

Lesson 10: How to fix the heart

Memory Verse: And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit. (2 Corinthians 3:18)

An old popular song asks, "How can you mend a broken heart?" Of course it was thinking of romantic love, but we've learned that the human heart was broken by sin. How can God "help me mend my broken heart, and let me live again"?

'In the beginning God created....' So says the Bible. What did he create? "...without him nothing was made that has been made." (John 1:3) That means that every living thing but God himself is here because God made it. The Psalmist says God "spoke, and it came to be; he commanded and it stood firm." (Psalm 33:9) For God it is easy to create a living, thinking, loving being.

But just because it's easy for him to create doesn't mean God considers his creatures disposable. That wouldn't show love, and God is love. No, once he has created someone he wants them to stay alive forever. He has designed all the living things he made to live and never die.

The last enemy to be destroyed is death. (I Corinthians 15:26)

For both God and his creatures death is an enemy. Some have even wondered if Adam and Eve had a way to understand what God meant when he said, "you will surely die." They had never seen death. But while they had no knowledge of evil, God must have made it clear to them that death was an enemy they didn't want to meet. As long as they trusted God that was all they needed to know.

We've learned that Adam and Eve's characters were changed when they believed Satan's lies and chose to mistrust God. If that was the problem, why did God let it go on? Why did he let them have children who were born sinners through no choice or fault of their own? If God wants to give his people new, fleshy hearts in place of their stony hearts, why couldn't he do that for Adam and Eve right then and save the rest of us a lot of trouble?

The answer, as with many answers to the hard questions about God and sin, tells us a lot about God's character and morality. It tells us about the kind of things God won't do, even if it would seem to be a better way to go about saving humans. And ultimately it tells us about the kind of people we will become as we become more like God.

Had God simply changed the character of Adam and Eve without their consent and cooperation he would, in effect, be creating new individuals. They wouldn't be Adam and Eve, they would be someone else in the bodies of Adam and Eve. Since the two were afraid of God when they heard him in the garden, it's certain they didn't yet trust him enough to let him change them.

There was one other problem. God had made lots of angels. There were a lot of perfect angel characters from which God could model new characters for Adam and Eve. But Adam and Eve weren't angels, and an angel character wouldn't be right for them. If Eve had sinned but Adam had trusted God and refused to join her, then Adam's human character would have been perfect.

But now that both humans had sinned, and now that both humans' characters were corrupted with sin, there was no perfect human character to use in restoring Adam and Eve.

But God didn't let that stop him. He had a plan. It was very expensive for him and for the universe, and it would be very expensive for the human race as well. But it offered hope that the same individuals who had mistrusted God could be restored to trust and eventually restored to a perfect relationship with God. In this plan God himself would become human and live on this planet as a human. Where Adam failed, he would succeed and would develop a perfect human character. This he could then offer as a gift to humans through all ages, not just the ones who lived after Jesus.

God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Corinthians 5:21)

In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering. Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers. (Hebrews 2:10, 11)

For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in [the flesh], in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit. (Romans 8:3, 4)

In the text from Romans we substituted “the flesh” for the words “sinful man” in the NIV. We do this because the clear meaning of the Greek is the human body or flesh. What Paul is telling us is that Jesus came to earth as a human and lived a sinless life. This proved that there was no “manufacturer's defect” in the creation of humanity. Having a human body did not mean one HAD to sin.

And once Jesus writes the perfect human character he developed into our hearts and minds we are able to meet the righteous requirements of God's law; not just the written ten commandment law, but the law of love which is God's flawless character. We are able to love as he loved.

“My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command.”
(John 15:13, 14)

When we study the life of Jesus we'll have a lot more to say about the example he set and how we can follow it and him. We will learn a lot about how we can have victory over sin by studying how Jesus led a sinless life.

And as the memory verse says, as we focus on the love and purity of Jesus we will be changed into that same image with ever-increasing glory.

Possible thought papers:

1. In one text in this lesson Jesus is not ashamed to call us brothers. In another he calls his followers “my friends.” Put both together and discuss what our relationship with Jesus can be.
2. If there is no “manufacturer's defect” in the human body, why do our bodies seem to want things that are harmful to us?
3. Recall a time you did something that seemed right at the time. Later you realized what you did hurt someone else. How did it feel to admit you were wrong?