

I TRY THE REINS

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The discipline of psychology has had a great influence on the modern world. Many people seek help from those trained in psychology and psychiatry. Many undergo psychoanalysis to help them with their mental health issues. Many who do not undergo psychoanalysis at least understand the basic idea. The Oxford English Dictionary defines 'unconscious' as "That part of the mind which is inaccessible to the consciousness; spec. an aspect of the mind containing material repressed from and not directly accessible to the conscious mind, but capable of influencing emotions and behaviour." That same dictionary defines 'psychoanalysis' as "A therapeutic method, originated by Sigmund Freud, for treating mental disorders by investigating the interaction of conscious and unconscious elements in the patient's mind and bringing repressed fears and conflicts into the conscious mind, using techniques such as dream interpretation and free association." Put simply, in this view a person's behavior is caused by motives of which he is wholly unaware, and of which he cannot be aware, except a psychoanalyst make him aware. This is not the Christian view of man.

Some Christians, especially those who have been disappointed by traditional Christian spirituality, do affirm psychoanalysis. They argue that the Scriptures teach that there is an unconscious, and so they affirm psychoanalysis as the means of bringing to the conscious mind that which is in the unconscious mind. One verse in Scripture that they believe supports this idea is found in the first chapter of Saint Paul's epistle to the Romans. There Saint Paul wrote, "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness." (Romans 1:18) Christian psychoanalysts argue that, because people hold the truth down, there must be an unconscious in which they hold it. So, they reason, there are things the Christian holds in his unconscious. However, in this verse Saint Paul describes the unbeliever, not the believer. He explains that the unbeliever sinfully suppresses the truth that God has made known to him, namely that He exists, and what He is like. Furthermore, the unbeliever does not consign his knowledge of God to an unconscious, so that he no longer knows that God exists. He actively suppresses the truth about God that God is constantly making known to him through the creation. Saint Paul writes in that same chapter, "When they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful." (Romans 1:21) However one understands this phenomenon, it characterizes the depraved unbeliever, not the righteous believer. The Christian does not suppress the truth; he believes the truth; he loves the truth. King David wrote in the Psalms, "Lead me in thy truth, and teach me: for thou art the God of my salvation; on thee do I wait all the day." (Psalm 25:5)

Another Scripture verse cited by Christians who believe in the idea of an unconscious is found in the book of Jeremiah. God said through Jeremiah the prophet, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" (Jeremiah 17:9) Noah Webster defined 'heart' as "The seat of the affections and passions, as of love, joy, grief, enmity, courage, pleasure etc." Matthew George Easton defined it as "the centre not only of spiritual activity, but of all the operations of human life." (Easton's Bible Dictionary) So, Christian psychoanalysts argue, the very center of man's spiritual activity, the seat of his affections and passions, is deceitful. It is not to be trusted. It calls good evil, and evil good; puts darkness for light, and light for darkness; puts bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter. (Isaiah 5:20) It is wicked beyond hope; it cannot naturally be improved. It is desperately sick, and beyond natural cure. God asks, "Who can know it?" Christian

psychoanalysts think this verse supports their view of man. They mistake, however. The verse must be understood in its literary context. Generations before, God made a covenant with the children of Israel at Moab, and that covenant included, as all God's covenants do, both promise and obligation. He promised them blessing for obedience, and cursing for disobedience. He said to them:

See, I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil; In that I command thee this day to love the LORD thy God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commandments and his statutes and his judgments, that thou mayest live and multiply: and the LORD thy God shall bless thee in the land whither thou goest to possess it. But if thine heart turn away, so that thou wilt not hear, but shalt be drawn away, and worship other gods, and serve them; I denounce unto you this day, that ye shall surely perish, and that ye shall not prolong your days upon the land, whither thou passest over Jordan to go to possess it. (Deuteronomy 30:15-18)

Tragically, the children of Israel chose death. After the passing away of King Solomon, the Kingdom of Israel was divided into the kingdom of Israel in the north, and the kingdom of Judah in the south. The people of the kingdom of Israel were so wicked that God, after giving them fair warning, sent the army of Assyria to conquer them, and to carry them away into exile. The people of the southern kingdom were also wicked. They were great sinners, but they considered themselves free from God's judgment because they offered sacrifices in God's temple. Through the prophet Jeremiah, God said to them, "Will ye steal, murder, and commit adultery, and swear falsely, and burn incense unto Baal, and walk after other gods whom ye know not; And come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, We are delivered to do all these abominations?" (Jeremiah 7:9, 10) The people worshipped idols, even offering their own children as burnt offerings. God said, "They have set their abominations in the house which is called by my name, to pollute it. And they have built the high places of Tophet, which is in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire." (Jeremiah 7:30, 31) Moreover, the rulers of Judah, rather than put their trust in the Lord, sought alliances with the pagan nations of Assyria, and with Egypt. So, God told the people that He would send the army of the Babylonians to conquer them, and to carry them away into exile. (Jeremiah 25:8-11) The fundamental sin of the people was a lack of faith; they did not put their trust in God. So, He said to them:

Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the LORD. For he shall be like the heath in the desert, and shall not see when good cometh; but shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, in a salt land and not inhabited. Blessed is the man that trusteth in the LORD, and whose hope the LORD is. For he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green; and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit. The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it? I the LORD search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings. (Jeremiah 17:5-10)

God alone is worthy of absolute trust. The heart of man is fickle and duplicitous, and so not to be trusted. God here characterizes the heart, not of the faithful Israelite, but of the unfaithful one; not of the righteous man, but of the unrighteous. It cannot be said of the righteous man that his heart is "deceitful above all things, and

desperately wicked.” God rejected King Saul because his heart was not right, and He chose David because his heart was right. David was a man after God’s own heart. (1 Samuel 13:14; Acts 13:22) When Samuel considered David’s brother, Eliab, to succeed king Saul, God said to Samuel, “Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart.” (1 Samuel 16:6, 7)

Who can know the heart of man, God asks. The answer is, God alone. He searches a man’s heart; he tests his mind. God knows all things. He knows what is in a man’s heart. When Jesus asked Saint Peter if he loved Him, the apostle answered, “Thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee.” (John 21:17) God alone knows a man’s heart, yet a man’s heart can be revealed by his actions. So, God tries a man’s heart by his works. The Proverbs say, “Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.” (Proverbs 4:23) Jesus said:

For a good tree bringeth not forth corrupt fruit; neither doth a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. For every tree is known by his own fruit. For of thorns men do not gather figs, nor of a bramble bush gather they grapes. A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil: for of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh. (Luke 6:43-45)

If a man has a believing heart, he will show it by his actions. Saint James wrote, “Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works.” (James 2:18) A man may say he has faith, but true faith shows itself in deeds; by good works a man proves that his faith is genuine. Abraham is the archetype of proven faith. From the time God called Abraham, Abraham trusted Him, and, because he trusted Him, he did what He said. When God told Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac, Abraham obeyed without question. As Abraham raised the knife to strike, God said to him, “Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me.” (Genesis 22:12) Abraham’s faith led him to do right. Saint James wrote, “Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?” (James 2:22) God knows a man’s heart, but a man’s heart is made manifest by his actions. So, God said to Israel, “I the LORD search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings.” (Jeremiah 17:10) God knows a man’s heart because He knows all things. Nevertheless, what is in a man’s heart is realized when he acts. Abraham by his good works showed God what was in his heart.

This was a principle by which King David lived. He wrote in the seventh Psalm, “Examine me, O LORD, and prove me; try my reins and my heart. For thy lovingkindness is before mine eyes: and I have walked in thy truth.” (Psalm 26:2, 3) In the one-hundred thirty-ninth Psalm he wrote:

O LORD, thou hast searched me, and known me. Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off. Thou compasses my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways... Search me, God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. (Psalm 139:1-3, 24)

As king David neared the end of his life, he gave a charge to Solomon his son who would succeed him. He said to him:

And thou, Solomon my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind: for the LORD searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts: if thou seek him, he will be found of thee; but if thou forsake him, he will cast thee off for ever. Take heed now; for the LORD hath chosen thee to build an house for the sanctuary: be strong, and do it. (1 Chronicles 28:9)

Solomon did build the temple, and when it was completed, he prayed a prayer of dedication. In that prayer he prayed for the people in case they might sin and repent. He said:

What prayer and supplication soever be made by any man, or by all thy people Israel, which shall know every man the plague of his own heart, and spread forth his hands toward this house: Then hear thou in heaven thy dwelling place, and forgive, and do, and give to every man according to his ways, whose heart thou knowest; (for thou, even thou only, knowest the hearts of all the children of men;) That they may fear thee all the days that they live in the land which thou gavest unto our fathers. (2 Kings 8:38-40)

God alone knows a man's heart, but He rewards or punishes a man according to what he does, for what he does is an expression of his heart. After Jeremiah bought Hanamel's field, he prayed:

Thou shewest lovingkindness unto thousands, and recompensest the iniquity of the fathers into the bosom of their children after them: the Great, the Mighty God, the LORD of hosts, is his name, Great in counsel, and mighty in work: for thine eyes are open upon all the ways of the sons of men: to give every one according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings. (Jeremiah 32:18, 19)

Saint Paul was assured of his right standing before God. Like Abraham, He believed God. He believed in Christ as Lord and Savior. Moreover, he knew that Christ had called him to be an apostle. Some men doubted Saint Paul's apostleship, and some opposed him. He believed that, whatever men might think of him, they were not the final judges. He knew of nothing against himself, but he also knew that he was not the final judge. Saint Paul believed that the final judge is the Lord Jesus, who received the right to judge from God Himself. Saint Paul wrote to the Corinthians:

But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment: yea, I judge not mine own self. For I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified: but he that judgeth me is the Lord. Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God. (1 Corinthians 4:3-5)

The Christian can, at times, be dishonest; he can even be in denial. Dishonesty is a sin, however, and the dishonest one is culpable. So, he must know that he is being dishonest. It cannot be the case that he is unaware of his dishonesty, nor that he cannot be aware of it. If one Christian knows that another is being dishonest, then he must tell him so, and the dishonest one must repent of his dishonesty. If a Christian is dishonest about something, and God alone knows, then God will discipline him for his dishonesty. It is folly to think that there is in man an unconscious mind, the motives of which cannot be known by the conscious mind, and which must be brought to his conscious mind by another man. For some time after David sinned with Bathsheba, he did not confess his sin. Finally, Nathan accused David, and David did confess. In the fifty-first Psalm he said to God, "Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom." (Psalm 51:6)

Let us remember that God alone knows the heart. Let us also remember that what a man does shows what is in his heart. Let us strive to have pure hearts that trust in God and that obey Him. Let us be humble before God, confessing to Him our sins. Let us also remember that however one man judges another, God is the final judge.

Now unto Him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy; to the only wise God our savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. *Amen.*