

Instructions About Heart-work

Lesson 3 — SELF, the great heart-idol

Man's original apostasy was his falling from God to self; and man's recovery to Christ is his being brought back from self to God (Mt 16.24). But this recovery is imperfect even in the best of saints. *Self* still has a seat in the hearts of all God's people, for there is a sinful selfishness with which we all remain infected. And while *self* can never retain its throne in our hearts (Jn 10.27-28), it can gain much ground and headway against us if we don't constantly mortify it (Heb 3.12-14). This great heart-idol of self manifests itself in three ways: self-conceit, self-will, and self-love.

- I. **Self-conceit:** magnifying of our own opinions, idolizing our own apprehensions, growing wise in our own eyes, resigning ourselves up to the conduct and government of our own carnal reasons or understandings.
 - A. The contest is between our own understanding and God's, Prov 3.5-6. It belongs to God as God to be our supreme guide and dictator; but when men determine to be wise in themselves and to prefer their own opinions and ideas over God's this is a denial of God and an asserting of self.
 - B. So we must take heed of self-conceit.
 1. It's characteristic of sinners that, though they are utterly blinded by sin, they are wise in their own eyes. They think their way is good and their state is good. They think they will go to heaven despite their dislike for holiness and their like for the ways of sin.
 - a) Let God say what He will about the path they're on, of the danger of the way they're in, of the necessity of a change to their state, of their needing to be born again, *yet* their self-conceit carries them on against all His words. They will believe their own blind minds before they will believe God. They will idolize their own understanding and venture their souls on their own opinions. "Thus says the Lord" carries no weight with them as long as their own hearts tell them all is well with them. They are governed in everything by whatever is right in their own eyes.
 - b) Nothing will change until they come to see that their *self-conceit* is their *self-deceiving*. The only way the authority of God will ever be set up in their hearts is by the idol of self being thrown down. Self must fall if God is ever to rise.
 2. And do we not as Christians still struggle with this?
 - a) We can become conceited in our own opinions and think it must be right because it's right to us. And if a brother disagrees with us, we count him in the wrong, we count him to be ignorant, and he becomes the object of our censure.
 - b) Is it not so very hard to consider that our brother may see more than we do? That our brother's disagreement may be an indication that *we're* in the wrong? How hard do we come by that humility and modesty which suspects ourselves of wrong! How quickly our pride blinds us and closes our ears to good counsel and wise advise. How quickly does our self-conceit show itself!
 - c) Do we ever stop and consider that we might be self-deceived in our opinions? That our views might be borne out of bias, prejudice, and self-love? Let the fear of self-deceiving be the cure for self-conceitedness.

II. Self-will

- A. The great controversy between God and self is whose will shall stand.
 1. God *will* have His will, Isa 45.23. In one way or another, sooner or later, all men will bow before Him.

2. But self demands to have its will as well, Rom 8.7. God calls all men to turn and live but self will not turn (Ex 7.13, 22; 8.15, 19; Ezk 18.30-32). God calls all men to repent and believe but self will neither repent nor believe—because that would mean a surrender.
 3. Sinners are for living as they will, for having what they will; they want to be left alone to take their own course, to walk in the way of their own hearts and in the sight of their own eyes. So that *this* is the great controversy between God and sinners—whose will shall stand. Sinners will be, so far as they are able, their own lords and carvers; they will obey themselves and shift for themselves and will not be content with God's will.
- B. There are two things in self-will that make it so backwards to God.
1. Wickedness
 - a) The things willed by self are either materially or circumstantially wicked in that they are either wrong in themselves, wrong in that circumstance, or motivated by wrong desires, Js 4.3.
 2. Stubbornness
 - a) Self-will refuses to take no for an answer. Whether it be good or evil, right or wrong, if self-will has its heart set upon it, come what will, it will have it. No matter what it takes to get it, no matter who it hurts to have it, no matter what it costs to buy it, if self-will wants it it will die for it or die trying.
- C. Sinners are self-willed creatures. It is self which carries the weight in their lives. In all their contentions, they're fighting for their own will. The rule and law they candidate for is their own. —What is it that has kept the sinner from Christ but this: *his own willfulness*.
1. He's heard of Christ, but will not have Him to rule over him (Lk 19.14). He's been invited by the preacher to come to Christ but will not go (Mt 23.37). He's been persuaded to put off his sins but he will not. He's been instructed in the way of life but he will not learn. He's been called to become a new man in Christ but he will not listen. He's been pressed to pray, read the Bible, examine himself, surrender to Christ, but he will not yield. He *will* walk after the flesh, he *will* keep his pride, he'll live *for himself*, he'll be *his own end*.
- D. And do we not still feel the tug of this self-will in our hearts?
1. Are we not often self-willed? Do we not know what it is to be hardened in heart? To be stubborn? To be driven/blinded by determination?
 2. How many verses have called us out only to have us turn the page or close the book? How many times has a friend spoken to us about our actions, our choices, our desires only to have us brush him off?
 3. What opinions and ideas do we hold above scrutiny? Are there areas of our lives which are out of the bounds of honest inquiry by our family, our brethren, our elders?
- E. **Praise God! the controversy between God and our will is settled: the power of self-will is broken. We are happy to say that the will of God will stand in our lives. Yet the power of self-will is not so broken that there's no root of it remaining. Its root abides still and it will spring up and grow again. Hence the need for the heart to be kept under godly government.