

Drawing Close to God

Introduction

1. **This lesson is designed to bring greater spirituality and closeness to God. It is designed to help build and increase personal happiness if we will admit our sins and desire to move in the right direction toward God.**
 - A. **Why aren't we, as members of the body of Christ, always the happy people we should be?**
 - B. **The Christian can't be happy and others can't be happy when our heart is not right with God.**
 - C. **Let us try to learn to be happy and improve our closeness with God by having our hearts aimed at pleasing God.**

James 4:8 Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

- **"double-minded": "two-souled" divided in thinking. To waiver or falter between two opinions.**
- 1) **We can learn why it is so important for us to purify our hearts before God.**

Simon the Sorcerer

Acts 8:13-23

1. We can learn from this account that we must be on guard against old weaknesses.

A. Satan will work on our weak points.

1 Peter 5:8 Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.

B. Simon was regarded as someone great. Earlier we read:

Acts 8:9-10 But there was a certain man called Simon, who previously practiced sorcery in the city and astonished the people of Samaria, claiming that he was someone great, to whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, "This man is the great power of God."

1) He still wanted to hold this greatness and continue to be known as someone great and therefore he wanted to buy the power to impart the Holy Spirit (Vs 18-19).

2. Simon got an evil heart and this is something we must avoid if we are to be pleasing to God.

A. Simon's thought was all wrong (Acts 8:20). He literally had sinned by thinking wrong; he had not acted as of yet.

**1) Jeremiah wrote:
Jeremiah 17:9-10**

- **Which is a result of the inward heart!**

Proverbs 4:23 Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life.

B. We must avoid the impenitent heart.

1) Simon did appear to have a penitent heart (Acts 8:24).

- a. Some people will never repent as their hearts have become hard.**

Romans 2:5 But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God,

- b Hardened hearts is a problem. The Holy Spirit repeated at least three times for man not to have a hard heart.**

Hebrews 3:8, 15

Hebrews 4:7

3. We must strive to maintain a heart suitable for correction.

- A. Christianity is a religion of the heart. A good heart is vitally important and essential.**

1) We must have good and honest hearts which can be easily entreated.

Luke 8:15

4. Simon was told to Repent and pray.

Acts 8:22 Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you.

- A. This is our means for keeping our hearts pure.**

Drawing Close to God Depends on Our Heart

1. Do we have an evil heart?

- A. I'm sure that most everyone here this morning would not ever admit to having a heart that is evil But an evil heart can spring up at any time.**

Hebrews 3:12 Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God;

- B. Bitterness can also spring up from time to time. In many families, churches, relationships, etc., where there was once love, bitterness has taken over.**

Hebrews 3:15 while it is said: "Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion."

- 1) As weeds have a tendency to always spring up where they ought not be, so can bitterness.**

- a. Some have let those weeds multiply - holding grudges and openly admitting dislike for a fellow brother in Christ.**

- C. Here's a personal question for all of us: "If we should die today, would we be saved?" Here are some common answers,**

- 1) "No," "I don't know," "I hope so," "yes." How would we answer? Take an inventory.**

2 Corinthians 13:5 Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?-- unless indeed you are disqualified.

2. God knows all things – we can't hide anything from Him.

A. Many act as though God can't see what they do. They think that the cover of darkness hides their sins.

1 Thessalonians 5:4-8

B. Remember, God knows everything. He even knows our thoughts.

Psalms 44:20-21

3 One can be self-condemned.

1 John 3:19-20 And by this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him. For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things.

A. One could have a clear conscience and still be wrong, but one cannot have an evil conscience and still be right.

1) God would never save us in spite of our evil consciences--thus, the importance of keeping our hearts right with God.

4. We all must make corrections when needed.

A. Our hearts have been sprinkled from an evil conscience.

Hebrews 10:22

1) This is the inward part of regeneration. Baptism is the other part "our bodies washed with pure water."

B. The Christian is blessed with the opportunity to obtain forgiveness at all times.

5. We all must maintain pure hearts.

1 Timothy 1:5 Now the purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith,

2 Timothy 2:22 Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.

A. We need to set reasonable goals and maintain them.

- 1) **For example, one might say, "I don't study like I should."**
 - a. **To obtain and maintain a good heart, one must change and begin to study like they should.**
- 2) **If one says, "I don't love my husband, wife, children, relatives, brethren or enemies like I ought to," he must change; otherwise, his own heart condemns him.**

G.T. Hewitt: "The best things in life are never rationed. Friendship. Loyalty, love, do not require coupons."

Henry Van Dyke: "Time is...too slow for those who wait, too swift for those who fear, too long for those who grieve, too short for those who rejoice; but for those who love, time is eternity."

Single Parent Family Magazine (1997): "**Forgiveness** means you give up your right to revenge. You choose not to keep score or get even.

Unforgiveness allows who we are to be defined by the hurts we've known and leads to a victim mentality, leaving us expecting to be hurt again. We become negative and defensive, and communication becomes impossible. Forgiveness releases us from past injustices, from keeping score and from lashing out at other people."

When Is Our Heart Not Right?

1. **Do we find services boring?**
 - A. **Do we find ourselves trying to slip in late or out early?**
 - 1) **Do we miss Bible class on purpose? Do we miss services when those we don't care for are teaching or preaching?**
 - B. **Do we enjoy studying, singing, praying? Or, are we looking for an excuse to not get involved or to even quit?**

Psalms 122:1 I was glad when they said to me, "Let us go into the house of the LORD."

2. **Do we find true joy in Bible study?**

2 Timothy 2:15
1 Peter 3:15

 - A. **We can learn to enjoy it, can we not?**
 - 1) **It is like getting involved in a hobby, sport, etc. The more we involve ourselves the more we enjoy it and the more we enjoy it, the more knowledgeable and skilled we become in it.**
3. **Do we enjoy the company of brethren?**
 - A. **For example, would we rather attend a gospel meeting (at one's home congregation or elsewhere) or would we rather be with worldly friends?**

1 Corinthians 15:33

4. Do we get upset with others if they rebuke us? (Prov 10:17; 12:15)

Proverbs 9:7-9 He who corrects a scoffer gets shame for himself, and he who rebukes a wicked man only harms himself. Do not correct a scoffer, lest he hate you; rebuke a wise man, and he will love you. Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be still wiser; teach a just man, and he will increase in learning.

5. Are we truly interested in souls?

Proverbs 11:30 The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and he who wins souls is wise.

- A. Do we encourage those that are doing the Lord's Work to continue their efforts Are we doing things for the cause of Christ?**

How Can We Improve Our Hearts?

- How can we have a better relationship with God and obtain a real personal happiness?**

1. Let wisdom reign in our hearts.

Proverbs 23:23 Buy the truth, and do not sell it, also wisdom and instruction and understanding.

Col 3:16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom.....

2. Feed our minds with wholesome things.**Philippians 4:8**

- A. Listen to tapes of sermons and songs. Read the Bible, and church bulletins, brotherhood papers, magazines etc. Much of the reading material available in this world is nothing but garbage.**

3. Purpose in our hearts to do good.**Barnabas was sent to Antioch and,**

Acts 11:23 When he came and had seen the grace of God, he was glad, and encouraged them all that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord.

Ezra 7:10 For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel.

4. Let joy reign in our hearts.

Psalms 4:7-8 You have put gladness in my heart, more than in the season that their grain and wine increased. I will both lie down in peace, and sleep; for You alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety.

- A. Happiness is a choice. Rejoice in God who brought joy.**

5. Seek God with all our hearts.

Psalms 34:8-10 Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the man who trusts in Him! Oh, fear the LORD, you His saints! There is no want to those who fear Him. The young lions lack and suffer hunger; but those who seek the LORD shall not lack any good thing.

- A. This is the only way to find a lasting peace and happiness.**

Conclusion

- 1. Do we have the right heart this morning as to be able to draw close to God?**
- 2. When we first get our own hearts right with God then we will be able to help others to get their heart right.**
- 3. Remember, before we can draw close to God, we must be able to admit sin and then do as the apostles commanded Simon:**

Acts 8:22 Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you.

