

How Much Room Is in Your Heart?

by Phil Beach Jr.

Having a heart open to God's love and interests is the key to a fulfilling and meaningful life.

Scripture: Matthew 13:22, Romans 12:10, 1 Corinthians 6:11, 2 Corinthians 6:11, Galatians 5:13, Philippians 2:3, Colossians 3:23, 1 Peter 4:10, 1 John 2:15, 1 John 3:16

Topics: "Heart Condition", "Godly Love"

Description

Phil Beach Jr. reflects on Paul's grief over the church in Corinth, emphasizing the danger of closing our hearts to the Lord's interests and the consequences of falling away from His Word. Paul's open heart and mouth towards the Corinthians reveal his deep care and willingness to share God's love and truth. The lack of room in the Corinthians' hearts led to division, envy, and a departure from God's wisdom to human wisdom, causing suffering and deception. Beach urges listeners to examine their hearts, ensure they prioritize the Lord's interests, and be filled with the love of God to serve selflessly and sacrificially.

Transcript

"Oh ye Corinthians, our mouth is open unto you, our heart is enlarged. You are not straightened in us, but you are straightened in your own bowels." 1 Cor. 6 :11-12. While pondering this scripture, the Lord reminded me of the story of Paul's grief regarding the church in Corinth. Paul was sent by the Lord to the city of Corinth. There, he preached the gospel and the Lord saved many folks. For a few years, Paul spent his days in Corinth, praying with the new group of believers and teaching them God's Word.

He met with them in their homes to eat, publicly preached and taught the Word of God, and prayed for them. There was a wonderful heart-felt love and care that Paul had with these saints. However, after Paul left the city, something happened to the hearts of these believers. They no longer had room for Paul. For some reason, they decided to close their hearts to Paul and no longer had the affection for him that they once had. At one time, they had lots of room in their hearts for Paul.

I'm sure they made time to pray with and for Paul as well as made time to help Paul out in his labors among the other believers in Corinth. There is evidence that because their hearts had room for Paul and the Lord's interests that Paul represented; they were willing to give up self-centered interests. But, after they closed their hearts, they seemed to fall away from the Lord's interests and become filled with other interests. This resulted in their lives becoming empty and broken up.

Many of them began to suffer in their marriages. There was lots of envy, jealousy and divisions among them. Christ and His wisdom were being substituted for human wisdom. Instead of working out problems among themselves, they were taking each other to court and shaming the name of the Lord. Additionally, because they had no room in their hearts anymore for the Lord's interests, they were being deceived by Satan from the simplicity of serving God and one another in love. Paul became very concerned for them.

When they were being corrected for their hardness of heart, there was no evidence of genuine repentance. This forced Paul to challenge them to examine themselves to be sure they were true followers of Christ. All this was happening because they no longer had room in their hearts for the Lord's interests or for His Word. Let's look more closely at this and as we do, let's remember that this can happen to us too, resulting in the same consequences. Our Heart and Mouth Are Open Paul begins in this scripture to speak directly to the saints.

"Oh you Corinthians...!" What passion and feeling you can sense in this statement. Paul must have been feeling a lot of sorrow and sadness as he sensed the closed hearts of these dear saints. Sometimes, I feel that my heart gets closed also to the Lord's interests because of the cares of this life. While praying, it seems the Lord will sometimes say to me what He was saying to these believers. He says my name, "oh, Phil...open up your heart to Me." Oh yes, the Lord will be very personal with us if we will listen.

It is very easy to become distracted from having a heart open to the Lord's burdens and interests. Jesus said that the cares of this life, together with the deceitfulness of riches can close up our hearts to the Lord. Only as we stay very close to Him can we be kept from this snare. Paul then says that his mouth and heart were wide open towards these saints. This is a very challenging and searching statement from Paul. Paul had such a heart of God's love and care for these saints that he could say that his mouth was wide open.

His words were filled with care, truth and communication with these believers. He was reminding them of how honest he had been with them and how he always was willing to speak, in love, the truth to them. That had not changed at all. Paul was still feeling the same way toward these saints. He longed to keep sharing God's Word, love and truth with them too, but knew that unless they opened up their hearts once again, he was unable to. Paul also tells them that his heart was open as well.

This represents a heart that had much room for them, to bear their pains and sorrows, to care for and love them. Paul in many places tells us that he prayed night and day for the churches that he helped to bring into existence. Paul was prepared to give his very life for all the saints and to live a sacrificial life for their sakes so he could serve them and bring the Word of God to them. In order for Paul to have such a large heart with room to care for the Lord's flock as he did, he had to be willing to forsake his own self-interests.

Paul, in one place tells us that at one time in his life he was proud of his position as a Pharisee. He liked being looked up to as a leader and being esteemed by others as a spiritual guide. Additionally, Paul was very proud of his religious heritage. But once he met Jesus Christ, he was willing to give all that up. He suffered the loss of all things so that he may know Jesus and follow Him. Paul knew that to follow Jesus required that he lose all his pride and self-serving ambitions.

Paul had to become willing to live a very hard life to follow the Lord. In many places Paul shows us the many ways he suffered because of following the Lord Jesus and forsaking his own worldly dreams and desires. We too will suffer if we ask the Lord to give us a heart that has room in it for the Lord's interests, like Paul had. You Lack Room in Your Heart After Paul explained to these believers that his own heart had lots of room for them, he went on to tell them that it was their hearts that had become closed.

Paul was trying to help the Corinthians to see that his own heart was still very much open toward them. His affection for them was growing, not diminishing! Then he went on to tell them that they were not closed out of his heart but that they had closed him out of their hearts. The Greek word Paul used to describe their heart condition toward him was "stenochoreisthe". This means to be severely restricted, to lack room. How sad for this to happen. Paul was very upset about this.

At one time, these dear saints had so much room in their hearts for the Lord and now, they had little or no room. What happened? It is so easy to fill our hearts with things and to stuff them so full of our own interests that we no longer have room for what really matters! There is evidence that part of the reason why these saints ended up having a closed heart was because they were being seduced by false teachers. These teachers were abusing them by charging them for the gospel.

They also were bad-mouthing Paul and making him appear as a "loser", because he did not make much of himself and practice bragging and boasting, like these false teachers loved to do. These false teachers also loved to compare themselves among themselves, liked to lift each other up, liked to demand that their followers honor them and pay them large amounts of money for their labor. They were pretending to be concerned for the flock but were in fact concerned about their own names and selfish ambitions alone.

All they wanted to do was to build their own kingdoms, using the name of the Lord to do so. Because the flock was led astray by these false teachers, they eventually closed their hearts to Paul. This can happen to us, dear ones, if we are not careful to guard our hearts. False teachers will always teach us a message that does not require us to deny our sinful ways. They will feed us with a word that encourages us to love money, worldly fame, seek after possessions and place much value on getting whatever we want.

If we embrace such teaching, it will only be a matter of time before our hearts no longer have room in them for the Lord's Word or His interests and servants who are bringing us His Words of life and truth. We are also in danger of passing this condition down to our children. Our children will become what they are feeding upon. What are you feeding your children? What are you allowing your children to feed upon? We must not be surprised if our children grow up with no hunger for the Lord or no room in their hearts for the things of God if we allowed them to feed on worldly and unprofitable things while growing up.

Recently a friend of mine at work told me that his son has a bad temper. He gets angry often. I asked him what kind of music he listens to. He said that his son listens to lots of loud music that is filled with lyrics that encourage anger, murder, hate and rebellion. You see beloved, we do become what we feed on. What are we feeding on and what are we allowing our children to feed on? Yes, we must be willing to confess that our hearts, like the Corinthians, are for the most part, not open to the Lord's interests.

They are often filled with worry and the cares of this life. Or maybe we are just trying to make ends meet and are just so tired; we have no energy or room in our hearts to invite the Lord's interests to live in us. We need the Lord to give us an honest heart in this matter so that we can grow in our capacity to have room for the Lord's heart to live in our hearts. Room in Our Hearts for the Love of God It is evident that the secret to why Paul was so filled with an open heart for the Lord's interests was because he was filled with the love of Jesus!

Oh, yes, dear one, the love of Jesus is a marvelous gift that is offered to all men. God's love is so rich and full of goodness. God's love is seen so perfectly in His Son and His willing heart to lay down his life for the sins of the world. Just think of how deep this love is in the Son of God. He was without sin and was always doing what was pleasing to His Father. He never hurt anyone and always sought to heal anyone that

would come to him and admit their need. Yet, He was willing to suffer on the cross and to become an offering for our sins so that we could be free from eternal banishment from God.

This love of God that lived in the heart of Jesus made Him the servant to God and others, and kept Him from ever seeking to please his own desires. This great love made Jesus the perfect reflection of His Father's character and was the motive behind everything that he did. When our hearts are filled with God's love then we freely empty them of the extra baggage that clutters them from having room for the Lord's interests. When God's love is living in our hearts we do not love the things of this age.

All that is in this world, including the desires of the flesh, the things that the eyes lust after and the pride of life, together with bragging and boasting in what one has and is, loses its appeal when we find room in our hearts for God's love. God's love moves us to sacrifice our lives to Him and others. We become willing and ready to give up those childish activities that so often fill our hearts, making them empty and prepared to house God's love. We, like Paul, begin to live with a new mindset.

We view life as a divine privilege to serve others according to the will of God, in truth and love and view people, not as objects to use for our own benefit, but as living souls that God loves very much. We long to serve others in the love of God so that others can see and love God too! When God's love lives in us, we are prepared to empty our hearts from selfish passions, love for material things, the need to be praised and honored by men and the trap of viewing our life as it benefits us.

We begin to see all things as a means and opportunity to make the Lord known by doing what is right in His eyes, irrespective of how we may personally benefit. Paul considered himself to be a bondservant of Jesus and therefore, bound, by love, to serve the Lord's interests alone. Consequently, he served the churches all of his earthly days and ended up being a martyr for the sake of Christ. We too will view ourselves in the same way if we, like Paul, are overcome by the love of God and allow it to fill our hearts.

When this happens, our hearts will be emptied from what keeps them closed to His interests and wide open to be filled with the wonders and beauties of God's purposes. May the Lord give us honest hearts in this matter! Are our hearts closed like the Corinthians? If so, what shall we do? God's work cannot flourish in our lives if our hearts are closed to Him, to one another or to His servants that bring us His Word.

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