 169–76; Jerry Bridges, *The Pursuit of Holiness*, 25th anniversary ed. (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2003). Plato and Sigmund Freud articulated a complex triune inner self but with models that are largely hierarchical trinities of tension and strife, devoid of a unifying center. Patrick Downey, *Desperately Wicked: Philosophy, Christianity and the Human Heart* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 14.

¹⁰ Gen 6:5; Pss 19:14; 49:3; 77:6; 139:23; Prov 15:14, 28; Matt 5:19; Luke 2:19; 6:45; Rom 10:9; Eph 1:18; 4:18; Heb 4:12; 8:10.

¹¹ Waltke, *Old Testament Theology*, 225.

¹² E.g., Jonathan Edwards, *The Religious Affections* (1746; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1986), 24–25; Sinclair B. Ferguson, *John Owen on the Christian Life* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1987), 134–36; Richard Sibbes, *Bruised Reed* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2005), 89; Westminster Larger Catechism 99; Stephen Charnock, “Sermon XIX,” in

descendants and popularizers have taken up the same scheme.¹³ This triangular paradigm has weathered the test of time and is upheld by contemporary biblical scholars.¹⁴

Thus, the word “heart” in Scripture is simple enough to reflect our inner unity and yet comprehensive enough to capture our inward threefold complexity. Just as the heart’s cohesive unity does not eclipse its compounded function, so also the heart’s complexity does not cloud its coherent integrity. This interplay between the heart’s unity and its complexity comes to the fore in Reformed theology, particularly when the issues of free will, the noetic effect of sin, and the “affections” are addressed in preaching. Before turning to that, we briefly explain each of the heart’s three functions.

2. The Heart's Mind

The Bible attributes our intellectual abilities—our thinking, planning, ideas, meditation, imagination, convictions and confusion, knowledge and ignorance, and wisdom and folly—to the heart.¹⁵ The heart is as much about reason as it is about emotion.¹⁶ Many passages reflect this idea. Paul prays for the Ephesians, “May [God] give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened” (Eph 1:17–18). The heart receives the light of God’s truth, but it can also suffer “blindness and confusion of mind [lit., ‘heart’ in Hebrew]” (Deut 28:28), or doubt (Luke 24:38; Matt 13:15; Mark 2:6; Prov 15:14). It is from the heart that all thoughts spring, whether for good or for evil: “For out of the heart come evil thoughts” (Matt 15:19). The knowledge of God is in the

Puritan Sermons, 1659–1689 (1674; repr., Wheaton, IL: Richard Owen Roberts, 1981), 2:387–88.

¹³ E.g., A. A. Hodge, *The Westminster Confession: A Commentary* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2002), 174; Charles Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, n.d.), 1:295; Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 233; C. R. Vaughan, ed., *Discussions of Robert L. Dabney*, vol. 3, *Philosophical* (1892; repr., Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle, 1996), 281; Bridges, *Pursuit of Holiness*; Elyse Fitzpatrick, *Idols of the Heart: Learning to Long for God Alone* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2001), 93–98; Kris Lundgaard, *The Enemy Within: Straight Talk about the Power and Defeat of Sin* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1998), 38.

¹⁴ Brandon, “Heart,” 499; Sorg, “Heart,” 2:181; B. O. Banwell, “Heart,” in *New Bible Dictionary*, ed. J. D. Douglas, 2nd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1982), 465; Andrew Bowling, “Heart,” in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, ed. R. Laird Harris (Chicago: Moody, 1980), 1:466; Daniel I. Block, *Deuteronomy*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 183. See the text note on Ecclesiastes 1:13 regarding “heart” in the English Standard Version (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007).

¹⁵ Wolff observes about “heart” in the Old Testament that “in by far the greatest number of cases it is intellectual, rational functions that are ascribed to the heart.” Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament*, 46–47.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 47. Interestingly, Wolff’s chapter on the heart is titled “Reasonable Man.”

heart: “I will give them a heart to know that I am the LORD” (Jer 24:7). Simeon prophesied that through Jesus’s birth the “thoughts from many hearts” would be revealed (Luke 2:35). The religious leaders frustrated Jesus with their cynical reasoning: “But Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, ‘Why do you think evil in your hearts?’” (Matt 9:4; Mark 2:6). Note the parallel in Psalm 139:23: “Search me, O God, and know my *heart*! Try me and know my *thoughts*!” Or similarly in Proverbs 3:5: “Trust in the LORD with all your *heart*, and do not lean on your own *understanding*.” The heart’s thoughtful intentions are seen in Genesis 6:5: “The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.” So also, the word of God speaks to the heart’s mind: “For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart” (Heb 4:12). Our Lord assumes the essential role of thinking for the heart when he explains his use of parables: “For this people’s heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them” (Matt 13:15; cf. Isa 6:9–10).

English translations render “heart” with words like “understanding,” “consider,” “sense,” or, most often, “mind” (Exod 14:5; 1 Kgs 3:9; Prov 19:21; Dan 2:30). When the words “heart” and “mind” appear together in Scripture—as they often do—they are not in contrast, but in coordination (e.g., Pss 26:2; 64:6; Jer 17:10; 20:12; cf. Matt 22:37; Mark 12:30; Luke 10:27). When the Bible says that a person lacks understanding, it is speaking of the person who “lacks heart” (Prov 7:7; 9:4, 16; 10:13; 11:12; 12:11; 15:21; 24:30). For example, in the book of Proverbs, translators have chosen phrases like “lacks sense” (ESV) to translate the literal phrase “lacks heart” (see Prov 6:32; 9:16; 11:12; 12:11; 15:21; 17:18; 24:30; cf. Eccl 10:3). These examples represent a small sample of the ways in which the Bible presents thinking as a vital function of the heart.

3. The Heart’s Desires (“Affections”)

Longings and cravings flow from the heart in search of satisfaction (1 Sam 23:20; Pss 20:4; 21:2; 35:25; Rom 10:1). It is from our heart that evil desires like coveting, deceit, envy, and pride arise (Mark 7:21–23; Jas 1:14–15; 3:14), as do righteous desires like seeking God, his kingdom, and his righteousness and loving one another (Jer 29:13; Matt 6:33; 1 Tim. 1:5). Whether rightly or wrongly, the heart longs for companionship, security, encouragement, happiness, comfort, and satisfaction. Jonathan Edwards defined these

longings as “the more vigorous and sensible exercises” of our heart, which will not abide spiritual things dispassionately; they either like or dislike, approve or reject, love or hate.¹⁷ Perhaps this is why the Puritans referred to these inclinations of the heart as the “affections.” Since desires are strong, the Bible employs words like “thirst” and “hunger” to speak graphically about spiritual appetites (Ps 63:1; Isa 55:2; Matt 5:6; John 4:10; 6:32, 48, 55; Heb 5:14; 1 Pet 2:2).

The biblical vocabulary for desire does double duty. It is used for both sinful desires and righteous desires, depending upon its object. The same word can be used for both a sinful craving (Num 11:4; 1 Sam. 2:16; 23:20; Ps 106:14) or righteous longing (Deut 12:15; Pss 45:11; 132:13; Isa 26:9). The word used for the condemned desires of lust (Matt 5:28), fleshly passions (Gal 5:24), and worldly desire (1 John 2:16–17) is the same word used for the commended longing to see the day of Christ (Matt 13:17) and the word Christ uses for his desire to eat the Passover with his disciples (Luke 22:15).¹⁸ Desire can describe how Achan coveted the gold (Josh 7:1, 24) or our desiring God’s law more than fine gold (Ps 19:20). In Galatians 5:16–17, the same term is used for both the desires of the flesh and the desires of the Spirit. What we learn from these examples is that not all desires are necessarily wrong and not all desires are necessarily right. Desire is simply a part of what it means to be human. As George Herbert put it, “He begins to die, that quits his desires.”¹⁹

Desires become sinful when they are out of bounds or out of balance.²⁰ Excessive desire—even if the object of the desire is lawful—is what the Bible calls idolatry. This desire grows into self-indulgence. It is what the person truly loves. It receives their finest effort, their best care, and their greatest devotion. It is their treasure (Matt 6:21). We tend to be emotional about our treasure. Thus, Scripture associates the heart with feelings. The things that we love bring out what lies at our core. As we all well know, the heart feels anger, joy, envy, rage, anxious fear, longing, sorrow, lovesickness, anguish, despair, and many other emotions.

4. The Heart’s Will

Often, when the word “heart” appears in Scripture, its volitional function is in view. The will determines if you will either resist or submit to what you

¹⁷ Edwards, *Religious Affections*, 24.

¹⁸ See also Acts 20:33; Rom 1:24; 6:12; 7:7; 13:9; Col 3:5; 1 Tim. 6:9; 1 John 2:16.

¹⁹ George Herbert, “Outlandish Proverbs,” in *The Complete English Works*, ed. Ann Pasternak Slater (1908; repr., London: David Campbell, 1995), 257.

²⁰ John Freeman, *Hide or Seek: When Men Get Real with God about Sex* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth, 2014), 16.

know and desire. Your heart has to make a choice. It will decide whether you will say yes or no. This is where the battle for the control of the heart is won or lost, depending on the will's strength or weakness, depending on the heart's callousness or brokenness, depending on whether the heart is still hardened by sin or made new by grace.

Whether fallen or redeemed, the will has two sides. On the one hand, the sinful will is a stubborn, rebellious, unyielding "heart of stone" (Ezek 36:26).²¹ It is an impervious "hardened heart," which resists God in rebellious and impenitent unbelief (2 Chr 36:13; Ezek 3:7; Acts 19:9; Rom 2:5; cf. 11:7; 2 Cor 3:14).²² Its patron saint is Pharaoh, who would not bend, despite all that he witnessed.²³ Christ cites Isaiah's call to explain why many will not truly see or hear his words due to their dull hearts, which are too thickly layered to feel spiritual sensitivities (Isa 6:9–10; cf. Matt 13:14–15; John 12:40). The same is true of the "uncircumcised" heart that stands in need of humble repentance (Lev 26:41; Deut 10:16; Jer 4:4; Rom 2:29). On the other hand, the sinful will's inability to resist temptation proves its weakness. It is sinfully enslaved, apathetic, unstable, uncommitted, and afraid. God rebuked Israel's weakness because they would not commit and "set their heart" on him but instead "set their heart" on gain (2 Chr 12:14; Ezek 33:31), ill-gained riches (Ps 62:10), or self-exaltation (Isa 14:13; Ezek 31:10). The weak-willed heart trembles or "melts" in fear (Gen 42:28; Deut 1:28; 20:8; Josh 2:11; 2 Sam 17:10).

Similarly, but conversely, the righteous will has two sides. It is both surrendered and strengthened. This is the fruit of the Spirit's regenerating work, which replaces what was impervious stone with what is now broken and contrite (Ps 51:17). On the one hand, this heart humbly bows before God and his word (Isa 66:2). It grieves over sin and is comforted by God's forgiving grace (2 Cor 7:10–12; Matt 5:4). This heart says yes to God's good pleasure and welcomes the joy of serving Christ. On the other hand, the righteous will is resolved to seek and obey the Lord (Judg 8:21; 1 Sam 2:1; 1 Chr 22:19; Ezek 40:4; Dan 1:8).²⁴ God's grace has infused it with a new and noble boldness that enables a Christian to say no to sin, defy the threats of the world, and resist the temptations of Satan (Acts 4:13; Jas 4:7; 1 Pet 5:9).

²¹ J. C. Ryle, "The Heart," in *Old Paths* (1878; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1999), 324.

²² Cf. Ezekiel 2:4, "The descendants also are impudent and stubborn [lit., 'hard and strong' in heart]."

²³ Exod 4:21; 7:3, 13–14, 22; 8:15, 19, 32; 9:7, 12, 34–35; 10:1, 20, 27; 11:10; 14:4, 8, 17.

²⁴ Richard Sibbes, *Works of Richard Sibbes*, ed. Alexander B. Grosart (1862; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1979), 1:88.

II. *Preaching to All of the Heart*

1. *Integrating the Mind, Desires, and Will*

If what has been stated thus far is true, then preaching to the heart means preaching to *all* of it—the heart’s mind, desires, and will. To do this properly one must bear in mind that the heart’s threefold complexity does not eclipse the heart’s unity. What the heart knows, desires, and chooses are in constant, mutual interaction. They must be held together, not pitted against one another. Each is distinct, yet not independent of the others.

For example, our desires are inseparably related to what we know and choose, because we are ultimately driven by singularity. We are not capable of dispassionate reasoning. The health of our mind is connected to the health of our desires.²⁵ A sick heart is a deceived heart (Jer 17:9). When our desires are impure, so are our reasons (Eph 4:18; Rom 1:21–22). But when our hearts and desires are renewed, then we see more clearly and discern with wisdom (Matt 13:16). God designed our affections and mind to be aligned. We study most diligently what we hold most dear.²⁶ We were not meant to think apart from our affections.²⁷ It is true that blind passion can confuse the mind (Prov 19:2), but it is also true that knowledge without passion rarely moves someone to act. Emotions do not always produce confusion; they can also bring clarity to the intellect.²⁸ We move with singular purpose and sharp thinking when we are energized by a “piping hot” righteous zeal. A stirred-up man of principle is not easily dissuaded. His emotion has given him lucidity and purpose.

So also, our sinful desires are hopelessly entangled with our thinking and choices. A heart given over to impurity and rebellion can no longer sustain sound judgment. Human reasoning is “radically embedded” in the character of the heart.²⁹ This is one lesson from Romans chapter one. Because the fallen heart has given itself to idolatrous and debased desires, it cannot help but suppress the truth with darkened, foolish, futile, and deceitful understanding. A deviant heart is a devious heart. When the heart is fixated on its chosen object, it does not have eyes for anything else, and it will not listen to common sense.

²⁵ James R. Peters, *The Logic of the Heart: Augustine, Pascal, and the Rationality of Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 18.

²⁶ Sibbes, *Works of Richard Sibbes*, ed. Grosart, 1:89.

²⁷ C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York: Macmillan, 1955), 24.

²⁸ Vaughan, ed., *Discussions of Robert L. Dabney*, 3:277.

²⁹ Peters, *The Logic of the Heart*, 34–36.

Similarly, one cannot speak of the will in abstraction from the spiritual state of the heart, as the Reformers, the Puritans, and their theological descendants have understood so well. What is “free will” if the heart is enslaved to sin? Augustine understood this contrary to Pelagius. Martin Luther saw this in contrast to Erasmus.³⁰ John Calvin maintained this contrary to the Anabaptists: “Similarly the will, because it is inseparable from man’s nature, did not perish, but was so bound to wicked desires that it cannot strive after the right.”³¹ Edwards explicated this same insight in *Freedom of the Will* (1754).³² They wrote of the biblical teaching that an unbelieving heart suffers from being spiritually seared and calloused. Such a heart is not free: “For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God’s law; indeed, it cannot” (Rom 8:7; cf. 2:5; 6:17; Eph 4:18; 6:6). The will takes up its alliance with the other chambers of the heart, particularly its bond with the affections.³³ The depraved heart is enslaved or in bondage (John 8:34; Rom 8:15). The hardened heart is an unfeeling heart, and a heart of stone is numb, insensitive, and unresponsive. Scripture aligns a hard heart with an unbelieving mind: “But their minds were hardened. For to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away” (2 Cor 3:14). Conversely, the heart that God has washed clean, made contrite, rendered righteous, and graciously filled with his Spirit and faith is free to serve God and man (John 8:32; Rom 8:2).

The relationship between the will and the mind is evident in the way that reasoning in Scripture is not restricted to the capacity to think or to the content of thought. Reasoning also involves the direction of one’s thinking. For example, Paul writes, “For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit” (Rom 8:5). There is no neutral gear for the mind. The direction of a person’s thoughts cannot be separated from the direction of a person’s life. As Jürgen Goetzmann states, “Man is always aiming at something.”³⁴ The words that Paul chooses in

³⁰ These themes are visible in the Latin titles: Luther, *De servo arbitrio*, and Erasmus, *De libero arbitrio diatribe*.

³¹ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, LCC 20–21 (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 1:271 (2.2.12).

³² Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 1, *Freedom of the Will*, ed. Paul Ramsey (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009). The full, original title is *A Careful and Strict Inquiry into the Modern Prevailing Notions of That Freedom of Will Which Is Supposed to Be Essential to Moral Agency, Virtue and Vice, Reward and Punishment, Praise and Blame*.

³³ Calvin, *Institutes* 2.2.12; Edwards, *Religious Affections*, 25.

³⁴ Jürgen Goetzmann, “Mind,” in *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Brown, 2:617.

Romans 8:5 “signify the direction of the will in human beings. The terms cannot be confined to the mind alone but refer to the whole existence of a person.”³⁵ What is in view is not simply the activity of one’s intellect but the movement of the will.³⁶ The same reality is seen in Paul’s exhortation to be “of the same mind” and to have the mind of Christ (Phil 2:2, 5). Paul refers to their mindset, the trajectory of their thinking or their “attitude.”³⁷ The same idea is found in the Lord’s rebuke of Peter: “Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man” (Matt 16:23). The concern is not a random thought but rather the whole orientation of Peter’s thinking.

The indivisible relationship between the three “chambers” of the heart is underscored by the repetition of the phraseology “with all your heart” and “with your whole heart.” God commands us to serve him (Deut 10:12), obey him (Deut 30:2), repent (1 Sam 7:3), walk in faithfulness (1 Kgs 2:4), enter into covenant (2 Chr 15:12), give thanks (Ps 86:12), keep the law (Ps 119:34), trust in the Lord (Prov 3:5), seek the Lord (Jer 29:13), rejoice (Zeph 3:14), and love him (Matt 22:37)—and says to do these things “with all your heart.” We appreciate such commands only if we understand that they demand *all* that we know, desire, and choose. The heart’s will expresses itself deliberately in the thoughts we consciously entertain, in the desires we intentionally inflame, and in the direction we persistently follow.

That the heart is integrated in its threefold capacity would seem to counter the notion that people “are lovers before they are thinkers” or that the heart is accessed by noncognitive, intuitive, and subconscious ways more than intellectual ways.³⁸ Such a view falls outside the Scriptural map—although it may land you in ancient Athens (Plato) or late-nineteenth-century Basel (Friedrich Nietzsche).³⁹ As seen above, to put the heart and the intellect into a relationship of tension is a false dichotomy and creates the impression that the mind is somehow less spiritual or noble than the affective or volitional part of who we are.⁴⁰ Preachers do not have to choose between aiming for

³⁵ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1998), 411. The words in view are φρονέω (*phroneō*), φρόνημα (*phronēma*), etc.; see Rom 12:3, 16; 15:5; 1 Cor 13:11; 2 Cor 13:11; Gal 5:10; Phil 1:7; 3:15, 19; Col 3:2.

³⁶ Goetzmann, “Mind,” 617.

³⁷ As with the NASB and NLT.

³⁸ James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation*, Culture Liturgies 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 47, 50, 60; James K. A. Smith, *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2016), 1–25.

³⁹ Ole M. Høystad, *A History of the Heart* (London: Reaktion Books, 2007), 151.

⁴⁰ For a helpful response to James Smith, see Matthew C. Bingham, “Brains, Bodies, and the Task of Discipleship: Re-Aligning Anthropology and Ministry,” *Themelios* 46.1 (April 2021): 37–54.

the “head” or the “heart.”⁴¹ Is such a dichotomy really that different from the foibles of the Corinthian church, which denigrated the mind?⁴²

2. *Priorities in Preaching to All the Heart*

Voices from the past and the present uphold both the integrated unity and the threefold complexity of the heart. Among them there is a shared assumption that the preacher should not appeal to only one aspect of the heart. Balance must be maintained in “ministering to the understanding, affections, and will.”⁴³ A few examples will suffice.

Augustine stated that “an eloquent man must speak so as to teach, to delight, and to persuade ... to teach is a necessity, to delight is a beauty, to persuade is a triumph.”⁴⁴ He is arguing that preaching is more than teaching; it is also “giving pleasure and moving.”⁴⁵ The preacher must appeal to the right-thinking mind and a “well-directed love” and a right will.⁴⁶ Edwards wrote that the “affections of the mind” are the “sensible exercises of the inclination and will of the soul.”⁴⁷ Thus, the type of preaching that is most desired is that which affects the affections, which are inseparable from the mind and will.⁴⁸ Robert Dabney understood that one must preach to the mind and affections en route to reaching volition. The emotions move the will.⁴⁹ Charles Bridges believed that the “two main ends of the Christian Ministry” are “to enlighten the mind and affect the heart.”⁵⁰ John Piper has argued the same. Preaching must stir up “holy affections” but must also “enlighten the mind.”⁵¹ In the words of D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, preaching is light and heat. It is “logic on fire.”⁵²

⁴¹ Capill, *The Heart Is the Target*, 97; Joel R. Beeke, *Reformed Preaching: Proclaiming God’s Word from the Heart of the Preacher to the Heart of His People* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 43–56.

⁴² 1 Cor 14:12, 15, 19–20; cf. 12:7.

⁴³ Sinclair B. Ferguson, “Preaching to the Heart,” in *Feed My Sheep: A Passionate Plea for Preaching*, ed. Don Kistler (Orlando, FL: Reformation Trust, 2008), 107.

⁴⁴ Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine* 4.27, in Philip Schaff, ed., *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Series 1 (NPNF¹) (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 2:583.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 2:586.

⁴⁶ Augustine, *City of God* 14.7 (NPNF¹ 2:267).

⁴⁷ Edwards, *Religious Affections*, 24. He did not see the will and the affections as essentially distinct.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 44–45.

⁴⁹ Robert Lewis Dabney, *Sacred Rhetoric: Or, a Course of Lectures on Preaching* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1979), 234.

⁵⁰ Charles Bridges, *The Christian Ministry* (1830; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1991), 318.

⁵¹ John Piper, *The Supremacy of God in Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1990), 82–83.

⁵² David Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1972), 97.

These comments show how a preacher can avoid the pitfalls of isolating the mind from the desires, or the desires from the will, or the will from the mind. It keeps him from appealing merely to emotion in the name of targeting the heart. The heart preacher recognizes that just as a person's understanding guides their desires, so also their desires move their will. "To produce volition it is not enough that the understanding be convinced; affection must also be aroused."⁵³ Those that aim for the heart in the proclamation of the Word do so comprehensively, sensitive to all of the heart's functions, and they do so thoroughly, in both sermon preparation and delivery. But does this entail a certain order or priority by which the preacher appeals to the different functions of the heart?

Some have spoken of giving preference to the mind when trying to reach the heart. Murray Capill, for example, believes that since the mind "is at the top" of the heart it comes first and operates as the "entrance point to the other faculties of the heart,"⁵⁴ whereas the passions reside at the bottom of the heart and perform the deepest and most powerful forces of the heart.⁵⁵ Thus, Capill argues that the preacher should appeal to the mind first, and then work his way "down" through the conscience and will, and then last of all, seek to impact the passions. Sinclair Ferguson states that preaching should be directed to the mind first and then it "touches the will."⁵⁶ "When we preach to the heart, the mind is not so much the terminus of our preaching, but the channel through which we appeal to the whole person, leading to the transformation of the whole life."⁵⁷ R. C. Sproul thought similarly: "We want to get to the heart, but we know that the way to the heart is through the mind."⁵⁸ Dabney put it this way. "Seeing is in order to feeling, and it only feels as it sees, no foundation can be validly laid for an appeal to the emotions without argument."⁵⁹

It would be tempting to criticize such comments as overemphasizing knowledge or reflecting a form of rationalism. But none of the statements above speak of isolating the mind or envisioning it as the end goal. Rather, they see the mind as a port of call or as a means to the rest of the heart. One can appreciate the commitment to reach the heart without bypassing the mind. Theirs is surely a refreshing response to that form of preaching that

⁵³ Dabney, *Sacred Rhetoric*, 234, 237.

⁵⁴ Capill, *The Heart Is the Target*, 103, 105.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 103, 119.

⁵⁶ Ferguson, "Preaching to the Heart," 107.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ R. C. Sproul, "Preaching to the Mind," in *Feed My Sheep*, ed. Kistler, 87.

⁵⁹ Dabney, *Sacred Rhetoric*, 242–43.

apologizes for asking a congregation to think deeply. How does a preacher *not* immediately appeal to a congregation's mind when explaining the context and meaning of an ancient text, before bringing out its significance?

The question of whether there should be a prioritized order in preaching to a particular function of the heart is answered by what has already been emphasized; namely, that preaching to the heart requires keeping *all* of the heart's functions in view. Where one "begins" is not nearly as important as the preacher's overall strategy, which must be to appeal to all of the heart. Would it not be perfectly natural to vary a sermon's entry point, depending upon the genre, nature, and content of the biblical text? Some texts lend themselves to beginning with the mind, some may encourage us to appeal to desires, while other texts would have us challenge the will. Respecting the content and contour of the pericope is the way forward.

3. Christ's Preaching and Teaching

The preaching and teaching of Christ illustrate this variation in targeting the heart's mind, desires, and will—depending upon his subject and intention.

Firstly, Christ often engaged the minds of his audience as he tackled important points of doctrine. When the Sadducees tried to trick Jesus with a hypothetical situation concerning marriage and heaven, he responded by showing them their erroneous understanding.

But Jesus answered them, "You are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. And as for the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was said to you by God: 'I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is not God of the dead, but of the living." And when the crowd heard it, they were astonished at his teaching. (Matt 22:29–33)

He also corrected those who mislead others with the wrong interpretation of God's commands.

Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. (Matt 5:19)

He engaged the Pharisees on points of theology and biblical interpretation.

Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them a question, saying, "What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?" They said to him,

“The son of David.” He said to them, “How is it then that David, in the Spirit, calls him Lord, saying,

“‘The Lord said to my Lord,

“‘Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet’”?

If then David calls him Lord, how is he his son?” (Matt 22:41–45)

Christ also exposed how sin begins with our secret thoughts of avarice and greed, worldliness and anxiety, self-righteousness and judgment of others—all of which pertain to the mind of the heart (Matt 6:1–33; 7:1–5).

Secondly, on other occasions Christ immediately takes aim at the desires of the heart and what it loves.

Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. ... No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money. (Matt 6:19–21, 24)

Christ frequently addressed the desires of the heart that have gone awry,

like anger,

“You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’ But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be liable to the hell of fire.” (Matt 5:21–22)

or lust,

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” (Matt 5:27–28)

or hatred,

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.” (Matt 5:43–44)

or false motives,

“Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.” (Matt 6:1)

Speaking of false motives, one of Christ’s favorite targets was hypocrisy. He confronted the Pharisees about its presence and he warned his disciples about its danger. Like leaven, it easily permeates prayer, fasting, giving to the poor, and every practice of righteousness (Matt 23:1–36; 6:1–6, 16; Luke 12:1). It can spread so effectively that even experts in religion can become utterly blind to worldliness, injustice, lack of mercy, and their own sin, even as they become inflated with self-importance and self-righteousness.

Thirdly, Christ appealed directly to the will of the heart—calling for his disciples and potential disciples to decisions and to making righteous choices.

“But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.” (Matt 6:33)

Another of the disciples said to him, “Lord, let me first go and bury my father.” And Jesus said to him, “Follow me, and leave the dead to bury their own dead.” (Matt 8:21–22)

Then Jesus told his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.” (Matt 16:24–25)

Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord’s feet and listened to his teaching. But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to him and said, “Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me.” But the Lord answered her, “Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her.” (Luke 10:38–42)

“Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.” (Matt 7:13–14)

These examples illustrate that preaching to the heart is not so much about where one begins as about whether one finishes. Faithful preaching and teaching will reach into every corner of our hearts—testing our thoughts, confronting our desires, and challenging our wills. One who sits

under such expositions will feel the effect of the word of God as a hammer, sword, or fire and sense its comfort as a salve or taste its sweetness as honey. If preaching truly confronts all of the heart, then its hearers will sometimes feel assured, consoled, and at rest, while at other times they will feel exposed, disrupted, and uncomfortable. When the living and active Word is unleashed to do its bidding in the hearts of men and women, how should they feel? They should react as any other believer who heard or who reads the Sermon on the Mount (from which came several of the examples used above). C. S. Lewis once responded to a Dr. Pittenger, who did not “care much for” the Sermon on the Mount. Lewis wrote:

As to “caring for” the Sermon on the Mount, if “caring for” here means “liking” or enjoying, I suppose no one “cares for” it. Who can *like* being knocked flat on his face by a sledgehammer? I can hardly imagine a more deadly spiritual condition than that of a man who can read that passage with tranquil pleasure.⁶⁰

Why should a faithful sermon accomplish anything less? Solid preaching of the Word brings Christ to bear upon all that you are and all that you have—both in what he requires and in what he gives. His greatest command is that you love him “with *all* your heart”—including with your secret thoughts, as your greatest treasure, and in your godly choices. And when he comes near to us, by his Word and Spirit, will we not also find ourselves saying, “Did not our hearts burn within us ... while he opened to us the Scriptures?”

⁶⁰ C. S. Lewis, *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics*, ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970) 182.