

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE
BETWEEN "HEART" AND "MIND" IN SCRIPTURE?

A Paper

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by
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Is there a difference between the words "heart" and "mind" in the New Testament? What is the difference (if any) between these two words? I want to address this topic because of something Bob Wilkin of the Grace Evangelical Society (GES) said in his article "Is Repentance a Change of Mind or Heart Concerning Our Sins? Part 2". In that article, Wilkin made the following comment in reference to Charlie Bing's *GraceNotes* 92 & 93 articles titled "Quotes on Repentance as a Change of Mind". Wilkin writes:

They [Dr. Bing and the present writer] never explain the difference between a change of mind and a change of heart. Nor do they explain why these are two different ways to be born again. [?!] Seemingly if they are different, then both would be required. If they are the same, there is no need to mention the change of heart. [But what if the Bible mentions it?] Dictionary.cambridge.org says that change of heart means "you change your opinion or the way you feel about something." Their first five synonyms are: "180, about-face, about-turn, back away, back out." Freedictionary.com gives these examples of the expression: "At the last minute, she had a change of heart about selling it. It had been in her family for generations. The government's change of heart on debt relief for the poorest countries is very good news." The expression normally refers to a decision to change one's actions. Possibly I'll address the change-of-heart view of repentance in a future blog. It does not strike me as being consistent with Free Grace Theology.[1]

There are several problems with Wilkin's line of reasoning. First of all, as Roger Post has correctly pointed out: "modern English dictionaries are not reliable sources for theological definitions." [2] This is true because the New Testament was *not* written in modern-day English, but in Koine Greek -- the common Greek language of the 1st century. So, if we today want to know what is meant by the words "heart" and "mind" in the New Testament, we have to look at the meaning of those words in the original language (the Koine Greek) rather than in the English dictionary. So Wilkin's appeal to the Cambridge (English) Dictionary misses the point entirely. Instead of using a modern-day English dictionary, Wilkin should instead reference a NT Greek lexicon in order to rightly understand the meanings of New Testament words.

Another problem with Wilkin's statement is that he's assuming that the words "heart" and "mind" refer to two different things, when the Scriptures indicate exactly the opposite! The New Testament evidence indicates that the words "heart" and "mind" are often used interchangeably in Scripture. Dr. Ralph "Yankee" Arnold (an advocate of traditional Free Grace Theology) has pointed this out admirably in his book *The Gospel Driven Man*. [3] Notice what Yankee Arnold says, it is an excellent analysis:

Is your heart something different from your head? Is there some clear distinction between heart and mind? WHAT DOES SCRIPTURE MEAN BY HEART? Does it mean your pumping organ? We do not always mean the pumping organ of our body when we say heart. For instance, if you speak of doing something "from his heart", you mean he did it sincerely. He did it from how he really felt and thought INSIDE. You do not mean his pumping organ performed the action instead of his brain.

It is the same in scripture. The word heart (kardis) refers to the INNER BEING of a man: his thoughts, feelings, and decisions. The word kardia may often be translated MIND! The

Arndt and Gingrich Lexicon says of this word kardia (Capitals ours) "Heart as the seat of physical, spiritual and mental life:" as the center and source of physical life....*satisfying our hearts with food* Acts 14:17...as the center and source of the WHOLE INNER LIFE with its THINKING, FEELING, and VOLITION, in the case of the natural man as well as the redeemed man...of the faculty of THOUGHT, of the THOUGHTS themselves, of understanding, as the organ of natural and spiritual enlightenment (I Kings 10:2, Job 12:3, 17:4) IN THIS AREA KARDIA MAY OFTEN BE TRANSLATED MIND: II Cor. 4:6, Eph. 1:18, II Peter 1:19."

The word kardia translated "heart" in the Bible refers to your *mind* or *whole inner life*. Do not confuse a person with, "Now are you believing with your heart or head?" His heart *is* his mind; his heart believes. If he believes, he is saved! "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved" (Acts 16:31).[4]

Someone might argue that Yankee Arnold is not specifically talking about repentance in the above quotation. But elsewhere in his book (in the chapter titled "Repentance"), Yankee Arnold says exactly the same thing! Commenting on Acts 2:36-38, Yankee Arnold says: "The Jews were pricked in their heart [Acts 2:37]; your heart is the part of you that **THINKS**, feels, and wills (Arndt and Gingrich Lexicon), it is your mind. They needed to change their mind and believe that Jesus is the Lord. He is God! He is the promised Messiah who would save them from their sins." [5] Thus it is evident that "the change-of-heart view of repentance" is *not* "a decision to change one's actions" (as Wilkin wants us to believe), but rather it refers to a change of mind! Yankee Arnold's comment also makes it clear that "the change-of-heart view of repentance" *is* consistent with Free Grace Theology (because Yankee Arnold is a Free Grace advocate and that is his view). This highlights the error of Wilkin's statement when he says: "It [the change-of-heart view of repentance] does not strike me as being consistent with Free Grace Theology." So the "change-of-heart view of repentance" *is* consistent with Free Grace Theology. What's more, it's Biblical! Commenting on Acts 2:37-41, Charles Ryrie similarly affirms: "Change of mind is the meaning of the word repent....and is perhaps best conveyed by the phrase 'change of heart' (cf. Rom. 2:5, where lack of repentance is described as an 'unrepentant heart')." [6] Ryrie goes on to say: "For these people repentance meant a whole-hearted change of mind about Jesus of Nazareth, thinking of Him no longer as merely the carpenter's son, a religious imposter, but now receiving Him as Lord (Divine) and Messiah." [7]

Thus, it can be concluded that the words "heart" and "mind" are often used interchangeably or synonymously in the New Testament, and this is how the words are used in reference to Biblical repentance.

ENDNOTES:

[1] Bob Wilkin, "Is Repentance a Change of Mind or Heart Concerning Our Sins? Part 2," GES blog (November 8, 2021), see footnote ii.

[2] Roger Post, "The Meanings of the Words Translated 'Repent' and 'Repentance' in the New Testament" (Master's Thesis, Wheaton College, June 1972), p. 4.

[3] Incidentally, Wilkin did a GES book review on *The Gospel Driven Man* and described the book in very positive terms. For example, Wilkin writes: "There is much in this book that *JOTGES* readers will like....Many in the Free Grace camp have been influenced by Florida Bible College and by Yankee Arnold. They will be delighted by this book. For those who are not familiar with Yankee Arnold, this book would be a nice addition to their Free Grace library." (Wilkin, <https://faithalone.org/journal-articles/book-reviews/the-gospel-driven-man/>)

[4] Ralph "Yankee" Arnold, *The Gospel Driven Man* (Hull, GA: Send the Light, 2005), pp. 186-187, emphasis his. See: Bauer, "καρδία", BDAG, pp. 508-509.

[5] Ralph "Yankee" Arnold, *The Gospel Driven Man*, pp. 157-158, emphasis his.

[6] Charles C. Ryrie, *The Acts of the Apostles, Everyman's Bible Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1961), p. 21, ellipsis added.

[7] *Ibid.*, p. 21.