

The Good Heart

Proverbs 6:16-19*

“The LORD hates . . . a heart that devises wicked plans” (6:16,18).

The word pictures and wise sayings of Solomon repeatedly remind us that God hates a heart that is used for violence instead of love. With stark images of destruction, the book of Proverbs reminds us that the heavens despise an imagination that is excited by the passions of pride, dishonesty, and violence.

God made our hearts for Himself. Our reason for existence is to fear, to love, to honor, and to enjoy Him forever. Our mission in life is to discover from the depths of our hearts the richness of His love for us and for others.

To please God, we must know what He values. What does He care about? What does He love? What does He hate?

God's values in the negative form (16-19)

- #1. God hates haughty eyes (17a)
- #2. God hates a lying tongue (17b)
- #3. God hates hands that shed innocent blood (17c)
- #4. God hates a heart that devises wicked plans (18a)

God's values in the positive form (select vv.)

The Heart's Intellectual-Spiritual Functions²

The heart thinks (Matt. 9:4; Mark 2:8), remembers, reflects, and meditates (Ps. 77:5–6; Luke 2:19).

More specifically, as the eyes were meant to see and the ears to hear, the heart is meant to understand, to discern, to give insight. When a person lacks insight, the Hebrew speaks of a “lack of heart.”

Understanding cannot be separated from morals. Isaiah was commissioned: “Make the heart of this people calloused; . . . otherwise they might . . . understand with their hearts” (Isa. 6:10).

Moderns speak of learning by heart, by which they mean rote memory. In the Bible, however, learning by heart is not like memorizing the multiplication tables; it must be mixed with spiritual affections.

As the mouth reveals what is the heart, the ear determines what goes into it. The father tells his son to “store up my commands within you”; he then adds: by “turning your ear to wisdom, and you will incline your heart to understanding” (Prov. 2:2).

The heart functions as the conscience. After David showed insubordination against the anointed king by cutting off the corner of his robe, his heart smote him (1 Sam. 24:5), and after Peter's sermon the audience was “cut to the heart” (Acts 2:37). The heart may condemn us, but God is greater than our hearts (1 John 3:20). David prays that God would create for him a pure heart to replace his defiled conscience (Ps. 51:10).

Finally, the heart plans, makes commitments, and decides. It is the inner forum where decisions are made after deliberation; here a person engages in self-talk. “In his heart, a man plans his course, but the LORD determines his steps” (Prov. 16:9). Because of this critical function, the father instructs the son: “Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life (4:23). The Lord detests “a heart that devises wicked schemes” (6:18).

The greatest commandment according to Jesus is “Love the Lord your God with all your heart” (Matt. 22:37). Love here is more than emotion; it is a conscious commitment to the Lord.

One speaks to the heart of another to move that person to a decision (Isa. 40:2; Hos. 2:14). The father asks the son for his heart (Prov. 23:26), by which he means that the son make a conscious decision to follow his instructions. The impenitent, however, have hearts that are insensitive, obstinate (Mark 3:5; 6:52), and hard (Matt. 19:8); they cannot be moved in a new direction.

—BRUCE K. WALTKE

*These notes are prayerfully prepared to aid, not replace, your personal study of God's word.

² Bruce K. Waltke, “Heart,” *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, Baker Reference Library (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1996), 331–332.