

**Articles and Sermons :: Characteristics of the Honest Heart - A.W. Pink****Characteristics of the Honest Heart - A.W. Pink - posted by AbideinHim (), on: 2008/11/8 22:01**

1. An honest heart loves the Truth, and none other does. "This is condemnation that light is come into the world and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil" (John 3:19), and that is true—a description of all men throughout the world over. What a fearful state to be in: not only in the dark, but loving the darkness. And why? Because it is congenial to their depraved hearts, it is their native element. Hence the passage goes on to say, "for everyone that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to light, lest his deeds should be reproved" (v. 20). Many excuses are made why they turn away from plain and faithful preaching and why they do not read God's Word in private, but the real reason is because they hate the Light—exposure, even to themselves, is the very last thing of all they desire. In sharp contrast therefrom: "But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God" (v. 21). This is the man with an honest heart: so far from hating the Light, he welcomes it, wanting to be searched and discovered by it.

An honest heart is open to the Word, not merely to certain portions only, but to the Word as a whole. Such an one sincerely wants the Truth, the whole Truth and nothing but the Truth. He does not wish the preacher to please or flatter him, but to be frank and faithful. The language of the unregenerate is, "Speak unto us smooth things, prophesy deceits" (Isa. 30:10). They desire to hear of an easy and flesh-pleasing road to Heaven, one which does not demand the denying of self and forsaking the world. They want to be at ease in their sins and assured they are the children of God while free to serve the Devil. But it is the very opposite with one having an honest heart. He is fearful of being imposed upon, and thinking more highly of himself than he has a right to do. If he is deceived, he ardently longs to be undeceived; if he is building his house upon sand, he wants to know it. He is willing to be tested and searched, and therefore he "cometh to the Light"—does so repeatedly and continuously, as the tense of the verb denotes.

An honest heart, then, is a Truth-loving heart, one which genuinely desires to know the mind of God, one which is ready for his creed, his character and his conduct to be searched by the light of the Sanctuary. He wants to know the truth about God, the One with whom he has to do, the One before whom he must yet appear and render an account. He will not be put off with any superficial and sentimental representations of the Divine Character, he determines at all costs to acquaint himself with God as He actually is. He wants to know the truth about himself, whether his soul be only slightly disposed or whether his case be so desperate as to be altogether beyond help. He is anxious to determine whether he has only a head or intellectual knowledge of things that matter most or whether he has been given a heart or spiritual knowledge of them. He wants to make certain of how he stands with regard to God and eternity, and he dare not take any man's opinion or say-so with regard thereto.

2. An honest heart accepts the Divine diagnosis of fallen man's condition and bows to the Divine verdict passed upon him. That diagnosis is that which is sinful, depraved, corrupt in every part of his being; that his understanding is darkened, his affections perverted, his will enslaved. The Divine Physician declares that, "from the sole of his foot even unto the head there is no soundness in him" (Isa. 1:6). It explains why this is so: because man, every man, is "shapen in iniquity" and "conceived in sin" (Psa. 51:5), and therefore "the wicked are estranged from the womb: they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies" (Psa. 58:3). So far from allowing that there is something spiritually good in every man, which only needs to be carefully cultivated in order to bring it to fruition, the Divine Physician declares, the "imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth" (Gen. 8:21), and in the flesh, "there dwelleth no good thing" (Rom. 7:18). And the honest heart quarrels not with that diagnosis, but receives it as true of himself. Because fallen man is what he is he stands condemned before his Judge. The Divine Law pronounces him guilty. It declares that he is a rebel against God, that he has followed the desires of his own heart and disregarded the claims of his Maker. It declares that there is, "no fear of God" before his eyes (Rom. 3:18), that he has conducted himself as though there is no Day of reckoning to be faced. It declares that he has "set at naught all God's counsel and would none of His reproof" (Prov. 1:25). It declares that "the wrath of God abideth on him" (John 3:36). It declares that, in the searching light of the Divine holiness, his best performances, his religious actings, his very righteousnesses are as "filthy rags" (Isa. 64:6). Now because the honest heart welcomes the Light, because it sincerely desires to know the worst about himself, it bows to the Divine verdict and "sets to his seal that God is true" (John 3:33). An honest heart acknowledges, "I am vile" (Job 40:4), "without excuse" (Rom. 1:20), a Hell-deserving sinner; and none but an honest heart sincerely does so.

3. An honest heart causes its possessor to take his place before God in the dust. How can it be otherwise if he accepts the Divine diagnosis and condemnation of his condition? As the penitent thief on the Cross acknowledged, "we indeed

d justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds" (Luke 23:41), so the one who truly bows to God's verdict owns that the everlasting burnings are his legitimate due. Thus pride receives its death-wound, all pretensions to goodness are repudiated, and with the publican of old he smites upon his breast crying, "God be merciful to me a sinner." Instead of seeking to extenuate his transgressions, he wonders at God's longsufferance toward him. Instead of asking, What have I done to deserve eternal damnation? he marvels that he is not in Hell already. He perceives clearly that if such a wretch as himself is to receive salvation it must be by grace alone, and that God has the full right to withhold such grace if He so pleases.

4. An honest heart ceases fighting against God, which is only another way of saying that he repents of his evil past, for true repentance is a taking sides with God against myself. He who loves the Truth is influenced and regulated by it; and therefore is he brought to renounce whatever is opposed to it. As light and darkness are opposites, so uprightness and crookedness, honesty and sin have nothing in common. Where there is an honest heart repentance and conversion necessarily follow. And repentance is not only a sorrowing for sin but also a turning away from it, the throwing down of the weapons of our warfare against God. To love the light is to love God, for He is light (1 John 1:5), and if we love God we shall forsake our sins, abandon our idols and mortify our lusts. An honest soul cannot do otherwise: anything short of that would be hypocrisy. "If we say that we have fellowship with Him and walk in darkness we lie and do not the Truth" (1 John 1:6). The upright man is the one who "feareth God and escheweth evil" (Job 1:8).

5. An honest heart seeks to please God in all things and offend Him in none. That is why this honesty is termed "simplicity (the single eye) and godly sincerity" (2 Cor. 1:12), for it desires and seeks the approbation of God above everything else. An honest heart refuses to accept the plaudits of men on anything for which conscience would condemn him. "God is a Spirit and they who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24). He cannot be imposed upon by pious words or a sanctimonious demeanor. He must be approached with "a true heart" (Heb. 10:22): all dissimulation and pretense has to be set aside in our dealings with Him who "trieth the heart and the reins" and whose eyes are "a flame of fire." When the heart beats true toward God there is a deep desire to please Him, not in some things only, but in all things, so that without reserve it asks, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" (Acts 9:6). True, that desire is not fully realized in this life, but the genuineness of it is evidenced when we can truly say, "I hate every false way" (Psa. 119:104).

6. An honest heart feigns not wisdom, but is very conscious of and frankly owns up to great ignorance. Even though he is well acquainted with the letter of Scripture and thoroughly familiar with all the external means of grace, that content s him not: there is a longing for a spiritual, an experimental, an efficacious knowledge of the Truth. Such an one feels himself to be the veriest babe in Divine things, which is indeed a healthy sign, for it is under such the mystery of godliness is revealed (Matt. 11:25). Such an one cries daily, "that which I see not teach Thou me" (Job 34:32), for he longs to know the way of the Lord more perfectly-not only in the letter but chiefly in the power thereof. So conscious is he of his ignorance that he prays with David, "make me to understand the way of Thy precepts" (Psa. 119:27)-how to walk in them, the way to keep them. And again, "Teach me Thy statutes"-observe well how this is repeated again and again (Psa. 119:12, 26, 64, 68, 124, 135), for it is in this the upright realize themselves to be more deficient.

7. An honest heart makes conscience of sin. Necessarily so if he sincerely desires to please God. Therefore he does not willfully and habitually ally himself in any known sin, against the light and stirrings of conscience, for "the highway of the upright is to depart from evil" (Prov. 16:17). As one of the lesser known Puritans said, "A righteous man hates all sins, even the ones he cannot conquer; and loves all the Truth, even that which he cannot understand" (Anthony Burgess). He makes conscience of what the world calls peccadilloes or trifling faults, praying, "Take us the foxes, the little foxes that spoil the vines" (Song. 2:15), yea, "cleanse Thou me from secret faults" (Psa. 19:12)-the sins of ignorance of which I am not conscious, but which defile before the thrice Holy One. Consequently, an honest heart makes it a point of confessing all known sins to God, even those of which his fellows know nothing. Sin is his heaviest burden and greatest grief.

8. An honest heart welcomes godly reproof. "Grace will teach a Christian to take those potions which are wholesome, though they be not toothsome" (Geo. Swinnock, 1660). "Rebuke a wise man and he will love thee" (Prov. 9:8), but hypocrites will resent it and fools rage at thee. An honest heart prefers the bitters of gracious company to the dainties of the ungodly: he would rather be smitten by a saint than flattered by the unregenerate. He not only gives a permit to faithful admonition but, when in his right mind, invites to, "Let the righteous smite me: it shall be a kindness; and let him reprove me, it shall be an excellent oil, which shall not break my head" (Psa. 141:5). "As oil refreshes and perfumes, so does reproof, when fitly taken, sweetens and renews the heart. My friend must love me well if he tells me my faults: there is an affection about him if he points out my errors" (C. H. Spurgeon) and about me also if I heed him. "Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful" (Prov. 27:6)-only the upright will subscribe to that.

9. An honest heart is impartial. "Now therefore are we all present before God, to hear all things that are commanded

thee of God" (Acts 10:33). These words of Cornelius were the language of sincerity. How very rare is such a spirit. The average church-member wishes to hear only that which accord with "our doctrines" and when he reads the Bible it is through theologically-tinted glasses. Here is where so many preachers are handicapped: they are bound by a detailed creed and know that if they departed therefrom they would lose their position. Bias, prejudice, sectarian shibboleths quench the spirit of honesty. To desire the Truth for Truth's sake is rare indeed. But an honest heart is impartial, refusing to pick and choose and is not swayed by denominational prejudices. An honest heart values the Divine precepts equally with the promises, appropriates the admonitions and threats as well as the comforting portions of Scripture, acknowledges himself in the wrong and his opponent who has the Truth on his side to be right, and admires and owns the image of Christ when he sees it in one belonging to another company.

10. An honest heart is chiefly concerned with the inner man. In His solemn denunciations of the Scribes and Pharisees Christ said, "Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity" (Matt. 23:25, 27-28). It is at this point especially that the genuine Christian is distinguished from the formal religionists. One with an honest heart makes conscience of wandering thoughts, evil imaginations the workings of unbelief, the risings of pride and rebellion against God. He seeks grace to mortify his lusts and prays to be cleansed from "secret faults." He cries daily, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me" (Psa. 51:10); "Unite my heart to fear Thy name" (Psa. 86:11); "Incline my heart unto Thy testimonies and not to covetousness" (Psa. 119:36). He makes much of heart work and endeavours to keep it with all diligence (Prov. 4:23).

Probably most of our readers are ready to exclaim, Alas, this quite cuts me off: I freely admit that such honesty of heart as has been described ought to be found in me, but to my shame and sorrow I must confess that much to the contrary is still operative in my soul. But cannot you see that is the last thing you would frankly own if you were dishonest?! The fact is that no soul is conscious of the workings of unbelief until God has given faith, is not troubled about the swellings of pride until humility is bestowed, mourns not over coldness until love is communicated, and is not exercised over deceitfulness before he is made sincere. We best learn to know things by their opposites. It would be a great mistake to insist that there is such a thing as perfect and unmixed honesty in this life, so that there is no guile or falsehood joined with it. We not only know in part, but our faith and love are weak and unstable, and honesty of heart has to contend with much that is opposed to it. If we can plead before God uprightness of intentions and if we grieve over all crookedness within us, that is sure proof we are no longer under the dominion of hypocrisy.

There are two distinct and mutually-hostile principles at work within the Christian, each bringing forth after its own kind, and it is by what each one brings forth that its presence may be ascertained. The "works of the flesh" are manifest (Gal. 5:19, etc.), but "the fruit of the Spirit" (v. 22, etc.) is equally identifiable. A detailed description of "the fruit of the Spirit" should not be understood to mean that "the flesh" has ceased to exist. And a portrayal of the workings of an honest heart must not be taken to signify that all which is contrary thereto has been expelled. David was an upright man, yet he found it needful to pray, "Remove from me the way of lying" (Psa. 119:29). The disciples of Christ had been given honest hearts, yet their Master deemed it requisite to bid them, "be not as the hypocrites" (Matt. 6:5). It is the regenerate who are exhorted, "wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile and all hypocrisies" (I Peter 2:1), which would obviously be quite meaningless if those evils had been eradicated from their beings.

"Who can understand his errors! Cleanse Thou me from secret faults" (Psa. 19:12). There is more deceit and self-ends operating in all of us than we perceive. If you prize an honest heart above a good name and value a clear conscience before God beyond a high reputation among men you are no hypocrite.