

The Mind Justifies What the Heart Has Chosen: A Biblical Perspective

Introduction:

In biblical theology, the heart and mind are viewed as distinct but intimately related aspects of a person. The “heart” is often depicted as the centre of a person’s emotions, desires and will, while the “mind” is represents understanding, reasoning and thought. The saying, “the mind justifies what the heart has chosen,” suggests that people often make decisions driven by their emotions or desires, and then use their intellect to rationalise or defend those decisions. This dynamic is particularly significant from a biblical perspective, where the heart and mind can either align with God’s Will or stray away from it. Many insights are offered in the Bible into how this relationship and interaction plays out in human behaviour, morality and spirituality. This essay will explore the interplay between the heart and the mind from a biblical standpoint, focusing on how Scripture reveals the dangers of allowing the heart to lead astray and how the mind subsequently justifies these choices. It will also examine how Scripture encourages transformation of both the heart and the mind in alignment with God’s truth.

The Deceitfulness of the Heart

We are born into a fallen world – our default nature is one of sin and selfishness. A key teaching and Biblical concept is that the heart has a tendency towards deceit. The prophet Jeremiah highlighted this when he said: "The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked: who can know it?"¹ This verse emphasizes how human beings are inherently inclined toward sin due to the fall², and that the heart, as the centre of desires and emotions, can lead individuals into deception. When people follow the desires of their hearts without considering God’s Will, they often make decisions that lead them away from righteousness.

However, the deceitful nature of the heart is only a part of the problem. What follows is that the mind often works to justify the decisions that the heart makes. A person may be driven by ambition, lust or anger and once the decision has been made emotionally, the mind steps in to rationalise. Let me use a personal example from my own childhood. My parents bought my brother a beautiful yellow blow up dinghy boat for Christmas one year and I coveted this gift. I justified my envy by convincing myself that I deserved that boat and that my brother was undeserving. I took a nail and I punctured the boat, thereby ensuring my brother could not get to use it on Christmas day. My mind became complicit in my heart's deceit and reinforced the wrong decision instead of correcting it.

Rationalization Darkens the Mind

The concept of the heart leading astray and the mind justifying it, is powerfully depicted in the book of Romans in the bible. The apostle Paul describes a process by which people, although they knew the truth about God, chose not to honour Him. Their hearts were filled with desires for things other than God and this led them away from Him. Once the heart has turned away from God, the mind follows and its reasoning becomes useless. "...because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened.."3

This concept of darkening of the mind is not only a loss of intellectual capacity; it is moral and spiritual blindness. The heart, having chosen a path away from God, influences the mind to rationalise and justify that path. This creates a cycle where the heart and the mind work together to perpetuate sin and the enemy uses this to separate us from God. Paul goes on later in the same chapter to explain that when the mind no longer aligns with God's truth, it becomes depraved and corrupt. It loses

the ability to accurately distinguish right from wrong, having been stained by the sinful choices of the heart.⁴ Looking back on my own life, there are many instances where I can clearly see how this cycle was evident and the distinction between right and wrong had become so muddied that I did not even have the need any more to rationalise any decisions in my mind because it had been led so far astray by my own selfish desires. I recognise the times where God left me to my own devices and I ultimately paid very high penalties for the wrong and immoral decisions I made.

Guarding the Heart

Recognising the heart's potential for deceit and the mind's inclination to rationalise poor choices, the Bible often urges believers to diligently protect their hearts. King Solomon states it clearly: "Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it."⁵ This verse emphasizes the crucial role of the heart in shaping a person's life. Because the heart influences decisions and actions, it is essential to guard it carefully, because if the heart is led astray the mind will naturally follow resulting in rationalisations that support sinful decisions.

Guarding the heart involves surrendering your desires and emotions to God and aligning them with His will. When the heart is properly oriented toward God, the mind is less inclined to rationalise sinful behaviour and instead will strive to make decisions consistent with biblical principles and values. On the other hand, if the heart is not kept in check, it becomes susceptible to desires that oppose God's Will, causing the mind to dangerously rationalise those desires.

In my own life, if I had been more diligent in guarding my heart, I would have saved myself from a lot of pain and hurt that could have been avoided. Even now, I can feel my mind fighting to excuse past sins and trying to justify behaviours because I was unsaved. The fact is, I knew deep down that the desires I was acting upon were

wrong, and there is no way of excusing this – the path forward requires repentance and a commitment to transformation.

Progressing from Desire to Sin

The relationship between the heart and the mind is also explored in the book of James in the New Testament of the Bible. We read about how temptation, arising from the heart's desires, leads to sin. Once the heart has chosen to entertain temptation, the mind often engages in rationalizing that choice and instead of resisting temptation through prayer or the application of God's Word, the mind collaborates with the heart to justify sinful behaviour. As James states: "But each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death."⁶

For instance, someone who desires worldly riches may be tempted to cheat or steal to achieve that goal. Rather than rejecting the temptation, the heart may embrace the desire for material gain, and the mind will work to justify that behaviour. Perhaps the mind will excuse the seriousness of the sin or claim that the person deserves the riches more than someone else. This progression from desire to sin illustrates the danger of allowing the heart to lead and the mind to follow in justifying immoral choices.

It is, in essence, the struggle between knowing and understanding Biblical principles and values and the act of applying them.

The Need for a Transformed Heart and Mind

Because the heart is prone to deceit and the mind rationalises sinful behaviour, the Bible urges the transformation of both heart and mind. In *Romans 12:2*, Paul writes,

“Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is - His good, pleasing and perfect will.”⁷

Contemporary culture and ideologies are grounded in underlying presuppositions. Effective reasoning relies on recognizing and understanding these foundational assumptions.⁸ The renewal of the mind is essential for discerning God’s will and resisting the temptations that come from the desires of the heart. When the mind is renewed by God’s Word and Spirit, it is better equipped to challenge the heart’s deceptive inclinations rather than justify them.

In the same way, the Bible emphasizes the importance of a transformed heart. *Ezekiel 36:26* offers God’s promise: “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.”⁹ This new heart is one that desires to do what is right in God’s eyes and is eager to respond to His will. When the heart is transformed by God, the mind no longer needs to engage in rationalizations for sinful behaviour; instead, both the heart and mind work together to pursue righteousness.

The Role of the Holy Spirit

The transformation of the heart and mind cannot be achieved solely by human effort. According to the Bible, the Holy Spirit is essential in this process. The Holy Spirit convicts the heart of sin, leads the mind to understand God’s truth, and empowers believers to live in obedience to God. Jesus affirms this in John 16:13, saying, “However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come.”¹⁰ By surrendering to the Holy Spirit, believers are able to overcome the heart's deceit and the mind's justifications.

Conclusion

From a biblical perspective, the mind will often justify what the heart has chosen, especially when those desires go against God's will. The Bible warns about the deceitfulness of the heart and the futility of the mind when separated from God's truth. Yet, Scripture also provides hope through transformation. By renewing the mind and receiving a new heart, believers can bring their desires and reasoning in line with God's will. It is ultimately through the Holy Spirit's work that both the heart and mind are aligned with God's truth, empowering believers to resist the temptation to justify sin and pursue righteousness.

ENDNOTES

1. *The Holy Bible*, Jeremiah 17:9, New King James Version
2. *The Holy Bible*, Genesis 3, New King James Version
3. *The Holy Bible*, Romans 1:21, New King James Version
4. *The Holy Bible*, Romans 1:28, New King James Version
5. *The Holy Bible* (2024), Proverbs 4:23, New International Version. Available at <https://www.bible.com/bible/111/PRO.4.23> (Accessed 7 September 2024).
6. *The Holy Bible*, James 1:14-15, New King James Version
7. *The Holy Bible* (2024), Romans 12:2, New International Version. Available at <https://www.bible.com/bible/111/PRO.4.23> (Accessed 20 September 2024).
8. Peacocke, Dennis (2023): *GoBusiness 100: Lesson 13 Teaching Manual*.
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9. *The Holy Bible*, Ezekiel 36:26, New King James Version
10. *The Holy Bible*, John 16:13, New King James Version

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