

A Matter of the Heart



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The Nippenose Valley is a small bowl shaped valley in north-central Pennsylvania. It was in this valley that biologists discovered a new species of fish in a cave, a type of troglomorphic sculpin. (Probably not a name you refer to frequently!)

I think you'll agree, "troglomorphic" is a particularly intriguing descriptor. By definition: "Troglomorphism is the morphological adaptation of an organism to living in the constant darkness of caves."

"Morphological adaptation" refers to the changes in form or structure that have taken place over time—in this case, "characterized by features such as loss of pigment, reduced eyesight or blindness, and frequently with attenuated bodies and/or appendages."

Here's an image of such a sculpin:



Two phrases of the above description capture my attention; "living in the constant darkness" and "reduced eyesight or blindness".

I think this has a spiritual parallel (see if you agree): Could we say that *moral* troglomorphism is the inevitable regressive adaptation to living in the constant general darkness of a sin-filled world, characterized by features such as loss of sensitivity to sin (especially one's own) and progressive moral blindness?

Spiritual blindness is the natural condition of the human race before conversion; it is a result of Adam's sin and part of our inheritance from that fall from favor with God. But it seems in our day that moral blindness is rapidly spreading and deepening.

The cultural systems around us actually seek to diminish the light of Biblical truth and coerce people to accept this blindness. Many public and private policies appear to incentivize sin and irresponsibility, while others punish decency and responsibility.

Anchored to the Word

Jesus said, *“I am no longer in the world; and yet they themselves are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep them in Your name, the name which You have given Me, that they may be one even as We are”* (John 17:11).

Then, He said, *“They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth.”* (John 17:16-17)

In the world, but not of the world.

And, according to Jesus, the armor that prevents moral slippage is the Word of God, the Bible. *“Your word is truth.”*

If you don't maintain a steady, systematic diet of the Bible, you will drift away from the truth. It is inevitable, because the current of the culture is moving that way. You have to swim against that current by staying fresh in the Scriptures.

That's why I often encourage you to follow a reading plan that will take through the entire Bible at least once every year (like The BibleProject's "One Story that Leads to Jesus," which includes many helpful videos). That is what will set you apart as one of God's children, teach you to hear His voice, and build up your faith. The Bible is your anchor. Without it, you will drift, and your heart will darken and harden. That's just the way it is.

Hardness of Heart

Moral troglomorphism results in "hardened hearts." The hardened heart is a familiar moral condition, described in both Old and New Testaments, where it is also sometimes translated as "blindness" or *"stubborn minds."* Consider several examples:

Hardened hearts are displayed in obstinate rebellion against God and persistent wandering from His covering presence –

Hebrews 3:7 Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says,

“Oh, that today you would listen as He speaks!

3:8 “Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, in the day of testing in the wilderness.

3:9 “There your fathers tested Me and tried Me, and they saw My works for forty years.

3:10 “Therefore, I became provoked at that generation and said, ‘Their hearts are always wandering and they have not known My ways.’”

3:11 *“As I swore in My anger, ‘They will never enter My rest!’ ”*

More specifically, hardened hearts refuse to listen (pay attention) to what God says (or has said) –

Ezekiel 3:7 But the house of Israel is unwilling to listen to you (the prophet), because they are not willing to listen to Me, for the whole house of Israel is hard-headed and hard-hearted.

Hardened hearts are also displayed in avoiding doing good –

Isaiah 46:12 Listen to Me, you stubborn people, you who distance yourself from doing what is right.

Hardened hearts are insensitive (especially) toward the poor –

Deuteronomy 15:7 If a fellow Israelite from one of your villages in the land that the Lord your God is giving you should be poor, you must not harden your heart or be insensitive to his impoverished condition. ^{15:8} Instead, you must be sure to open your hand to him and generously lend him whatever he needs. ^{15:9} Be careful lest you entertain the wicked thought that the seventh year, the year of cancellation of debts, has almost arrived, and your attitude be wrong toward your impoverished fellow Israelite and you do not lend him anything; he will cry out to the Lord against you and you will be regarded as having sinned. ^{15:10} You must by all means lend to him and not be upset by doing it, for because of this the Lord your God will bless you in all your work and in everything you attempt. ^{15:11} There will never cease to be some poor people in the land; therefore, I am commanding you to make sure you open your hand to your fellow Israelites who are needy and poor in your land.

Hardened hearts are generally unfeeling (destitute of spiritual perception) –

Matthew 19:8 Jesus said to them, “Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because of your hard hearts, but from the beginning it was not this way.

Hardened hearts are closed-minded. Paul expresses some detail of this moral condition in his letter to the church in Ephesus:

Ephesians 4:17 With the Lord’s authority I say this: Live no longer as the Gentiles do, for they are hopelessly confused. ¹⁸ Their minds are full of darkness; they wander far from the life God gives because they have closed their minds and hardened their hearts against Him. ¹⁹ They have no sense of shame. They live for lustful pleasure and eagerly practice every kind of impurity. ²⁰ But that isn’t what you learned about Christ.

“*With the Lord’s authority*”—sounds like Pentecostal preaching! The “Gentiles” represent the unconverted people of the world, who live by the “futility of their reasoning.” You and I are witnesses today of such absurd and utterly foolish thinking in many of the philosophies and policies of the culture around us.

Hardness of heart is what we learn *apart from* Christ, and without the example of Jesus. It is the way of the world—man without God, flesh without Spirit, reason without faith. That is why Paul reminded us, *“That isn’t what you learned about Christ.”*

The next few verses address the core of moral troglomorphism in every age. See what a pitiful condition people fall into, when they resist God’s advances or drift from His truth:

- *Their minds are full of darkness*
- *They wander from the life God gives*
- *They have closed their minds*
- *They have hardened their hearts against God*
- *They have no sense of shame (become callous)*
- *They give themselves over to sensuality*
- *They indulge themselves in every kind of impurity*
- *They invent ways of doing evil* (added by Paul in Romans 1:30)

So, “hardness of heart” is not just a lack of empathy or compassion toward people in pain; it is a quality of heart *in relation to God*.

A Remedy

Knowing the natural course of increasing darkness in a sinful world, God has promised a remedy in Christ, and a preventive for our moral drift: a new heart!

Ezekiel 36:26 I will give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit within you. I will remove the heart of stone from your body and give you a heart of flesh.

Therefore, Paul urged us passionately:

“And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all He has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind He will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship Him. Don’t copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God’s will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.” (Romans 12:1-2)

“Let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think.” That’s a change of heart!

The way you act is a product of the way you speak. The way you speak is a product of the way you think. And the way you think is a product of the condition of your heart.

More than anything else, life is a matter of the heart.

How is your heart today?

Is its beat steady and calm (trusting in the Lord)?

Is it healthy (following in the way of the Lord)?

Is its beat strong (full of light and courage)?

If you need a spiritual heart change (even an entire replacement (as Ezekiel predicted), or if you need a cleansing or renewal or a fresh anointing of God's Spirit in your spirit, bow before the Lord Jesus Christ today and give Him your hard heart, asking Him to take control of your life and renew your heart.