

# The Perfect Heart

by Catherine Booth

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*A perfect heart towards God means being sincere and thorough in one's love and service, and being whole-hearted in love and thorough out-and-out in service.*

**Scripture:** Genesis 15:6, 2 Chronicles 16:9, Psalm 37:37, Matthew 5:48, 1 Corinthians 2:6, 2 Timothy 3:17

**Topics:** "Wholehearted Devotion", "Spiritual Obedience"

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## Description

Catherine Booth preaches on the story of King Asa from 2 Chronicles 16:9, highlighting the importance of having a perfect heart towards God. She emphasizes how God seeks those who are loyal, obedient, and trusting in Him wholeheartedly, using examples from David, Paul, and Abraham to illustrate the characteristics of a perfect heart. Catherine Booth warns against being partial in our devotion to God, urging believers to be sincere and thorough in their love and service to experience God's strength and favor in their lives.

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## Transcript

2 CHRONICLES 16:9.--"For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him."

You are, most of you, aware that this passage occurs, in the history of Asa, one of the most godly and devoted kings that ever sat upon the throne of Judah. We are told in the fourteenth chapter that he commenced his reign by setting himself to destroy the idolatry into which the whole nation had been betrayed by its former ruler, and to restore the worship and service of the God of Israel. He set himself to bring back the nation to its allegiance and obedience to God; and his success is a great encouragement to any who shall set themselves, single-handed, and with a perfect heart towards God, to do this in any circle, under any circumstances.

He succeeded. God blessed him in his efforts to purge his kingdom inside, and God also delivered him from his enemies outside, and enabled him by His power to defeat the king of Ethiopia, who came against him with an exceeding great army, because King Asa was perfect in his heart towards God.

When this king came up against him, Asa went and cried unto the Lord and cast himself upon his God, trusting Him to deliver him, and God never disappointed any man, either before or since Asa's day, who did that. God delivered his enemies into his hand, and made him a successful and happy king over a prosperous and increasing people.

But by-and-bye, after many years, for Asa was perfect in his heart towards the Lord for many years of his long reign; but whether it were, as, alas! too often happens, that a life of ease and prosperity brought forth in Asa the results of partial backsliding, we know not; but, as years went on, another war was declared, and this time it was the King of Israel who came up against the King of Judah. What did Asa do? Did he go, as formerly, and cry unto the Lord, and put his battle into His hands? No, he did not. He had left his first love; he had become, in a measure, untrue to the Lord God of Israel. He forgot where his strength lay; his spiritual perceptions had become dim; he had lost his realisation of God's ability to help and deliver him out of the hands of his enemies, and so he fell back upon worldly policy. He went down to Assyria and courted Ben-hadad, the King of Assyria, and said, 'Come and help me, that my enemies may depart, for I am sore pressed.' Ah! what a picture of backsliders. On another occasion, when Jehoshaphat made an ungodly alliance, a prophet met him and said, "Shouldest thou help the ungodly and love them that hate the Lord?" No man ever did this without being sorely whipped, as poor Asa was. He succeeded, indeed, in the battle, and won the victory. It was a lawful end, but he accomplished it by unlawful means. He won the victory, and, I dare say, he was congratulating himself and stroking his beard in self-complacency, when, lo! the prophet comes to deliver God's message to him, and he says:

"Because thou hast relied on the King of Syria, and not relied on the Lord thy God, therefore is the host of the King of Syria escaped out of thine hand.

"Were not the Ethiopians and the Lubims a huge host, with very many chariots and horsemen? Yet, because thou didst rely on the Lord, he delivered them into thine hand.

"For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the earth, to show himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him. Herein thou hast done foolishly; therefore from henceforth thou shalt have wars." ?????? the very thing he went to Assyria to seek to avoid. He wanted peace, not war, and he went down to Assyria to enable him to spend the remainder of his days in peace, when, lo! the Word of God goes forth, "Thou shalt have wars." He was chastised in the very thing for which he sold himself and his God. "Be sure your sin will find you out." It is God's way to chastise His children by those very things in which they sell His interests. "Thou shalt have wars."

But we want to deal specially with the lesson which the prophet draws from this event; for he says, 'Wherefore didst thou go to Assyria? Wherefore hast thou sinned against God? Hast thou forgotten who the God of Israel was? Didst thou not know that the eyes of the Lord run throughout the whole earth?' He would have helped thee now, Asa, as much as in the past. He will help any man who is whole-hearted towards Him--that trusts in Him. Now, I say, this is the lesson which the prophet draws, not only for Asa, but for all the Asas since his day and those who are yet to come, for every man and woman who professes to be a servant of God, the prophet sounds down to the ages that "the eyes of the Lord ran to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect towards him."

Now, what is this perfect heart? "Ah!" you say, "that is the point." Yes, that is the point, and we will try to show what kind of a heart this is. It must be A DIFFERENT KIND OF HEART TO HEARTS IN GENERAL; all hearts are not perfect towards God, or else His eyes would not have to be running to and fro throughout the earth to find them. They would be plentiful enough if they were the common sort of hearts, but evidently they are a different kind of hearts to ordinary hearts. And another thing is evident on the face of the text, that these kinds of hearts are very precious in the sight of God. He delights in them; He sets greater store by one such heart than He does by thousands of the other kinds of hearts, of which there are

so many. I say, these two lessons everybody with common sense will admit at once--that these hearts are not the common hearts, and that they are very precious in the sight of God.

Now, what is the meaning of this term "perfect heart," referring to the hearts of God's children all the way through the Bible? As you know, I like to establish my points in the mouths of two or three witnesses. I will give you two or three texts, that we may find out God's meaning of this term, and then we will give you the very lowest rendering where all schools are agreed, for I don't want controversy. We will just look at Psalm 37:37. "Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright: for the end of that man is peace." There are such people as God means in that verse. Psalm 64:4. "That they may shoot in secret at the perfect," who have always been a favourite target for the Devil. He does not shoot much at people whose hearts are imperfect towards the Lord. It is at those perfect people he shoots. "Suddenly do they shoot at him," perhaps while he is thinking they are his friends. "Suddenly they shoot and fear not."

"Be ye perfect," says the Saviour, "even as your Father which is in Heaven is perfect." That means something. We will try to find out what it does mean (Matthew 19:21):

"Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me."

And, again, at 1 Corinthians 2:6. "Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect."

And (2 Timothy 3:17).

"That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."

There are numbers of others, but these are samples, and I suppose all Christians attach some idea to these terms. They must be terms signifying a great difference between the persons who are spoken of and ordinary men and women. Now, what do they mean? Well, the very lowest rendering of all divines and all schools is this, that it means sincerity and thoroughness. Well, that is all I want. Give me a man sincere and thorough in his love, and that is all I want; that will stretch through all the ramifications of his existence; it will go to the ends of his fingers and his toes, through his eyes, and through his tongue, to his wife and to his family, to his shop, and to his business, and to his circle in the world. That is what I mean by HOLINESS! Then, taking the lowest translation, it means that a man is whole-hearted in love, and thorough out-and-out in service! (Amen.) In behalf of that man who is thus perfect towards God, God will indeed show Himself strong in more ways than one.

This cannot mean a merely natural heart, it must mean a renewed heart, because there are no perfect hearts by nature. There is no one in this sense that doeth good and sinneth not, for every child of Adam has gone astray like a lost sheep, has done the things he ought not, and left undone the things he ought to have done, and the whole world has become guilty before God. There are no naturally perfect hearts. It must mean, then, a heart renewed by the Holy Ghost, put right with God, and then kept right. A heart cannot be kept right until it has been put right, and that is the secret of the failure with some of you. You are trying to bring forth fruits before the tree is planted. You are looking for the fruits of a perfect heart before you have got one. You may well be disappointed. You must get your heart renewed, and then kept right by the power of the Holy Ghost.

Then, what does this perfect heart imply?

1st. A heart perfect in its loyalty to God, thoroughly given over to God's side, irrespective of consequences, LOYAL. These are the hearts that God wants. This was the difference between David and Saul. There was not so much difference in the greater part of Saul's outward life, when compared with the life of David. It was only the Prophet Samuel, perhaps, who knew the difference, and a few close observers; but the difference was, that David was loyal to God, and God calls him, for this reason, a man after His own heart.

From the first calling of David from the sheepfolds, right to the end, with one or two exceptions, during the whole of his life, he was loyal to God, and, if you will carefully search his history, you will find that in all his wars and all his dealings with the nations round about, and with the leaders of affairs in his own kingdom--in everything, David was loyal to God. The interests of God's kingdom lay at David's heart--not his own honour, ease, or aggrandisement--not his own fame or riches, or building himself a house--it was the house of his God that was dear to his heart. He was loyal; whereas Saul was loyal only as far as it served his own purposes and interests. Oh! how many such Sauls there are in these days. When God's commandments went counter to his notions, he openly set God at naught, and did as he liked. He sacrificed God's interests to his own. He was unloyal at heart, hence he was a traitor, and never could learn the way of the Lord. He was never perfect towards the Lord his God, and, at last, God cast him off, and Samuel did also, and you know what his end was. Just the difference between the two--loyal and unloyal.

A heart perfect towards God! What does it mean? It means: 2nd. Perfect in its obedience. That man or woman who has this kind of a heart ceases to pick and choose amongst the commandments of God which he shall obey and which not--he ceases to have his own will, though sometimes he may have a struggle with his own will and the way that God may call him to take, may look to him as if it were a dangerous or risky way, and he may wait a little bit to be thoroughly satisfied; but, when once satisfied that it is God's way, the true child will not hesitate. He confers not with flesh and blood; but on he goes, irrespective of consequences. This was Paul's kind of obedience. He conferred not with flesh and blood; he counted all things dung and dross, and he went on doing so to the end--thorough in his obedience.

People come to us and want to know what they are to do; they feel that they are only half-hearted in God's service; they have neither joy nor power, and say, "What must I do?" We take, as God helps us, the dissecting knife, and try to find out the difficulty. We get them down under the blaze of the Holy Spirit's light, and try to probe them and find where they are wrong. Perhaps the Lord leads us to the sore spot, and we point out the difficulty, but, instead of obeying, they shrink away. They look ahead, and they see that to obey the light will involve loss of some kind--perhaps reputation, wealth, family associations, ease, or loss of friends, loss of temporal comforts, loss of a good business. Loss is in the background, and they see it. They know where we are leading them to, and they slip back; they do not want to see, and yet they do not want to consider themselves dishonest, so they turn their heads away, and will not look in the direction of the light, smoothing it all over, and singing

--"Were the whole realm of nature mine, That were an off'ring far too small," &c.

That is not a perfect heart, but a partial heart towards the Lord God.

The partial heart, so common, alas, now-a-days, wants to serve God a little. It is willing to go a little way with God, but not all the way; so that, taking the lowest interpretation, that is not a perfect heart towards the Lord. Can it be expected that the Lord should show Himself strong in behalf of such people? Do you

think you would, if you were God?

Suppose you were a king, and had a prince or statesman who was serving you very valiantly and devotedly, while it suited himself; but, suppose the tables were turned, and you were dethroned and cast away into exile, your name being bandied about the nation, where you once reigned as king, in disgrace and dishonour; suppose this statesman gave you up, and said, 'Oh! I am going to be on the side of the reigning monarch. I was very devoted to this man while he reigned, but I cannot afford to be devoted to him now his interests draggle in the dust; I must be on the winning side.'

What would you think of such a man? And if you were restored to your kingdom and power, would you show yourself strong on behalf of such a man? No; you would remember, as David did, the man who cursed you. But if you had a prince or statesman who followed you into exile, who ministered to you in secret, who tried to hold up your interests, who contended for your righteousness and justice, and held up your name and tried to make the people see that you were a good and true man, who held on to you, when all the nation was calling you a traitor--if you came back to your throne, would you not show yourself strong in behalf of that man?

Of course you would. The Lord says He will show Himself strong in behalf of those of such a heart towards Him, You masters here have a servant--a clever, smart man; you know how well he can serve you, and how valuable he can be, and would be, if he were true; but you have reason to believe that he will only go with you as far as it will be for his own interests; he will serve you as far as he can serve himself, too, but, if he can get up by putting you down, you may lie there.

What would you say to such a man? You would say, 'I shall never show myself strong for him.' So God is not likely to show himself strong for people who are not of a perfect heart. A lady said to me, 'I have been doing this and doing that for years, but I have no power; why don't I have it?' I said, 'Because you are not true to God. He will give it to anybody who is true to Him, and He can see into your heart, and knows you are not.' Why will He not show Himself strong in your behalf?

Because you do not show yourself thorough in His behalf. The moment you show yourself thorough, that moment will He show Himself strong for you. If you had been in Daniel's place you would not have done as he did. Daniel was one of the perfect-hearted men; he served his God when he was in prosperity. He set his window open every day. Then his enemies got round the king to make a decree that no man should pray but to this king for so many days. 'Now,' they said, 'We shall have him.'

But Daniel just did as he was wont, he went and prayed with his window open. You say, 'That was demonstrative religion, that was courting opposition. What need was there for him to make this display; could he not have shut the window and gone into an inner room. That was just like you Salvation Army people, you always make a demonstration. Why could he not have gone into an inner chamber and prayed?' Because he would be thorough for his God in adversity, in the face of enemies, as he was in prosperity. So he went and prayed with open window to the God of Heaven, and because HE is the God of Heaven, He is able to take care of His own. His heart was perfect towards the Lord his God.

3rd. This perfect heart is perfect in its trust; and, perhaps, that ought to have come first, for it is the very root of all. Oh, how beautiful Abraham was in the eyes of God; how God gloried over him. How do I know that Abraham had a perfect heart towards God? Because he trusted Him. No other proof--no less proof--would have been of any use. I dare say he was compassed with infirmities, had many erroneous views, manward and earthward, but his heart was perfect towards God. Do you think God would have

failed in His promise to Abraham? Abraham trusted Him almost to the blood of Isaac, and God showed Himself strong in his behalf, and delivered him, and made him the Father of the Faithful; crowned him with everlasting honour, so that his name, from generation to generation, has been a pillar of strength to the Lord's people, and a crown of glory to his God.

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