

**Christianityworks**  
**God Wants to Heal My Heart**  
**0060-3**  
***The Power to Change***

God wants a heart connection with us. He's so passionate about it that He sent His only Son to die for you and for me so that we could have that with God.

**Spotting the Fake**

I don't know about you but there's one thing I can't stand it's a fake. A product that doesn't do what the advertisers claim it will do; a person who says one thing but does another. It's not just dishonest but it's annoying because there's just no excuse for it.

Fake is the word we use to describe a thing that falls into that category, but when it comes to a person we have another word, we call them a hypocrite. A hypocrite is someone who lives life by the maxim, do what I say and not what I do. A hypocrite is someone who holds themselves out to be one thing but on the inside is something entirely different.

Hypocrisy violates trust. And let's be honest, it's something we've all done. When we go for a job interview, we can be so intent on putting our best foot forward that we hold ourselves out to be something that we just aren't. We so want to impress so we can win the job, that we embellish our abilities and our experiences. You know what I'm talking about.

Two-faced is another expression we have to describe this disconnect between who a person seems to be on the outside and who they really are on the inside, because eventually who we are on the inside shows through. And that's why it appears that we have two faces. The question is, when we look in the mirror can we spot the fake?

Last week on the program and again this week we're looking at our hearts, that deep place inside where we live, where our dreams and motivations and desires and intentions are. The place where we experience joy and pain because the heart is so incredibly important. That's something I realised when I gave up smoking.

I used to smoke three packets a day. I was a chain smoker. I was truly addicted. Now I tried to give up but I never could. I tried and tried and tried. But one day I was in a room and watched someone die of cancer. I watched this woman breathe her last breath on this

earth. She was a smoker. It's almost 30 years ago now, but I remember it as if it were yesterday. I walked out of that room, I took the packet of cigarettes out of my pocket – it was a gold packet about half full – and I threw them in a grey metal bin and I haven't had a single cigarette since. Why? Because I had a change of heart.

Watching that woman die moved me so deeply it changed my heart and the moment my heart was changed the rest was easy. The heart is so incredibly important because it's what happens in our hearts that determines how we live our lives. If the stuff going on in our heart is good then we'll live a good life. If it's rotten we'll live a rotten life. You just can't help it, it's just the way it is.

Psalm 55, if you have a Bible open it, it's a Psalm of King David. Have a listen to what he says about a so-called friend. Psalm 55 beginning at verse 20:

*"My companion laid hands on a friend and violated a covenant with me, with speech smoother than butter but with a heart set on war; with words that were softer than oil but in fact were drawn swords".*

I love that contrast. On the one hand speech smoother than butter but on the other a heart set on war. Do you see the disconnect between what the person was saying, this so called friend, and what he did. That's the temptation for all of us. To have deceit and anger and war in our hearts and yet to pretend something else on the outside. In fact many years later the Apostle Paul wrote this. It comes from 2 Timothy chapter 3 beginning at verse 1. He said:

*"You must understand this, in the last days distressing times will come for people will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, inhuman, implacable, slanderers, profligates, brutes, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, holding to the outward form of godliness but denying it's power. Avoid them."*

Do you see, here it is again. This disconnect between the real person and what they pretend to be. They hold onto an outward form of godliness. They pretend to be godly on the outside but inside they're rotten. They deny the power of God to change their hearts.

See that's the problem about being religious. People ask me "Are you religious?" and my answer is "Absolutely not!" It's got nothing to do with religion. It's about a relationship with Jesus Christ. See, Jesus said the same thing to the hypocritical religious leaders, the Pharisees and the Scribes. They appeared to be so goody-two-shoes on the outside, but listen to what he said to them. Matthew chapter 23 verses 25 and 26:

*"Woe to you Scribes and Pharisees. You hypocrites for you clean the outside of the cup and the plate but inside they are full of greed and self indulgence. You blind Pharisees! First clean the inside of the cup so that the outside may also become clean. And this is the reason that we've been talking about the importance of a clean heart over the last week and again this week on the program.*

Listen to me. Unless God changes our hearts - and that's the power the Apostle Paul was talking about - nothing's going to change in our lives. I tried to give up smoking but it wasn't until God changed my heart that it became possible. I tried so hard on my own. Here's the amazing news. God's **wants** to transform our hearts. He **wants** to change our hearts. He **wants** to do things in us that we simply can't do for ourselves.

See, even if you or I were a heart surgeon we couldn't operate on ourselves to clear the blocked artery. You have to get someone else to do it. And that's what's going on here. And the heart, who we are deep inside, is so important because who we are deep inside is either going to give us a fantastic life, a life that's a blessing to others, a life where we have the power to love and to sacrifice and to serve. Or it's going to give us a rotten life. A life of selfishness, a stunted life.

Last week we looked at this verse from Proverbs. Let me as you to let become part of who you are and how you live and what you want you want God to do in you. Proverbs chapter 4, verse 23 says:

*"Above all else guard your heart for it is the wellspring of life."*

And this week and again next week we're going to look at how to lay hold of the power of God to change our hearts. Let's stop pussyfooting around. Let's stop tinkering around at the edges, trying to change this or that. Real change, powerful change, decisive change that once and for all sets us free from the rubbish that's been holding us back, that comes the power of God, the Holy Spirit, God Himself at work in our hearts. Because when He sets us free we will be free indeed.

I believe that God wants to give us a pure heart, a strong heart, yet a soft heart and a steadfast heart. I believe wants to hide His Word in our hearts, yours and mine, to do mighty things that we simply can't even imagine.

## **Religion or Relationship**

I remember a decade and a half ago when I became a Christian, I remember the first time I took myself off to church. It was a scary thing to do. My frame hadn't darkened the doorstep of a church for many a year other than the odd wedding or funeral. It was a sunny day and I spotted this little church building not far from where I lived. So rocked up pretty much just on time so I wouldn't have to talk to anyone.

Now I didn't realise back then that they started 10 minutes late. And this man greeted me at the door. He was wearing a red tie and a white short sleeved shirt. "Hi, my name's Phil" he said as he shook my hand and enthusiastically smiled. So I went inside and looked around and thought to myself, where's the minister?

I was looking for a guy in robes or at the very least with a dog collar that ministers used to wear in those days. I couldn't find one. And truly I had no idea who "the minister" was until it came time for the sermon. And this Phil got up and preached. This was pretty odd, I thought. Could it be that he's the minister. Where's the collar? Where's the robes?

I ended up learning so much from Phil and one of the most important things he ever taught me was that it's not about religion and ritual. That's not what God's looking for. It's about something else entirely. Phil Littlejohn is the man's name. He became a giant in my life. A man who encouraged me and taught me through whom God brought a lot of healing to my life.

But the old Phil refused to be called Reverend Littlejohn. I never saw him with a collar or robes. And he talked so much about the fact that living our lives for God had nothing whatsoever to do with the outward trappings of religion. This was a shock to me. It's just not what I expected. I expected all those outward trappings. But you know something, the more I read what God had to say, the more I read what Jesus actually did and said, the more I had to come to the conclusion that Phil was absolutely right.

Now, is there anything wrong with robes or collars or choirs or any of that stuff? No! Not at all. But those things, well they're not the

main game. God's not interested so much in the rituals that we perform, as He is in the relationship that we have with Him. Have a listen to this exchange between some of the religious leaders of the day and Jesus. It's so powerful. Have a listen. It comes from Matthew chapter 15 verses 1-9:

*"Then the Pharisees and Scribes came to Jesus from Jerusalem and said, "Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders, for they do not wash their hands before they eat?" Jesus answered them, "And why do you break the commandment of God for the sake of your traditions. For God said 'Honour your father and mother and whoever speaks evil of father or mother must surely die'. But you say that whoever tells father or mother, 'Whatever support you might have had from me is now given to God' then that person did not honour their father. So for the sake of your tradition you make void the Word of God. You hypocrites. Isaiah prophesied rightly about you when he said 'This people honours me with their lips but their hearts are from me. In vain do they worship me teaching human precepts as doctrines'."*

Now me, I find that sobering. Because I'm a baby boomer, post-war generation. We like order and organisation. That's why I had the expectations that I did of what a church should be like and I constantly thank God for giving me Phil that first day I walked into that church, because He used Phil to set me free from religion which could have trapped me.

If you're younger than me, you won't find that exchange between Jesus and Scribes and Pharisees so much sobering but probably you'll find it liberating, because you're just not into structures and hierarchies and all that stuff. But it's this one sentence that Jesus spoke and I really, really want to hone in on because it's God's Word to breathe life into you and me today. Have a listen again:

*"This people honour me with their lips but their hearts are far from me. In vain do they worship me teaching human precepts as doctrines"*

Because you know something, the world over, there are millions, hundreds or millions even billions of people who think that by going to church and going through the religious motions and ticking the religious boxes that somehow this will put them in favour with God. That in fact that's what it's all about. That by doing what the religious leaders say they will have eternal life. But so much of what we do when we play church are human things that we invented.

In some churches they kneel, stand and sit at different times in the service. Now there's nothing wrong with that but it's a human invention. Some churches burn incense, others say certain prayers. Some sing and some don't. Some use guitars and drums others use an organ. It's all good but none of those things are where it's at. We can sing song and honour God with our lips but if our hearts are far from Him when we're worshipping then we're worshipping Him in vain.

You can see this in marriages. Some marriages, sadly, are little more than a ritual, they're a sham. There's no real heart connection between husband and wife. Do you think that just labouring through each day and pretending everything's okay is all that a marriage should be? Of course it isn't. So how can we imagine that living our lives for God can be about ticking religious boxes.

My friend, God wants our hearts. God wants a heart connection with us. He is so passionate about that, that He sent His only Son to die for you and for me so that we could have that with God.

These religious leaders that Jesus was talking to didn't have a clue about the love of God and the heart of God connect with us. Not a clue. See the world is full of churches that are full of leaders and full of people where they don't have a clue about the passion that God has for them. A passion to connect. The passion to set us free. The passion God has for us to experience His glory and His grace and His love. Are all churches like that? No, of course not. But let me tell you, a lot of them are. I know people who have gone to church most of their lives and I look into their eyes and I am looking for some spark of passion and desire for God but there just isn't one.

Listen to me, loving Jesus isn't about singing songs and going to church and doing religious things. Loving Jesus is about opening our heart to Him and letting Him have sway in us. And laying down our lives for Him and loving the people around us and serving the people around us. Listen to what the Psalmist writes in Psalm 84 verse 2:

*"My soul longs, indeed faints for the courts of the Lord. My heart and my flesh sing for joy to the living God".*

See that's what God is looking for. And that's the sort of heart and desire that He'll give us if only we'll ask Him. God is in the business of changing our hearts, my friend. God is in the business of utterly transforming our hearts. I long for the living God. I long to see Him, to hear Him, to know Him in every part of my life. That's why I spend time praying each day.

That's why I take quiet times to rest in Him. And the more I discover Him, the more I realise that I'll never run into the boundaries of His love. I'll never come to the end of it because there is not end to His love. What a joy! What a life! Religion can't give that to me.

### **Things that Come from the Heart**

You know that passionate outburst from Jesus that we looked at just before the break, His passion about having a relationship with Him instead of following a whole bunch of man-made rules. It continues on in the next part of Matthew chapter 15 verses 10 to 20. In fact this next passage is Jesus explaining exactly what He's just been talking about.

Have a listen, because as it turns out, it's right in the sweet spot of what we're talking about in this series of programs – "God Wants to Heal My Heart". He's just finished saying that these people honour Me with their lips but their hearts are far from Me. They worship Me in vain because they teach human rules as doctrine. And now He goes on to explain what He was talking about. If you have a Bible, grab it. Please follow. It comes from Matthew chapter 15 from verse 10 onwards. Let's have a listen:

*"Then He called the crowd to Him and said, 'Listen and understand. It's not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, it's what comes out of the mouth that defiles'. Then the Disciples approached Him and said, 'Do you know that the Pharisees took offence when they heard what you said?' Jesus answered, 'Every plant that my Heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted. Let them alone, they are blind guides of the blind. And if one blind person guides another both will fall into the pit'. But Peter said to Him, 'Explain this parable to us'. And then He said, 'Are you also still without understanding? Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth enters the stomach and goes out through the sewer. But what comes out of the mouth precedes from the heart and this is what defiles. For out of the heart come and evil intentions, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a person. But to eat with unwashed hands does not defile.'"*

See what goes into the mouth, they had laws about what they could eat. They weren't aloud to eat pork or crustaceans like lobster or prawns and that sort of thing. There are a whole bunch of things like that in God's law and they had to ritually cleanse their hands,

wash their hands, before they sat down to eat because they thought if they didn't they'd become unclean.

That's fine. They were in God's law. They were the rules before Jesus came. But then they made rules on top of the rules. They became finicky. They turned things into rituals and said, 'Well you know if you don't follow all these rules God won't accept you'. Jesus is saying it's not what you do on the outside that matters. But now, have a listen to it again, it's what happens on the inside.

*"What comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart and this what defiles. For out of the heart come evil intentions, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness and slander. These are the things that defile a person".*

And that my friend, that's what God wants to change – our hearts. You know it and I know it. I talked about it earlier on the program with my smoking addiction I had 30 years ago. You know we can try and change the things on the outside as much as we like, but you know something, until God changes our hearts nothing happens. And that's why God wants to change our hearts because it's the place where all the bad stuff comes from.

Listen to me, if you or I have anger in our hearts toward someone, in fact, some people are just angry about everything. They're angry all the time. If we have this anger swilling inside in our hearts, we're going to act upon it. We have to, it's how we're made. We can pretend, we can try and be hypocrites, but we can't have one thing going on in our hearts and do something entirely different with our hands forever. Eventually the two have to come together. Eventually the heart wins out and our hands do what the heart commands.

If I'm angry on the inside, then eventually I'm going to be angry on the outside. If I have unforgiveness in my heart eventually I'm going to live that out and punish the person I haven't forgiven. If I have evil intentions in my heart eventually I'm going to do evil things. That's why rules don't work.

The Apostle Paul talks about the law being weakened by the flesh and what he means by that is that rules are about regulating what we do on the outside. Yet rules have no impact on our heart. Rules have no power to heal our heart. The only thing that does, the only thing that really changes our hearts deep inside – listen for this, wait for this – is God himself.

And when our heart is healed, when the Spirit of God invades our heart, when the rule and the lordship and the Kingdom of God invades our heart, when we open our hearts and say "Lord take me, take all that I am. Fill me, fill me full of your Spirit". When that happens God heals our hearts and our lives are utterly, utterly transformed.

If you're heart is in need of healing I implore you, open your heart to God today. Let Him fill you with His Holy Spirit and then over the days and weeks and months and years ahead just watch in awe as He heals your heart.