

## The Animating Spirit

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There is a lurking assumption about humanity in this text, and it's not a popular one—*humanity is essentially bad*. God says: You profaned my name; I must cleanse you. In fact, you're so bad, you need more than a cleaning; you need a new heart. But today, we like to think we're essentially good. Sure we make some bad decisions now and then, but that doesn't make us bad. It just makes us a poor judge. But if you follow this reasoning out, that people are essentially good and that you are essentially *right* most of the time, how do we account for all the chaos in the world? You have to sink your hope in one group (good) and disparage the other (bad). The Right or the Left. *This* is incredibly polarizing, disruptive to society. You have to essentially demonize one half of the population to prop up your own party, your own self perception that you are right and good most of the time. But what if we're wrong? What if God is right? What if we are essentially bad? Then we need the *cleansing, replacing, animating* power of this passage more than we can imagine.

### Cleansing the Temple

Israel's prophet Ezekiel lifts his eyes toward God's temple, sees through the north gate entrance, and sees an "[image of jealousy](#)" (5). Something been dragged into God's temple that's incited his jealousy. The image is an idol, and the temple God's dwelling place, where his glory cloud descended, where there were to be *no other gods: I will be your God, and you will be my people*. But Israel has dragged this idol, not just into their lives but into *God's very house!* Adultery in the marriage bed. A watershed event ensues—God's glory (kavod: weightiness) departs from the temple. Israel is sent into exile. This is also our story; we come into this world with bodies, a kind of mini-temple, which is also devoid of the glory, the weight, the presence of God. So to fill the void, we drag things into our lives in search of weight. A relationship, a career, a political party, a social issue, and *we cling to it*. When I was dating Robie, she became the thing I looked to weight. We must have broken up and got back together ten times. Why? I was clingy, emotionally volatile, over the top romantic and utter despair when we weren't together. She wasn't sure if I really loved *her* or the idea of being married. What do you cling to? What have you dragged into the temple? You'll know it because it makes you volatile. You protect at all costs. Being right? Being loved? Being good? Being seen? Whatever it is, it rules you. It keeps you up at night, sends you into worry during the day. It doesn't just rule you; it *defiles* you. When we cozy up to an idol, its sacrilege, its impiety rubs off on us. The impiety of my idolatry erupted our second year of marriage. I yelled, cursed, and threw things because she didn't measure up to my God-sized expectations. I loved the *idea* of a wife more than I loved my wife herself. Some of you love the idea of Christianity more than Christ himself; the idea of mission more than the God of mission; the notion of grace more than the God of grace. Until we release our image of jealousy, we cannot enjoy the presence of glory. What's your image? Will you release it or continue to place deity-sized expectations on it? When Jesus was asked by religious ruler how to enter the kingdom of God he replied, "[Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God](#)" (Jn 3:5). Want to enter the kingdom? Want the glory, the weight, the happiness to enter you? Release your idol. Ask God to cleanse you. He's exceedingly glad to do it: [I will sprinkle clean water on](#)

you and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. It is a glorious thing to be sprinkled clean, forgiven.

### Replacing the Heart

All cleaned up, Israel is sent back into the land of God's holy presence, *but what will keep them from drifting to old idols, breaking God's commands, returning to exile? They need more than cleansing; they need a new heart.* In Hebrew thought, the *heart* was the motivational center of an individual. A brewery for identity, but *the brew was bad; heart made of stone*. In Egyptian mummification, the heart was taken out of the body and replaced with a stone inscribed with a symbol for eternal life. Why? The thinking was when they were judged in the afterlife, their heart would betray them. Show who they really were and disqualify them for eternal life. But with the heart of stone, they could trick the god to secure renewal of life. *You might say the Egyptians were more honest with themselves than we are.* They knew they weren't essentially good, and they knew they deserved judgment. That's why they tried to trick the gods. Problem is, it doesn't work with the *real* God, Yahweh—the one who was, who is, and is to come—who sees through stone. What does he see? If I serve a lot, go to church regularly, in a CG and FC, and don't make too many moral blunders, God will look at my self-inscribed life and grant eternity. You know you're doing this if you get down on yourself for not doing more, or if you try to justify reasons why you do less. A little voice interrogates or praises you. We're acting as though we can trick God, as if he believes, Do more, and I will accept you. Religious people, people on the right, aren't the only ones who do this. In a recent NY Times piece, **Julia Scheers** describes her journey of growing up in a religious home, and being taught about sin. As she grew older, she realized her notions of sin had evolved. Her goal wasn't to gain admittance into heaven; there is no heaven, instead, she became occupied with the "real world concerns of injustice and inequality." She writes, To me, the greatest sin of all is failing to be an engaged citizen of the world. She goes on to describe raising her children "without sin." Instead, she's raising her children based on "*my moral code.*" Gives a glowing description of their activism, especially her daughter's "Kids for Hillary" pantsuit flashmob, which got picked up by a couple networks. Now how has she fallen into the same trap as the religious person, person on right? She hasn't escaped sin; she's simply restricted it to injustice and inequality (she is right; they are sinful). She hasn't escaped judgment; she judges her children based on her new moral code. She's saying, if you march, if you protest, if you support this party, I accept you. Despite her enlightened secular thinking, she cannot escape judgment, morality, or sin. Yahweh, of course, is not deceived by progressive or conservative tactics. He sees she has dragged *herself* into the center of the temple, where progressive views replace God's commands. He sees where the right drags themselves into the temple. He sees *you* dragging *yourself* your idol into center of the temple. Our motivational center is corrupt. Is it any wonder that we are weightless, drifting in search of joy? Stone-cold, we can't give ourselves a new heart. So God does what we cannot do; removes the deceitful, heart of stone and replaces it, not with a fake, but with the real deal, a heart of flesh, "**And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh**" (26). He makes us truly human, but you have to ask. You have to seek. You have to be brutally honest about your heart condition and cry out for salvation. To the Savior: cleanse me; replace my heart!

## The Animating Spirit

Notice it's not enough to be cleansed, to receive a new heart. The new heart has to be *animated* by a new Spirit, *And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules* (27). When we turn from our idols and put our faith in Jesus, we're not just cleansed; we're given an animating Spirit, a new weight, a new significance. True glory is brought back into the temple *when the Spirit* is placed *in you*. As a result, you'll be careful to keep his commands—to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God. Why do I struggle? You're seeking animation, power, life, from other things: a job well done, a thriving relationship, a moral code, activism, an idol. And it's lifeless. But when the Spirit is charging our heart with God's love, when we're seeking his filling and presence, we obey, not to be significant, but because we are significant in Christ! Because the glory has returned. The Spirit makes all the difference. He animates us with the power of God's love: "*God's love is poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us*" (Rom 5:5). One translation says, his love is "shed abroad" in our hearts *through the Spirit*. It so encompasses us that we don't have to demonize the Right or the Left. We don't have to drag lifeless idols into the temple. Why? Next verse, *For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly*" (Ro 5:6). Un-godly. We weren't good. Christ dies for our moral weakness, our moral pretension and religious pretending. He dies for putting ourselves smack dab at the entrance of the temple! And lavishes us with his love. The Spirit pumps the unchanging, undying love of God through our new heart so our obedience isn't for eternal life; its from eternal life! So we're attentive to God's Word, fresh electrical charges of God's love, incline us *not to be "good" but to obey because he's replaced our heart*. This is what the Spirit does, and if he's not doing it in your life you have to ask yourself, Do I really have a new heart? Or am I operating with a fossilized heart? Good news: God stands ready to cleanse, to replace, and to animate your heart. If you've dragged an idol in, he's ready *to flood your heart with his love*. Turn to Christ, cling to the Spirit, obey God's Word.