

The “Heart” of God’s Word

By Rev. John M. Young

(To get the most out of this Bible study, consider comparing multiple English translations. The King James Version [KJV] tends to give a more literal rendition of the Greek and Hebrew, while the New International Version [NIV] often translates into modern English idiom. One Web site that provides multiple translations is www.biblegateway.com.)



Study guide helps for this Bible study are provided at www.lwml.org (click on the Quarterly button) or through the LWML office.

Opening Prayer: O Lord, open our hearts and minds to be receptive to Your Holy Spirit through our study of Your Word, that we may be blessed to the very core of our being. In Jesus’ Name. Amen.

“I love you with all my heart.” Those who are unmarried may long to find such romance one day, while others have perhaps heard these words from a spouse repeatedly over a decades-long marriage. The words “love” and “heart” go together so naturally in English that we might mistakenly substitute sentimental emotionalism for God’s command to love Him (and others) with all our heart.

What is the heart after all? Literally, the heart is the organ that beats about 70 times per minute, pumping blood throughout your body, without which we would die. Figuratively, we usually use “heart” to refer to the place where we feel our emotions. A broken heart means great sadness or grief, while a racing heart indicates excitement; “my heart goes out to you” communicates pity or sympathy; “from the bottom of my heart” conveys sincerity; and “loving with all my heart” expresses an emotional commitment of total devotion.

But is this what God’s Word means when it says, for example, “Love the LORD your God with all your heart”? Look up the following verses and write what is attributed to the “heart.” (Verses marked with an asterisk are interpreted in the NIV and do not use the word “heart”; compare to the KJV’s use of “heart.”)

Luke 3:15

Luke 1:51*; Luke 9:47*; Mark 2:6*

Matthew 15:19

Luke 24:32,38*

2 Corinthians 2:4; John 16:6*

1 Corinthians 4:5

2 Corinthians 9:7; Luke 21:14*

2 Thessalonians 2:17

Hebrews 8:10

James 1:26*; Romans 16:18*

The Greek word for "heart" is *kardia*, which is the root of our words cardiac and cardiologist. (In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word is *leb* or *lebab*.) People in Biblical cultures thought of the "heart" less as the seat of the emotions and more as the total inner self. Thus "heart" in the Bible refers to the mind and the will as well as emotions.

However, the usual Biblical idiom for emotions is not completely foreign to us. Have you ever had a "gut feeling" or felt something "in the pit of your stomach"? The Greek of the New Testament uses a word *splanchna*, meaning "intestines," to locate emotions; the King James Version often translates this very literally as "bowels," while modern versions use the English idiom of "heart."

Look up the following verses to see *who* was "moved with compassion" (literally, "feeling it in the intestines").

Luke 15:20

Luke 10:13

Luke 7:13

Philemon verses 1, 12, 20

Philippians 1:8

Colossians 3:12

1 John 3:17

Mark 6:34

Matthew 18:27

In the Hebrew way of speaking, emotions were felt in the kidneys. In the King James Version, the word “reins” (from the Latin word that gives us *renal*) translates this usage. Compare **Psalm 7:9**; **Psalm 26:2** and **Jeremiah 11:20** in multiple versions. The common phrase is literally “kidneys and heart.” The King James Version has “reins and heart,” but modern versions are likely to have “heart and mind.” In our culture, the “heart” is the equivalent of the Hebrew “kidneys,” while we use “mind” for the Hebrew concept of “heart” (when distinguished from kidneys, figuratively speaking).

Now carefully compare **Deuteronomy 6:5** with the three times it is quoted by Jesus in the Gospels—**Matthew 22:37**; **Mark 12:30**; **Luke 10:27**. What are the Gospel writers trying to do with their choice of words?

In the light of what we have studied, how can the meanings of “heart” be applied to our lives?

We are called to love God “with all our heart.” This includes emotions, but much more as well. It is the entire core of our being. There is certainly room for emotions, as Jesus Himself felt strong emotions. But the love of **John 3:16** is *action*—Jesus’ death to take away our sins.

Closing Prayer: Heavenly Father, help us to understand the “heart” of Your Word and maintain a proper balance between our emotions and all areas of our lives. Help us to love others by action, as You loved us by giving us Your Son, in whose Name we pray: Amen.

Sing “They’ll Know We Are Christians By Our Love” (*All God’s People Sing!* 237), noting how the song emphasizes the idea of love as *action*, not just emotion.

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