

Wings

*“Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength;
they shall mount up with wings like eagles.”
Isaiah 40:31*



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Cut to the Heart

God's word is a fine surgical instrument, laying bare the inner workings of the human heart. The practical effect on the humans can be quite different.

“Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Men and brethren, what shall we do?’” (Ac. 2:37).

“When they heard these things they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed at him with their teeth” (Ac. 7:54).

These verses record the responses of two different audiences to the gospel. The first describes the Jews on the day of Pentacost responding to Peter's sermon; the second describes the Sanhedrin council responding to Stephen's defense of his faith. In both cases, the teaching caused the hearers to be “cut to the heart.” But from that point the responses went in entirely different directions: One group became baptized believers; the other became a pack of snarling dogs who put the preacher to death.

The juxtaposition of these two accounts raises an obvious question: How could the same message have an identical response in both audiences, yet the outcome be so radically different?

The Greek word for heart (*kardia*) is used in both verses to describe what was

affected by the teaching. The “cutting” that occurred on these two occasions is represented by different Greek words (*katanusso* for the Jews on Pentacost, “to strike or prick violently”; *diaprio* for the Sanhedrin, “to divide by a saw”); but the distinction is too fine to bother with. In simple terms, both audiences were emotionally overwhelmed by the logic of the message they heard. If what they had heard was true, the implications would shatter their world. They could not simply shrug it off.

But *recognizing* the need for a change in one's life, and *making* that change are two different things. For the Jews on Pentacost, the “cut to the heart” they experienced was a profound sense of guilt over a terrible mistake they had made. They were in deep trouble with God; could such a sin ever be forgiven? Their response (“What shall we do?”) was that of people desperate for escape. The pain experienced by the Sanhedrin, on the other hand, took the form of anger and outrage, rather than guilt. Stephen's teaching threatened the power, prestige, and social status they

had worked so hard to attain. They were unwilling to give up all that, so they resorted to the only other option available to them: They silenced the messenger, first by literally stopping their ears (v. 57), then by killing the preacher (v. 58-60).

The contrast between these two groups reveals an important characteristic of God's word. It is designed to work as a winnowing tool, separating the wheat from the chaff. The identical message can have entirely different effects on people, *depending on the character of the individuals who hear it*. God's word is “sharper than any two-edged sword . . . a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Heb. 4:12). Those who genuinely love God and want to do the right thing will recognize in His word a reliable source of guidance and correction, and accept it. Those who love their earthly possessions more than God will see His message as a threat, and reject it angrily.

The result is two different groups of people, created by the surgical precision of the Word cutting on human hearts.

– David King