

A fatal heart condition¹

Introduction

On 3rd December, 1967, Sth African surgeon Dr Christiaan Barnard performed the world's first heart transplant. The recipient lived for 18 days. In 1968 he performed another one. The recipient lived for 19 months. A year later, the first black recipient underwent the surgery. She survived 12½ years. In 1971, another person had the operation, and survived over 23 years.

When I was in early high-school, I sat next to a girl who had a hole in her heart. Her skin had that characteristic bluish tinge, and her hair was snow-white. She died while still in her teens.

My friend Malcolm had a heart condition which prevented him getting a job. He started an apprenticeship as a fitter and turner, but never managed to complete it, as his condition became too severe.

Malcolm eventually had a heart transplant, and it dramatically changed his life. He got married, had a couple of kids, and died in his 30's.

What was the common factor amongst all of these, and many, many others? They died. Even patients undergoing this operation today, with all of our advanced knowledge, techniques, equipment and drugs, will die.

A heart condition can be incapacitating physically. Symptoms can range from mildly annoying flutters through breathlessness, lethargy, dizziness, fainting, to intense and debilitating pain.

A heart transplant is the only hope of a normal life for some. But even then, the heart won't last forever. One day, in spite of all the best efforts to look after it, it will stop beating, and life will be snuffed out in a moment.

When the Bible talks about the heart though, it doesn't usually mean our physical heart. Mostly it refers to something that is intangible within us, but is real nonetheless.

¹ By Ian Gould, preached at City Edge Church, Melbourne, 23/08/09

What is the heart:

Webster's dictionary has fifteen different meanings and uses for the word "heart". The ones that mostly concern us are:
4 *The seat of the affections and passions, as of love, joy, grief, enmity, courage, pleasure &c.*
7 *The seat of the will; hence, secret purposes, intentions or designs.*

What happened to the heart?

Adam and Eve were the only people ever created who had hearts unspoiled by sin. They had the opportunity and the freedom to obey God. As we all know, they chose the path of disobedience. This brought about death. Death spiritually in the form of alienation, enmity and hostility toward God, and later death physically.

That event is what we now call "The Fall." The Fall, and the entrance of sin in to the world, corrupted everything in creation, and every person descended from Adam and Eve.

What were the consequences?

According to the Bible, we are all dead.

Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned- for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come. But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many. And the free gift is not like the result of that one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brought justification. For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness

reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ. (Rom 5:12-17)

The legacy Adam left us with is a legacy of dead hearts, rebellion against God and alienation from Him. The extent of this is universal. *Everybody* has a dead heart toward God by nature. We are born with a dead heart; in fact we are conceived with it. We go through life with it, and unless God intervenes, we die with a dead heart, in rebellion against God and alienated from Him.

How can I say this with such certainty? Firstly, and most importantly, the Bible tells me so, frequently:

... all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, as it is written: "None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one." (Rom 3:9-12)

for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, (Rom 3:23)

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience- among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. (Eph 2:1-3)

Secondly, I can say it from observation. Everyone who has a child has heard of the period known as the "Terrible Twos." Why does everyone know about it? Because it is universal. What mother, teaching her boy to dress himself, also teaches him to shout "No!" in her face. What father, taking his little girl shopping, teaches her to throw a tantrum to get the lollies by the checkout?

David wrote:

Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me. (Ps 51:5)

Thirdly, I can say it from personal experience. There has never been a day in my life when I can honestly claim to have been totally pure in thought, in motive, in attitude and in action. I don't just mean that I have not been able to get through a day without *doing something wrong*, but also that I

have not been able to get through a day *always doing what is right*.

The Bible has a much more realistic view of humans than we humans do. We like to think of ourselves as “not too bad” or “not as bad as Hitler,” but the Word of God reveals what is really going on inside. The inside, the heart, is corrupt.

There is a theological term for this condition: Total Depravity. Total depravity does not mean that we are all as evil as we could possibly be. None of us do as many bad things as we could do. We could not even say that about Adolf Hitler. Even he was nice to his mistress Eva Braun, and his friends. Reportedly, he liked little children and animals. Even Hitler was not *as bad as he could possibly be*.

Rather, total depravity means that we are *as bad off as we could possibly be*. It means that sin has penetrated every fibre of our being, every recess of our soul. There is nothing within us that is not stained by sin, and at enmity with God. There is nothing we do that is not tainted by sin. It means that we are *unable* to do anything by ourselves to please God, to get on His right side, to gain His mercy.

It means that, by nature, every human being *only and always* deserves rejection by God and His eternal wrath and punishment for sin.

Never ask God to be fair with you. If God were to be fair, He would give you exactly what you deserve – eternal punishment. Rather ask God to be merciful towards you. It is your only hope.

Why does it matter?

Understanding the sinful rebellious nature of man is absolutely foundational to understanding man’s relationship to God. If we don’t get this right, then our whole understanding of how to get to God, and how to please God, and how to relate to God will be fatally flawed.

It will lead us to demanding that God bless us for being good people. But God sees us as we really are, and He opposes the proud, not blesses them. The only people God relates to in a *saving* way is *sinners*. Remember Jesus said:

... "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners." (Mark 2:17)

Or it will lead to us working to please God and gain salvation. But we can never do enough to wash away the stain of sin on our inner being. Even in the act of trying to get right, we continue to sin.

Or it will lead to us rejecting God altogether as unimportant, insignificant, or unwilling to help.

John Piper says that evangelistic strategies that pass over Total Depravity are not doing people any favours. If you jump over Total Depravity to the work of God in salvation, people don't have a clue what they are being saved from. Most people conceive of salvation as being saved from sickness or a bad marriage or a rotten life. This doesn't get to the root of who we really are. *We need to understand what we are really saved from.*

Understanding the sinful rebellious nature of man is also absolutely foundational to correct understanding of Scripture. If we don't start with this assumption, then none of the rest of Scripture is really going to make sense. The Bible is both the record of God's dealings with sinful man, and the promise of His solution to sin.

What are some heresies?

There have been some heresies, historically. Probably the most serious of these is *Pelagianism*.

Pelagianism is named after a British monk called Pelagius from back in the 5th Century. He believed that the heart is not dead, but it is morally neutral. He taught that Adam's sin only affected himself, not any of his descendants. All his descendants sin because of their own choice and what they learn from others. By choosing not to sin, man can reach salvation on his own, without the need for Christ's forgiveness of sin.

There is no doubt that this is an appealing idea because it seems to give humanity some dignity and worth, and some control over their own destiny. Who doesn't want to believe that?

There is also a modified version of this, called Semi-Pelagianism. This suggests that the heart is not dead, but only weak or sick – damaged by Fall, but not destroyed.

Semi-Pelagianism teaches that the sinner has the ability to initiate belief in God, and that God's grace is then extended in response to man's initial effort. Thus, though the heart is weak, it is not dead, and any feeble efforts it makes towards God will be rewarded and reinforced by the grace of God to enable the person to take the decisive step for salvation.

The only problem with both of these is that they are wrong, fatally wrong. In denying the sinful fallen nature of man, Pelagius also denied the necessity of grace. And there is no possibility of salvation outside of the grace of God. Both of these teachings were carefully considered by the early church and condemned as heresy, as an attack on the fundamentals of the faith, and harmful to Christian faith.

Both are unrealistic views of the state of humanity. Both of them deny and minimise the grace of God. Both of them glorify man and take glory away from God. Neither of them is true to Scripture.

What are the dangers?

We've all heard people say, and maybe even said ourselves, "I believe in my heart... I believe God is like this... I believe that all paths lead to God... I believe God is love and so he won't punish people... It doesn't matter what you believe, just as long as you are sincere..." and so it goes on. One wishy-washy phrase after another.

I could get on the train at Glen Waverley station and *sincerely* believe that it is going to take me to New Zealand. But it doesn't make any difference how sincere I am. That train won't get me to New Zealand. *Sincerity does not over-rule truth and facts.*

Another danger is that we encourage people to "Follow your heart..." As we have seen from Scripture and from experience, the last thing we could trust to lead us the right way is our heart. Remember that Jeremiah said:

The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it? (Jer 17:9)

Why would anyone choose to follow something that is both deceitful *and* dead? Wouldn't we rightly call such a person an idiot, and say they get what they deserve? And yet we say such patronising rubbish as, "That's nice. Just follow your heart and I'm sure everything will work out fine."

What is the solution?

Given the situation that we are enemies of God, rebels who want nothing to do with Him by nature, that we have nothing of worth within us that God should want to bless us, and that we can bring nothing of value to a relationship with God, what is a poor miserable sinner to do?

Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting! (Ps 139:23-24)

The heart is as dead as Lazarus was in the tomb. We can no more bring it back to life than Lazarus could get up out of the tomb and walk out by his own choice.

What we need is a new heart, one that is alive to God and able to respond to God. And there is only one way for that to happen.

In the Old Testament, God made some promises regarding our hearts:

And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. (Eze 36:26-27)

And I will give them one heart, and a new spirit I will put within them. I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in my statutes and keep my rules and obey them. And they shall be my people, and I will be their God. (Eze 11:19-20)

"Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers... But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor

and each his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." (Jer 31:31-34)

These promises are what the Bible calls the New Covenant. That New Covenant became a reality when Jesus Christ willingly gave up His life at Calvary.

And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood." (Luke 22:19-20)

We can never, of our own accord, get our hearts right with God. We are just too sinful, too rebellious, too dead towards Him. If ever we were going to be saved, it had to be a work of God, initiated by Him and carried out by Him. And that is where the Cross comes in. The Cross is the basis for the New Covenant.

The Cross makes it possible for God to both judge sin and forgive sin. He is righteous in His punishment of sin on all those who have turned their backs on Him.

But He is also righteous to forgive those who put their faith in Christ because Christ has served the sentence of punishment in their place. When a sinner puts his or her trust in Jesus Christ alone for salvation, part (but not all) of the benefit is a new heart. It is a heart that now *wants* to follow God. It is a heart that is now *grateful* towards God. It is a heart with new motives and attitudes, and a heart that is gradually being changed in thoughts and actions to become more like Christ.

Total Depravity magnifies the Cross of Christ like nothing else. Until we understand our sinful nature, we will never properly understand and appreciate grace.

Unless we start with the knowledge of the Total Depravity of ourselves and of mankind, then the Cross really will seem like "Cosmic Child Abuse" as one Christian author claims.

Grace will never become *truly amazing* until we realise the depths of our own wickedness and rebellion before a truly holy and righteous God. Only then will we truly realise what

we have been saved from, and what we have been saved for. Only then will we truly realise how vast is the love of God for sinful and hostile humans.

I don't know where you stand in relationship to Jesus Christ this morning. But if you have never experienced the reality of a new heart, of transformed motives, desires and attitudes, then you need to today.

Turn to Jesus Christ, who is faithful to receive all who put their trust in Him, and will not turn any away. He gave His life, He poured out His blood so that you could be reconciled to God, have a changed heart, and never again need to face the threat or fear of eternal punishment.

More Scriptural evidence

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. (Gen 6:5)

And when the Lord smelled the pleasing aroma, the Lord said in his heart, "I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the intention of man's heart is evil from his youth. Neither will I ever again strike down every living creature as I have done. (Gen 8:21)

And it shall be a tassel for you to look at and remember all the commandments of the Lord, to do them, not to follow after your own heart and your own eyes, which you are inclined to whore after. (Num 15:39)

And you shall remember the whole way that the Lord your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not. (Deut 8:2)

Beware lest you say in your heart, 'My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth.' (Deut 8:17)

"Do not say in your heart, after the Lord your God has thrust them out before you, 'It is because of my righteousness that the Lord has brought me in to possess this land,' whereas it is because of the wickedness of these nations that the Lord is driving them out before you. (Deut 9:4)

But to this day the Lord has not given you a heart to understand or eyes to see or ears to hear. (Deut 29:4)

Beware lest there be among you a man or woman or clan or tribe whose heart is turning away today from the Lord our God to go and serve the gods of those nations. Beware lest there be among you a root bearing poisonous and bitter fruit, one who, when he hears the words of this sworn covenant, blesses himself in his heart, saying, 'I shall be safe, though I walk in the stubbornness of my heart.' This will lead to the sweeping away of moist and dry alike. (Deut 29:18-19)

But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart." (1Sam 16:7)

The fool says in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds, there is none who does good. The Lord looks down from heaven on the children of man, to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God. They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one. (Ps 14:1-3)

"But my people did not listen to my voice; Israel would not submit to me. So I gave them over to their stubborn hearts, to follow their own counsels. (Ps 81:11-12)

Enter not into judgment with your servant, for no one living is righteous before you. (Ps 143:2)

A worthless person, a wicked man, goes about with crooked speech, winks with his eyes, signals with his feet, points with his finger, with perverted heart devises evil, continually sowing discord; (Prov 6:12-14)

Because the sentence against an evil deed is not executed speedily, the heart of the children of man is fully set to do evil. (Eccl 8:11)

This is an evil in all that is done under the sun, that the same event happens to all. Also, the hearts of the children of man are full of evil, and madness is in their hearts while they live, and after that they go to the dead. (Eccl 9:3)

O Jerusalem, wash your heart from evil, that you may be saved. How long shall your wicked thoughts lodge within you? (Jer 4:14)

Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots? Then also you can do good who are accustomed to do evil. (Jer 13:23)

"When you tell these people all these things, they will say to you: Why has the Lord declared all this great disaster against us? What is our guilt? What is our sin that we have committed against the Lord our God? Then you will answer them: Because your fathers abandoned Me" -the Lord's declaration-"and followed other gods, served them, and worshiped them. Indeed, they abandoned Me and did not keep My law. You did more evil than your fathers. Look, each one of you was following the stubbornness of his evil heart, not obeying Me. (Jer 16:10-12)

The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it? (Jer 17:9)

"This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; (Matt 15:8)

But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. (Matt 15:18-19)

And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed (Jn 3:19-20)

No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day. (John 6:44)

For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. (Rom 1:21)

But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed. (Rom 2:5)

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. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. (Romans 8:7-8)

But whoever has doubts is condemned if he eats, because the eating is not from faith. For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin. (Rom 14:23)

The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. (1 Corinthians 2:14)

They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. (Eph 4:18)

The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life. (1Tim 1:15-16)

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. (1 Jn 1:8)

For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it. (Jas 2:10)

The Lord our God be with us, as he was with our fathers. May he not leave us or forsake us, that he may incline our hearts to him, to walk in all his ways and to keep his commandments, his statutes, and his rules, which he commanded our fathers. (1Kgs 8:57-58)

And the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live. (Deut 30:6)

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. (Deut 6:5)

For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. (2Cor 4:6)

having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, (Eph 1:18)

so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints. (1Thess 3:13)

May the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God and to the steadfastness of Christ. (2Thess 3:5)