

Cross My Heart, Part 2

In the English language we have many heart idioms, and a few of them give away just how sick the heart can get ... a bleeding heart, a broken heart, pour your heart out, cry your heart out, eat your heart out, rip your heart out, a hard heart, a heart of stone, sick at heart, wear your heart on your sleeve ... (What is in the heart will eventually make itself known!)

Matthew 15:18-19 But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies:

We have learned to guard our behavior, but we have never learned to monitor our hearts. That is what gets us in trouble.

Proverbs 4:23 (KJV) Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.

Proverbs 4:23 (NLT) Above all else, guard your heart, for it affects everything you do.

We are tempted to treat the symptoms that stem from an unhealthy spiritual heart while ignoring the deeper issues. But as is the case with the physical heart, **eventually the root problem will become the real problem**. Just as a heart attack has the potential to destroy your body, so spiritual heart disease has the potential to destroy you and your most valuable relationships.

Things that stay in the darkness grow exponentially over time, and finally break through the filter we have put in place. They cause us to act in ways that others don't understand, and develop habits that even we don't understand (and can't break).

We've already talked about the way these "heart attackers" work, but today we're going to start studying four specific factors that attack our spiritual heart. Each one of them causes an imbalance that makes us "sick." And each one of them creates this imbalance through a DEBT – DEBTOR relationship. Think about when somebody owes you money that they haven't paid – it causes an awkward imbalance in the relationship ("an elephant in the room") because there's a debt.

GUILT is the first of these factors. And let's say first thing that guilt should not be part of the culture of the New Testament church!

John 3:17 For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.

Jesus didn't leverage guilt to manipulate people into following Him, because only guilty people use guilt to control others. He wasn't guilty!

CODE BLUE: GUILT SAYS "I OWE YOU."

Think about it – "I owe you an apology" or "let me make it up to you." Why do we say things like that? Because a DEBT – DEBTOR relationship has been created! For example, you can't have a relationship with someone who won't tell you the truth because they have robbed you of something important. If someone leaves their spouse or family, they have robbed them of their future, their self-esteem, etc.

Guilt is simply that inner sense that says "I took something from someone" (I OWE YOU), but we don't experience it quite that accurately – guilt is simply experienced as a huge weight that we carry around. And we carry the unresolved guilt we pick up into all our other relationships! Our guilt becomes so much a part of us that we don't even recognize it.

Underneath guilt is anger against ourselves – "I let ME down!" So the only way I can excuse me not living up to MY expectations is to never let YOU live up to my expectations either! That's why it's almost impossible to please a guilty person. Since I disappointed me, I have to figure out a way for you to disappoint me as well.

BUT I CAN'T CHANGE THE PAST! Yes you can – because guilt grows in the darkness but it dissipates in the light. **But there are only two options** – you either have to pay the person back (which is often impossible in relationships), or you have to ask them to cancel the debt!

OPEN CONFESSION BREAKS THE POWER OF GUILT! (spotlight)

The Bible has far more to say about confessing to other people that it does about confessing to God. God already knows! You only get rid of guilt when you go to the person you offended.

Numbers 5:6-7 (NIV) Say to the Israelites: When a man or woman wrongs another in any way and so is unfaithful to the LORD, that person is guilty and must confess the sin he has committed. He must make full restitution for his wrong, add one fifth to it and give it all to the person he has wronged.

Luke 19:8-9 And Zacchaeus stood, and said unto the Lord; Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold. And Jesus said unto him, This day is salvation come to this house, forsomuch as he also is a son of Abraham.

Matthew 5:23-24 Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.

Our relationship with God hinges on our relationship with others! You cannot resolve your differences with God if you are unwilling to resolve your differences with others. You cannot be in fellowship with God and out of fellowship with others over something you have done.

James 5:16 Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.

The goal of confession isn't simply a clear conscience, the goal is a changed life. **YOU LIVE FROM YOUR HEART**, so you have to shine God's spotlight on its hidden parts to cure the disease of guilt. Confessing secretly to God is no substitute for confessing openly to someone you have wronged. Sins that you only confess to God you tend to repeat, because confession hasn't changed YOU. (i.e. confessing that you cheated on a test to the teacher will probably prevent it in the future!) Besides, you didn't steal from God, you stole from THEM!

But my life is much more complicated – I didn't cheat on a test, I cheated on my marriage! Do you know how much it will hurt them if I confess? **Confession doesn't hurt people; concealment hurts people.** They already know something is wrong ... and your heart is rotting away! This fear of consequences is why we see last-minute deathbed confessions – but what a tragedy that people live their whole life under such weight.

When you confess, your outside world may become momentarily far more complicated, but your inside world will become free. When you confess, you'll be able to accept others with all their failures because their failures won't constantly remind you of your own. And you will finally be able to forgive yourself. You will be free!

The penalty for our sin has been dealt with once and for all; but the consequences of our sins are a different matter altogether.

The same Bible that assures us of God's forgiveness also teaches the principle of restitution. Forgiveness from God does not erase our need to take responsibility for what we have done. In fact, our gratitude alone should compel us to confess and clear the slate.

OPEN CONFESSION BREAKS THE POWER OF GUILT!

Others may very well be held hostage to bitterness and anger over what you have done to them. You're kidding yourself if you think everyone you have wronged has simply forgiven you and gone on with their life. Sure, that's what they ought to do – but you didn't do what YOU ought to have done either!

If you really want to understand the power of confession, turn it around and put yourself on the receiving end. Whose apology do you most desire and least expect? Who is it that seems completely insensitive to the trouble or hurt they caused you? Imagine how you would feel if you got a surprise visit from that person. How would you feel if that individual walked in, sat down, and took full responsibility for what he or she had done? Imagine what might transpire in your heart if, with sincere humility, that person offered to do anything within his or her power to make restitution for what had been taken from you. You would never be the same! **Likewise, YOUR words may bring healing to a wounded soul.**

HOW ARE THINGS IN YOUR HEART? Do you have any secrets?

CODE BLUE: GUILT