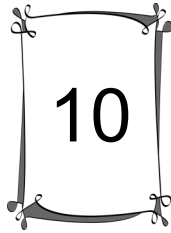


The background of the cover is a photograph of a scenic landscape. A paved road curves through a valley, flanked by trees with vibrant autumn foliage in shades of yellow, orange, and green. To the left of the road, a railway track with overhead power lines runs parallel to it. In the distance, a large, rugged mountain peak rises against a sky filled with heavy, grey clouds. The entire scene is framed by a green border with rounded corners.

# Sermons of Robert Murray M'Cheyne

**10. The Heart  
Deceitful**

Sermons  
of  
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M'Cheyne



The Heart  
Deceitful

***“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it? I the Lord search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings” Jer. 17:9, 10.***

**I. The state of the natural heart.** (Verse 9.) This is a faithful description of the natural heart of man: The heart of unfallen Adam was very different. “God made man upright.” His mind was clear and heavenly. It was riveted upon divine things. He saw their glory without any cloud or dimness. His heart was right with God. His affections flowed sweetly and fully towards God. He loved as God loved — hated as God hated. There was no deceit about his heart then. It was transparent as crystal. He had nothing to conceal. There was no wickedness in his heart — no spring of hatred, or lust, or pride. He knew his own heart. He could see clearly into its deepest recesses; for it was just a reflection of the heart of God. When Adam sinned, his heart was changed. When he lost the favour of God, he lost the image of God. Just as Nebuchadnezzar suddenly got a beast’s heart, so Adam suddenly got a heart in the image of the devil. And this is the description ever since: “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.” (Verse 9.)

1. *It is “deceitful above all things.”* Deceit is one of the prime elements of the natural heart. It is more full of deceit than any other object. We sometimes call the sea deceitful the sea appears perfectly calm, or there is a gentle ripple on the waters, and the wind blows favourably; during the night a storm may come on, and the treacherous waves are now like mountain billows, covering the ship. But the heart is deceitful *above all things* — more treacherous than the treacherous sea. The clouds are often very deceitful. Sometimes, in a time of drought, they promise rain; but they turn out to be clouds without rain, and the farmer is disappointed. Sometimes the clouds appear calm and settled; but, before the morning, torrents of rain are falling. But the heart is deceitful above all things. Many animals are deceitful. The Serpent is more subtle than any beast of the field; sometimes it will appear quite harmless, but suddenly it will put out its deadly sting, and give a mortal wound. But the natural heart is more deceitful than a serpent — *above all things*. It is deceitful in two ways — in deceiving others

and in deceiving itself.

(1). *In deceiving others.* Every natural man is a hypocrite. He is different in reality from what he appears to be. I undertake to say, that there is not a natural man present here to-day in his true colours. If every natural man here were to throw off his disguise, and appear as he really is, this church would look more like the gate of hell than the gate of heaven. If every unclean man were to lay bare his heart, and show his abominable, filthy desires and thoughts; if every dishonest man were now to open his heart, and let us see all his frauds, all his covetous, base desires; if every proud, self-conceited one were now to show us what is going on below his coat, or below that silk gown — to let us see the paltry schemes of vanity and desire of praise; if every unbeliever among you were openly to reveal his hatred of Christ and of the blessed Gospel — O what a hell would this place appear! Why is it not so? Because natural men are deceitful — because you draw a cloak over your heart, and put on a smooth face, and make the outside of a saint cover the heart of a fiend. Oh! your heart is deceitful above all things. Every natural man is a flatterer. He does not tell other men what he thinks of them. There is no plain, honest dealing between natural men in this world. Those of you who know anything of this world, know how hollow most of its friendships are. Just imagine for a moment that every natural man were to speak the truth when he meets his friends; suppose he were to tell them all the bitter slanders which he tells of them a hundred times behind their back; suppose he were to unbosom himself, and tell all his low, mean ideas of them how worldly and selfish they are in his eyes; — alas! what a world of quarrels this would be. Ah, no! natural man, you dare not be honest — you dare not speak the truth one to another; your heart is so vile that you must draw a cloak over it; and your thoughts of others so abominable that you dare not speak them out: “The heart is deceitful above all things.”

(2). It shows itself in another way — *in self-deceit*. Ever since my coming among you I have laboured with all my might to separate between the precious and the vile. I have given you many marks, by which you might know whether or not you have undergone a true conversion, or whether it has only been a deceit of Satan — whether your peace was the peace of God or the peace of

the devil — whether you were on the narrow way that leads to life, or on the broad way that leads to destruction. I have done my best to give you the plainest Scripture marks by which you might know your real case; and yet I would not be in the least surprised, if the most of you were found at the last to have deceived yourselves. Often a man is deeply concerned about his soul; he weeps and prays, and joins himself to others who are inquiring. He now changes his way of life, and changes his notions; he talks of his experience, and enlargement in prayer; perhaps he condemns others very bitterly; and yet he has no true change of life — he walks after the flesh still, not after the Spirit. Now, others think this man a true Christian, and he believes it himself; yea, he thinks he is a very eminent Christian; when, all the time, he has not the Spirit of Christ, and is none of his. Ah! “the heart is deceitful above all things.”

2. “*Desperately wicked.*” This word is borrowed from the book of the physician. When the physician is called to see a patient, past recovery, he shakes his head and says: This is a desperate case. This is the very word used here. “The heart is desperately wicked” — past cure by human medicine. *Learn that you need conversion, or a new heart.* When we speak of the necessity of a change to some people, they begin to be affected by it, and so they put away some evil habits, as drinking or swearing, or lying; they put these away, and promise never to go back to them; and now they think the work is done, and they are in a fair way for heaven. Alas, foolish man! it is not your drinking, or your swearing, or your lying that are desperately wicked — but your heart. You have only been cutting off the streams — the source remains polluted — the heart is as wicked as ever. It is the heart that is incurable. It is a new heart you need. Nothing less will answer your need. *Learn that you must go to Christ for this.* When the woman had spent her all upon physicians, and was nothing better, but rather worse, she heard of Jesus. Ah! said she, if I may but “touch the hem of his garment I shall be made whole.” Jesus said to her: “Daughter, be of good comfort, thy faith hath made thee whole.” Come, then, incurable, to Christ. The leprosy was always regarded as incurable. Accordingly, the leper came to Jesus, and worshipping, said: “Lord, if thou wilt thou canst make me clean.” Jesus said, “I will, be thou clean;” and immediately his leprosy was cleansed. Some of you feel that your

heart is desperately wicked; well, kneel to the Lord Jesus, and say: "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean." You are a leper — incurable; Jesus is able — he is also willing to make you clean.

3. *Unsearchably Wicked*: "*Who can know it?*" No man ever yet knew the badness of his own heart. We are sailing over a sea the depths of which we have never fathomed.

(1). *Unawakened persons* have no idea of what is in their hearts. When Elisha told Hazeal what a horrible murderer he would be, Hazeal said: "Is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing?" The seeds of it were all in his heart at that moment; but he did not know his own heart. If I had told some of you, when you were little children playing beside your mother's knee, the sins that you were afterwards to commit, you would have said: "Am I a dog, that I should do this thing?" and yet you see you have done them. If I could show each of you the sins that you are yet to commit, you would be shocked and horrified. This shows how ignorant you are of your own heart. I suppose that the most of you think it is quite impossible you should ever be guilty of murder, or adultery, or apostasy, or the sin against the Holy Ghost; this arises from ignorance of your own black heart: "*Who can know it?*"

(2). *Some awakened persons* have an awful sight given them of the wickedness of their own hearts. They see all the sins of their past life, as it were, concentrated there. They see that their past sins all come out of their heart — and that the same may come out again. And yet the most awakened sinner does not see the ten thousandth part of the wickedness of his heart. You are like a person looking down into a dark pit — you can only see a few yards down the sides of the pit; so you can only see a little way down into your heart. It is a pit of corruption which is bottomless: "*Who can know it?*"

(3). *Some children of God* have amazing discoveries given them of the wickedness of their own hearts. Sometimes it is given them to see that the germs of every sin are lodging there. Sometimes they see that there never was a sin committed, in heaven, in earth, or in hell, but it has something corresponding to it in their own heart. Sometimes they see that if there were not another fountain of sin, from which the face of creation might be defaced, their own heart is a fountain inexhaustible — enough to corrupt every creature, and to defile every fair spot in the universe. And yet even they do not

know their own hearts. You are like a traveller looking down into the crater of a volcano; but the smoke will not suffer you to look far. You see only a few yards into the smouldering volcano of your own heart.

Learn to be humbled far more than you have ever been. None of you have ever been sufficiently humbled under a sense of sin; for this reason, that none of you have ever seen fully the plague of your own heart. There are chambers in your heart you have never yet seen into — there are caves in that ocean you have never fathomed there are fountains of bitterness you have never tasted. When you have felt the wickedness of your heart to the uttermost, then lie down under this awful truth, that you have only seen a few yards into a pit that is bottomless — that you carry about with you a slumbering volcano — a heart whose wickedness you do not and cannot know.

## II. The witness of the heart.

1. *“I, the Lord.”* We have seen that we do not know one another’s hearts; for “the heart is deceitful.” Man looketh on the outward appearance. We have seen that no man knows his own heart — that the most know nothing of what is there; and those who know most, see but a short way down. But here is an unerring witness. He that made man knows what is in man.

2. *Observe what a strict witness he is:* “I, the Lord, search the heart, I try the reins.” It is not said, I *know* the heart — but, I *search* it. The heart of man is not one of the many objects upon which God turns his all seeing eye, but it is one which he singles out for investigation: “I search the heart.” As the astronomer directs his telescope upon the very star he wishes to examine, and arranges all his lenses, that he may most perfectly look at it; so doth God’s calm eye pore upon the naked breast of every man. As the refiner of silver keeps his eye upon the refining pot, watching every change in the boiling metal; so doth God’s eye watch every change in the bosom of man. Oh! natural man, can you bear this? How vain are all your pretences and coverings! God sees you as you are. You may deceive your neighbour, or your neighbour, or yourself — but you cannot deceive God.

3. *Observe, he is a constant witness.* He does not say, I have searched, or I will do it — but, I *search* — I do it now, and always. Not a moment of our life but his pure, calm, searching eye has been gazing on the inmost recesses of our hearts. From childhood to old age his eye rests on us. The darkness hideth not from him. The darkness and the light are both alike to him.

4. *Observe his end in searching:* “Even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings.” (Verse 10.) In order to know the true value of an action, you must search the heart. Many a deed that is applauded by men, is abominable in the sight of God, who searches the heart. To give an alms to a poor man, may be an action either worthy of an eternal reward, or worthy of an eternal punishment. If it be done out of love to Christ — because the poor man is a disciple of Christ — it will in no wise lose its reward; Christ will say: “Inasmuch as ye did it to the least of these my brethren, ye did it unto me.” If it be done out of pride or self-righteousness, Christ will cast it from him; he will say, “Depart, ye cursed — ye did it not unto me.” The reason, then, why Christ searches the heart is, that he may judge uprightly in the judgment. Oh, sirs! how can you bear this, you that are Christless? How can you bear that eye on your heart all your days, and to be judged according to what his pure eye sees in you? Oh! do you not see it is a gone case with you? “Enter not into judgment with thy servant; for in thy sight shall no flesh living be justified.” Oh! if your heart be desperately wicked, and his pure eye ever poring on it, what can you expect, but that he should cast you into hell? Oh! flee to the Lord Jesus Christ for shelter — for blood to blot out past sins, and righteousness to cover you.

### **Learn the amazing love of Christ.**

He was the only one that knew the wickedness of the beings for whom he died. He that searches the hearts of sinners died for them. His eye alone had searched their hearts; ay, was searching at the time he came. He knew what was in men; yet he did not abhor them on that account — he died for them. It was not for any goodness in man that he died for man. He saw none. It was not that he saw little sin in the heart of man. He is the only being in the universe that



saw all the sin that is in the unfathomable heart of man. He saw to the bottom of the volcano and yet he came and died for man. Here in is love! When publicans and sinners came to him on earth, he knew what was in their hearts. His eye had rested on their bosoms all their life — he had seen all the lusts and passions that had ever rankled there; yet in no wise did he cast them out. So with you. His eye hath seen all your sin — the vilest, darkest, blackest hours you have lived, his pure eye was resting on you; yet he died for such, and invites you to come to him; and will in no wise cast you out.

