

God Changes Stony Hearts: The Holy Spirit Series #2 Handout

Proverbs 14:34 NIV: “Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin condemns any people.”

From this we learn that sins do not only impact the ones who commit them. Sin always impacts others. Unchecked sin always grows. Tolerated sin becomes the cultural practice of families, groups, and even nations. And eventually sins find themselves protected by a nation's laws and celebrated among the people. When things get this bad, the holiness of God requires justice. Sin must be dealt with. Either it is confessed and forsaken and forgiven by God, or it must be judged by God.

Ezekiel 36:16 **Again the word of the Lord came to me:** ¹⁷ **“Son of man, when the people of Israel were living in their own land, they defiled it by their conduct and their actions. Their conduct was like a woman’s monthly uncleanness in my sight. ¹⁸ So I poured out my wrath on them because they had shed blood in the land and because they had defiled it with their idols. ¹⁹ I dispersed them among the nations, and they were scattered through the countries; I judged them according to their conduct and their actions.**

The Israelites were deported from their homeland, killed by the sword, or ravaged by the horrors of siege warfare which brought scarcity, hunger, and desperation.

Ezekiel 36:20 **And wherever they went among the nations they profaned my holy name, for it was said of them, ‘These are the Lord’s people, and yet they had to leave his land.’ ²¹ I had concern for my holy name, which the people of Israel profaned among the nations where they had gone.**

The Israelites had been chosen by God to be His special possession, His own people. But their sins and gross wickedness besmirched the good name of Yahweh. People in foreign lands saw the punishment God had visited upon the Israelites and concluded that the Hebrew God wasn't strong enough to help them prevail, so God had to defend His honor.

Ezekiel 36:22 **“Therefore say to the Israelites, ‘This is what the Sovereign Lord says: It is not for your sake, people of Israel, that I am going to do these things, but for the sake of my**

holy name, which you have profaned among the nations where you have gone. ²³ I will show the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, the name you have profaned among them. Then

the nations will know that I am the Lord, declares the Sovereign Lord, when I am proved holy through you before their eyes.

God makes it clear that the Israelites did not deserve the good things He was about to do. God was exonerating His Holy name.

When God does His great work, the Israelites will be proof of God's holiness. But, how does one get from being perverse, depraved, and disgusting to the Lord to being a demonstration of God's holiness for others to witness?

Ezekiel 36:24 **“For I will take you out of the nations; I will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land.**

2 Chronicles 36:21 **The land enjoyed its sabbath rests; all the time of its desolation it rested, until the seventy years were completed in fulfillment of the word of the Lord spoken by Jeremiah.**

22 **In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, in order to fulfill the word of the Lord spoken by Jeremiah, the Lord moved the heart of Cyrus king of Persia to make a proclamation throughout his realm and also to put it in writing:**

23 **“This is what Cyrus king of Persia says:**

“The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and he has appointed me to build a temple for him at Jerusalem in Judah. Any of his people among you may go up, and may the Lord their God be with them.”

The people returned humbled and chastened by their time in exile, but their real problems remained. Their hearts were stony hard.

Ezekiel 36:25 **I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols.**

God forgave the Israelites, and the post-exilic Jews did not return to the worship of idols. God made them ritually clean so they could again worship Him, but the inward condition of their hearts was still in the stony dungeon of the depravity of the sinful nature.

Ezekiel 36:26 I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. ²⁸ Then you will live in the land I gave your ancestors; you will be my people, and I will be your God.

The third wave of this prophecy was fulfilled through Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Jesus came not merely to forgive sins; He came to deal with the sinful condition of the human heart.

The heart of stone represented the inability to keep God's laws because of hard-heartedness. The heart of flesh bespoke holiness of heart.

The sinful heart rebels against God's laws, and though people might outwardly keep such laws, inwardly they fight against them. A stony heart is set in its ways. But God does not want to merely forgive sinful acts. God wants to make sinners holy. If God only forgave sins without changing sinners, then sin would remain in mastery over people.

Romans 6:13-14 NIV ¹³ Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness.¹⁴ For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace.

A sinful heart hears God's precepts as cold hard laws and fears punishment. A heart made holy by God's Spirit has been changed so that it operates on the principles of Holy Love. A regenerated heart does not reject God's laws, nor does it live in fear of punishment.

A heart made holy by the Holy Spirit is alive with the love of God. Holy love becomes the motivation for all that is done. Love for God and for others is empowered by God's Spirit living within.