

Believing With The Heart

Romans 10:8-10 and Mark 11:23 refer to believing with our hearts. There is much confusion in the church about what “believing with the heart” means. Some wrongly imagine it refers to some type of merely emotional response to God. As a result of this, some people go on altar calls and express many strong emotions but go away having not really exercised true Biblical faith for salvation in the case of unbelievers or for something else in the case of born-again Christians.

Some churchgoers falsely think “believing with the heart” refers to believing merely with the human mind. This type of approach results in many people falsely thinking they are saved just because they mentally believe Jesus died on the Cross, was resurrected, paid the due penalty for sin and in other Biblical doctrines. Such people are only “*almost Christians*”. They are not saved from sin, Satan or eternal punishment.

Yet another false teaching about “believing with the heart” is the idea it refers to believing only with our human spirit. This notion has been popularised by some Pentecostals and Charismatics. In the Bible, the meanings of the Hebrew and Greek words for the human heart include the human spirit, mind, will and emotions.

The New Testament Greek word for heart is “kardia” which means “the seat of the physical, spiritual and mental life; centre and source of the whole inner life with its thinking, feeling and volition in the case of the natural man as well as the redeemed man; the faculty of thought, of thoughts themselves, of understanding; the will and its decisions; moral decisions; the emotions, wishes, desires; disposition”¹ or “the seat of moral nature and spiritual life, the desires, the affections, the perceptions, the thoughts, the understanding, the reasoning powers, the imagination, conscience, the intentions, purpose, the will.”²

Louw and Nida say, “It is often possible to render ‘kardia’ by a number of different terms depending upon the immediate context, for example, ‘mind’, ‘intention’, ‘purpose’ or ‘desire’”.³ Kittel defines “kardia” as including “soul and spirit, feelings and emotions, desires, understanding, thought, the will, the whole of the inner being of man in contrast to his external side”.⁴

The New Testament word “*heart*” includes the human spirit. 1 Peter 3:4 infers this. Actually this is the only verse in the whole Bible which suggests the heart includes the spirit. Some believe Romans 2:29 also suggests the heart includes the human spirit. But note while the King James Version translates the Greek word “pneuma” in this verse to be “*spirit*”, the New King James Version and the New American Standard Bible translate it as “*Spirit*”, referring to the Holy Spirit.

The heart also includes the human *mind* (see Matthew 9:4, 15:19, Mark 2:6, 2:8, Luke 2:19, 2:35, 3:15, 5:22, 9:47, John 12:40, 2 Corinthians 3:14-15 and Hebrews 4:12). Matthew 9:4 says: “*But Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, “Why do you think evil in your hearts?”*”

¹ Bauer, pages 403-404.

² Vine, page 297.

³ Louw and Nida, page 321.

⁴ Kittel, Volume 3, page 612.

Philippians 4:7, Hebrews 8:10 and 10:16 speak of the heart and mind as two different things but this does not prove the mind is not a part of the heart. This is just as 1 Timothy 1:5 speaks of the heart and conscience as two different things even though the conscience is a part of the heart.

Acts 11:23, 2 Corinthians 9:7 and Romans 6:17 show the heart includes the human *will*. Romans 6:17 refers to obeying from the heart. Obedience is partly an act of our will. Hebrews 4:12 reveals the heart includes both the will and the mind when it uses the expression: “...***the thoughts and intents of the heart.***” The word “***intents***” here relates to the will.

The heart also contains the human *emotions*, as Romans 9:2 and 2 Corinthians 2:4 demonstrate. 2 Corinthians 2:4 says: “***For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you, with many tears...***”

Acts 2:37, Romans 2:15, Hebrews 10:22 and 1 John 3:20-21 indicate the heart contains the *conscience* also.

Bible Study Questions

1. What does believing with the heart mean?
2. What does believing with the heart not mean?