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Maturing Toward Wholeness in the Inner Life

Chapter Thirteen

With All Your Heart

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me (Psalm 51:10)

1 - In Mark 12:29-31 Jesus refers to five components of the human person—heart, soul, mind, strength (body) and social relationships (love of neighbor).

2 - Each of these components in me has been damaged by sin—the sin I have committed, and the sin all around me in family and society. Each must be re-formed.

3 - In this and the next four chapters I have been significantly influenced by Dallas Willard's *Renovation of the Heart*. I am deeply grateful.

4 - What did Jesus mean by “heart”? Willard's understanding:

Now, when we set aside contemporary prejudices, and carefully examine these two great sources [the Judeo-Christian and the Greek, the biblical and the classical] I believe it will become clear that “heart,” “spirit,” and “will” (or their equivalents) are words that refer to one and the same thing, the same fundamental component of the person (*Renovation of the Heart*, p. 29).

5 - For our purposes here, we will concentrate on understanding the heart as it refers to my will, my intention, my choices.

6 - Of all the components of my person, I have most direct control of my will or choices—more than my soul, mind, body or social relationships.

7 - It may seem that I have more control of my body. But I don't control many bodily functions, and most of those I do control require my will to act first.

8 - It may seem that I have more control of my mind. But thoughts and emotions regularly come which I did not choose or intend.

9 - I can choose what I intend, though I cannot always do what I intend. This introduces to us the difference between “will” and “will-power”.

10 - Choosing what I intend to do or be is a function of my will. The ability to do what I intend to do or be is a function of the condition of my inner life.

11 - Of course the ability to do what I intend also often depends on external circumstances. Many external circumstances are beyond my control.

12 - Relying on “will-power” to behave the way I intend often leads to defeat. Relying on Christ in everything results in becoming a new kind of person.

13 - Following the teachings of Jesus gradually transforms my inner life. I don't do it; the Holy Spirit does it. But I must choose it.

14 - Ability to make my own choices lies at the core of my personhood, my individuality, my human dignity. It is an expression of the image of God in me.

15 - God is free to make his own choices. He created me free to make my own choices. But I am not free to avoid the consequences of my own choices.

16 - My choices, more than anything else, are what is uniquely me. Decisions I am making day by day are forming the person I am becoming—forever.

17 - The freedom to choose gives human beings the ability to create. Our Creator created us creative—like he is.

18 - Nothing violates a person like attempts to take away the freedom to make his or her own choices. Observe the reactions of small children.

19 - God took a risk when he created us free. To do so was essential to his intention to create beings with capacity to share intimacy with him.

20 - Love requires freedom to choose. Though expressed outwardly, the decision to love first forms inwardly. Love cannot be forced; the heart must choose it.

21 - Worship requires freedom to choose. Jesus said God is seeking worshippers (John 4:23). Worship cannot be forced; the heart must choose it.

22 - The human person—heart, soul, mind, body, social relationships—is damaged, ruined. Sin did this. Jesus renews us by his grace. But we must choose it.

23 - God will not force himself on us—he values us too highly. To violate our will would de-humanize us. He calls, offers himself, and waits.

24 - My heart must direct the re-making of my person. “Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life” (Proverbs 4:23).

25 - But my heart has also been damaged by sin. It too must be re-formed. I can intend to rely on God, but I find that my intention fluctuates.

26 - I must intend that my intention be re-trained. I learn to habitually

- repent of my failures, and
- return my heart to reliance on God (faith).

27 - Only the Holy Spirit, not the force of my willpower, can re-form my heart. Only I, by my choices, can give him permission to do so.

28 - Both repenting and re-setting my will are repetitive processes. A child learns to walk by falling down and getting up—again and again.

29 - I learn not to be de-railed by discouragement. One look at self; ten looks at Jesus! No matter how many times I fail, he never gives up on me.

30 - Freedom to choose is essential for healthy submission to God-established authorities. Heart submission cannot be forced or demanded.

31 - Demanding submission violates the will and triggers anger. God does not force submission. He invites us to submit to his love and wisdom for our own benefit.

32 - My anger is activated when my will is crossed. I feel violated and want to retaliate. But retaliating can wound me more than the original offense.

33 - Choosing to rely on God to right the wrong releases me from anger and heals me. Jesus teaches me how to do this in apprenticeship to him.

34 - Many are surprised to learn that God actually submits to us! How so? He chooses not to override our choices even when they are grievous to him.

35 - Only by choosing to submit to another person do we allow that person to love us. Only by choosing to submit to God do we allow him to transform us.

36 - God saves all who allow him to do so. If I refuse, with great sadness, he honors my decision. Only my own choice can separate me from him.

37 - "You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart" (Jeremiah 29:13).

38- Jesus: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Matthew 5:8).