

Part 27: How to Fix a Conflicted Heart

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Have you ever been driving down the interstate on a road trip and realized that behind that billboard, or blind corner, was a Highway Patrol Officer?

In that situation, I assume all of us have the same reaction. Step one: we tap the breaks. Step two: We check our speedometer. Step three: we study the pace of the cars around us. Step four: we all become religious prayer warriors staring into our review mirror watching the response of the patrolman.

For most of us, we barely consider our speed right up until that point where an authority presents itself to us. And in that moment a myriad of emotions, thoughts, considerations, and excuses begin to flood our minds.

Our world features the heart as the only guide we can trust in life. But in moments like this, we find how complicated our hearts are. Despite how confident we thought we were, or how ingrained in excitement or conversation we were, all it took was a little bit of external examination and our hearts were provoked to discomfort, anger, confusion, doubt or uncertainty.

To confirm this, next time you're at an airport watch people in the TSA lines. Everyone is getting run through the same maze of lines, as you stare at signs telling you what you need to do to get through security. You often listen to an overhead recording reminding you of what you need to take off, or put on the x-ray belt. Then you finally get to the check point and you take out your liquids, take off your shoes, the agent there reminds you to empty your pockets, place your laptops and computers in their own tray, and to empty your water bottles.

Everything up until that point has been preparing you to walk through that metal detector with full confidence.

But as soon as you get there, the next agents says, "Do you have anything in your pockets?"

And what does everyone do? They check their pockets. I doesn't matter what you think you know, our hearts, as confident as they may seem, are fickle and complicated. In the back of even the most confident mind is the whispering threat of self-doubt, or at least a quiet brake-check asking ourselves if what we hope for is really what we will receive.

When an authority begins to examine us, we are prone to all sorts of feelings in light of that. Our passage today in the book of Proverbs is all about this examination, specifically how the King of Kings examines our hearts. If parked police cars and TSA screening stations can cause us to second guess ourselves, how much more might we second guess ourselves when we stand before the God who sees all things? But there is a wonderful hope in our text today and that is that God wants you to have confidence before him, he wants to help our conflicted hearts by showing us the solution to our brokenness.

What we are going to see today is this: **The God who sees our hearts is the solution to the fears of our hearts.** We are going to see three pictures of our hearts today. In Proverbs 20:2-7 we are going to see **The Condemnation of our Hearts**, in verses 8-12 we are going to see the **Conclusion of our Hearts**, and the by zooming back into verse seven we are going to examine the **Confidence of our Hearts**.

Let's begin by reading our first passage of scripture today: **Proverbs 20:2-7**. Here we see our first point: **The condemnation of our hearts.**

What we will see in both portions of our text today is that Solomon has a similar pattern in each. Each passage begins with an appeal to a king, or as will become clearer as we examine the text, the King, that is the Lord. But after an appeal to the judgement of a King he has a passage which focuses on the hearts and actions of the subjects of a king.

Solomon opens up in verse two by comparing the terror of a king to the growling of a lion, and then goes onto say that whoever provokes this Lion-King forfeits his life.

When Solomon is talking about the terror of the king, he's not talking about a king who is quick-tempered and lacks self-control. In most of the Proverbs, Solomon assumes that this terror of the king is the King's just and righteous response to what is evil and harmful in his kingdom.

Remember what we encountered about the nature of kings in **Proverbs 16:12**.

A good king establishes his kingdom by making sure his people are safe from danger and corruption. Therefore it is a good king who punishes those who do evil for the protection of those who pursue what is good.

The justice of this king, his power, is compared to a lion. Few things in our imagination stir dangerous awe like a lion. It is royal, it is strong, it is intimidating, and it is to be feared. So much so that if you're one foolish enough to provoke this kind of king, you're one who is quick to forfeit his life.

You have a better chance of fighting a lion than you standing before the wrath of a good king.

So how does Solomon want us to live in light of the knowledge that a good king will punish and destroy those who are evil? He wants you to not provoke the king.

Now this is where our complicated hearts begin to rear their heads. Many of us can say: "I've never provoked a king. In fact, I don't even have a king in America." We might even apply this governmental paradigm to our own lives and have sense of confidence in our obedience to the laws of the land: We pat ourselves on the back for never getting a speeding ticket, never being called to court, never committing wholesale fraud and not having a true crime documentary produced about our life.

In fact culturally, even if we apply this idea of human authority to the idea of God's authority the majority of people believe that God is pleased with them. That they stand in his good favor.

It is almost as foreign to us to worry about provoking God's wrath as it is for us in Montana to worry about provoking an African lion.

But what's interesting is that immediately after speaking of the justice of the king, Solomon seems to go into a sort of disconnected series of Proverbs in verses 3-7. We might think that at this point the justice of the king in verse 2 is disconnected from the proverbs which follow until we get to verse 8 where Solomon again returns to the idea a king's justice when he says (**Proverbs 20:8**), "A king who sits on the throne of judgement winnows all evil with his eyes."

In other words, what Solomon is doing is he is forcing us to spend time examining our own confidence if we are one who thinks too quickly that we are in good standing with the king.

Jesus does a really similar thing in the gospel of Matthew with the Pharisees. The Pharisees are those who have great confidence in their heart before God. They think they have upheld the law of God with complete fidelity. But Jesus gets behind their confidence and says, "You might not have murdered someone, but I tell you that if you have hated someone you have murdered them in your heart. You might not have slept with someone who is not your spouse, but if you have lusted you have committed adultery in your heart."

Jesus, who is the wisdom of God incarnate, is modeling a similar type of introspection that Solomon now provides us when we consider our own relationship to our hearts and the King who is also a lion. Solomon gives our hearts a series of tests.

You might think yourself to be a great and good person but: **Proverbs 20:3**.

It pleases the King, it is honorable, to be one who keeps far from arguments with little value. But are you a fool who is constantly drawn into quarrels which consume us. Think of the last argument you had with someone, what was that argument about? Was it something that mattered ultimately? Something which humility and repentance could have easily avoided?

But our world loves strife because it clings to our hearts own vindication of itself. Charles Bridges says of this that "a world of sin must always be a world of strife."

There are some arguments and debates we enter into because we genuinely want to be loving towards the other person, but more times than not are our quarrels driven not by a desire to be loving but a desire to be right? How many of us quarrel because we want to quarrel? Such a heart provokes the king, it is out of place in his kingdom.

Next look at **Proverbs 20:4**.

You might never have robbed a bank, but have you robbed God of his time in your sloth? As part of the rhythm of life in the Middle East are seasons of rest and seasons of work. It's translated here as autumn for our western world, but the planting season in Palestine was in the winter which is actually the Hebrew word here. It was the coldest and rainiest season. It was the season where the last thing you wanted to do was go outside and yet, those who refuse to labor when it's time to labor are those who will be denied provision when the season comes.

Here we encounter a heart which is both slothful and entitled. I think it can live the way they want to and be bailed out by the work of another. This is the heart of the man James describes in **James 4:17**.

But where these first two proverbs get at our external actions, Solomon's next two move deeper into our hearts and highlight the complicated nature of our desires.

Look with me at **Proverbs 20:5-6**.

So here we see three verses all of which get at the integrity of our hearts.

Solomon first says that the desires of our heart are so deep. They are powerful and persuasive, and yet it takes a man of great understanding to actually try and draw out and discern why it is we want what we want.

This is the challenge of thoughtfulness we looked at last week. There are often times where in my anxiety or in my frustration I am so deeply affected in my emotions and yet for the life of me I cannot draw out why my heart feels this way. Or other times I don't want to put in the work of actually understanding the seat of my passion and instead I simply want to be led by them.

But this is not the only problem of our conflicted hearts. In verse six we see that it is only with great effort that we can understand what is in our hearts, but more than that, verse seven says that even when we find out what is in our hearts, our lives sometimes deny the very thing we think we believe or desire.

Look at **Proverbs 20:6**.

It's easy to declare you want to lose weight, but it's hard to be faithful to that. It's easy to say you want to follow Jesus, but it's hard to do that. It's easy to say you want to selflessly serve your spouse, but it's hard to do that.

It is easy to proclaim your steadfast love, your commitment to wanting to please God and love others, but who is faithful to actually do that?

In Augustine's autobiography he talked about how in his early years he was aware of the intellectual merits of Christianity. He desired the moral life and the avoidance of judgment, and yet despite the fear that stood in his heart he could not live his life for the love of Jesus. He continually chased women and accomplishments, he desired God but his heart was far from him.

How many of you have had such a conflicted heart? Do you see what Solomon has done here? He has taken whatever confidence we might think we have before God and he has shown us that we, even in the conflicted nature of our hearts, have provoked the Lion-King.

We have been faithless. At his point, Solomon wants us to cry out: "Where is the faithful subject?"

And he answers that cry in **Proverbs 20:7**.

Be righteous and walk in integrity. Now remember righteousness is not simply equal to morality. When Solomon talks about righteousness it includes our decisions but at the base of our decisions is a covenant loyalty to God. We act righteously because we have been saved by the God who is righteous.

And notice the confidence that comes in walking righteously with God, confidence enough even for your children.

But by the time we get here we are convinced of one thing aren't we? We are not the righteous one who walks in integrity.

So where do we stand? Well at this point, just like when we encounter the cop on the interstate we are reasonably gathering information on where we stand in relationship to God himself. And all of this is brought to bear in **Proverbs 20:8-12**.

Here is our second point this morning: **The Conclusion of our Heart**

As we examine our hearts, we do so in the presence of a God who will winnow all that is evil. That is an agricultural term where the fruit of the harvest was separated from the chaff.

God, when the just king of all, the Lord, sits on the throne he will winnow all evil.

After a similar sort of introspection the prophet Jeremiah comes to this conclusion in **Jeremiah 17:9-10**.

Who can know the complexity of your heart and all its crevasses and concerns? We can't even know the depth of our own heart, but God the all-seeing King, the all hearing judge sees everything.

In light of this the Apostle Paul cries out: **Romans 7:18-24**.

Brothers and sisters, if you can't make it through TSA without double-checking your pockets, how will you soberly and confidently stand before the God of all righteousness with any sort of confidence.

In the words of Solomon: "Who can say, 'I have made my heart pure and I am clean from sin.'"

He develops this idea more in: **Proverbs 20:10-11**.

In other words if God sees every transaction in the market place and knows which weights and measures are false weights and measures to rob the customer, if we are able to look at our own children and discern their heart from how they act, then who are you to think that the God who created the heavens, the God who knit together your heart, the God who made the hearing ear and the seeing eye will not see your heart for what it really is.

Look at **Proverbs 27:19, 17:3**.

This life is meant to expose your complicated heart. Whether you are Christian or not, you know the burden of this. Many of us approach our hearts, desires and faults like Schrodinger's Cat. We refuse to examine our hearts because we fear what we will find, we fear that if we find doubt, lack of satisfaction and fear that we will be guilty of destroying what little joy we already had. So we fear silence to examine our hearts and fill our lives with busyness and distraction so we free ourselves from the dilemma.

Many more of us have done the work of examining our hearts. We know that we have impulses of selfishness towards others, we know that what we think will bring us joy is fragile at best and a long shot

at its worst. We carry with us a pervasive fear and anxiety everywhere we go just hoping that we will find what we are looking for.

When we were looking at this text in staff meeting this week one of the other pastor's shared a story of when he was little and shoplifted a piece of candy. He desired it, he considered it, he plucked it from the shelf and put it in his pocket, and walked away with a sense of accomplishment.

But then he felt a hand on his shoulder, and he knew he had been caught. He mentioned the sickening feeling of knowing that here he was, and he was guilty.

The beauty of Proverbs is that it is attempting right now to place that hand on your heart now so that you might not have to feel that hand in eternity. That you might today realize that the same king who has come to see into your heart is the same king who at the same time has come to save your heart and give you confidence before him.

In 1 Kings Chapter 8, King Solomon finishes the temple. He finished the place where God, Israel's true King would dwell among his people. And he prays one of the most wonderful prayers in all of scripture. He prays that when God's people are in a mess, when they have sinned against God, but when they pray towards the temple, that God would hear them and save them.

Look at how he concludes his prayer: **1 Kings 8:46-53**.

How might we be delivered from the God who sees our hearts? By turning with our hearts back to God.

Remember the hope of righteousness that Solomon spoke of in Proverbs 20:7? The hope is that in turning to God we might become righteous.

Look at the wisdom of God in **Isaiah 1:18**.

God made a promise to a people with conflicted hearts that he would one day, cleanse them. God himself would solve the problem of the heart unable to cleanse itself.

After Paul brought us into the inner turmoil of his heart look at how he concluded his reflection: **Romans 7:24-25**.

Jesus, the true King, is not only the King who sees all hearts judges all evil. But he is also the King who in seeing our evil hearts desired to die so that those who have sinned against him might have confidence for life in him.

And here is our third point today: **The Confidence of our Heart**.

If we come to Jesus you can have confidence before the king.

When we do the work of actually examining our hearts we will find they are a terrible place. We might find ourselves prone to self-deprecation and frustration. We see our sin, we hate our sin, we wrestle with what assurance we might have but when we see what Jesus has done we know that the same hearts we might hate are the same hearts which Jesus loves.

Look at **Romans 5:1-5**.

What is the hope for our hearts? The love of God poured into our hearts in Jesus Christ.

Here is confidence in life, here is a hope that cannot be shaken, here is where we see our great high priest in great reverence and yet we are not afraid at what may come for we know that he has come for us. We stand in fear of what we know, that we are saved by Jesus' work and not our own.

Look at how John Bunyan puts this: **"And if Satan meets you, and asks 'Where are you going?' Tell him you are maimed, and you are going to the Lord Jesus. If he throws at you your own unworthiness, tell him that, even as the sick seek the physician, as he that has broken bones seeks him that can set them, so you are going to Jesus Christ for cure and healing for your sin-sick soul...Up, up sinner; be of good cheer, Christ came to save the unworthy ones: be not faithless, but believe."**

Do you want confidence amidst the anxieties of this world? Then come to the King that if left alone in our sin we would only fear, but when robed in faith and repentance we are saved by his own righteousness.

This then produces the comfort of Proverbs 20:7. Look here at **Romans 6:17-18**.

Being saved by Christ is being saved to righteousness. It is desiring with all our heart to turn now away from what provokes and instead to live our lives for what delights God.

This humility before the King doesn't cause us to come to him for mercy only wanting to return to confusion, we come to Jesus burdened with our sin and we turn more and more into his righteousness.

Augustine when he finally saw the relief that comes through faith in Jesus Christ said this: "I now have no need to be more certain of you, but more steadfast in you."

The certainty of knowing we stand with confidence before the King leads us to want to be more and more steadfast in that hope. To live with new hearts cleansed by Jesus and walking in integrity with his grace.

So what do you do when you feel condemned before God? What do you do when you feel captive in your sin? You bring your heart to God by faith in Jesus Christ and find peace in your salvation and empowerment for your growth.

In closing as we consider our hearts, I want to leave you with this: **2 Thessalonians 3:5**.