

# Rend Your Hearts: A Lenten Meditation

(Joel 2: 12-14) 12 Yet even now—oracle of the LORD—return to me with your whole heart, with fasting, weeping, and mourning. 13 Rend your hearts, not your garments, and return to the LORD, your God, For he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love, and relenting in punishment. 14 Perhaps he will again relent and leave behind a blessing, Grain offering and libation for the LORD, your God.

**A problem:** What is God's command? "Return to me with your whole heart..." *Who possesses a whole heart?*! Indeed, why would the Lord want our heart? How can it please Him?

Four things which keep the heart unwhole and at bay from God, all related to sin:

1. Guilt - To be blameworthy and meriting punishment
2. Shame - To be diminished in beauty, loveliness, or desirability in virtue of some defect
3. "The stain of sin" - Residue of our wrongdoings which remain after guilt and shame are gone
4. External woundings - Hurts caused by others which can result in false beliefs or maladaptive actions

These can all result in *internal divisions* or *divided hearts*

**The Goal:** Love (duh...). But what is love?:

1. Willing the good of the other
2. Desiring union with the other

How do the aforementioned barriers get in the way of love?:

- a. Guilt - We fear punishment such that it is contrary to others willing our good, thus negating the first feature of love
- b. Shame - We fear rejection or abandonment by others, thus negating the second feature of love
- c. "The stain of sin" - Even after reconciliation and the removal of guilt/shame, the remaining stains can diminish enjoyment of love or cause anxiety about whether the love is real or deserved
- D. External woundings - Love is a two-way street, so even if we are disposed to love, it won't find its fulfillment if the other party is wounding us

**So barriers to wholeness of heart are, by their nature, barriers to love. And all of these are caused by sin in some way or other. Sin prevents us from giving God our whole heart.**

Application: The story of Adam and Eve

**Getting to the point:** Etymology of the word rend: Goes back to Old English and Middle German - seems to have linguistic connection to the word “rind”

We have a rind on our hearts, or perhaps, if you will, a covering of scar tissue. To rend our hearts, then, is to seek to remove the rind, to remove the scar tissue, to remove the calluses that close off the heart and cause it to work improperly.

What does rending of heart mean for each of the barriers to love?

**A. Guilt** - To rend our heart w/r/t guilt is to (1) acknowledge and feel sorrow for our wrong, (2) recognize that we deserve punishment for said wrong, but also (3) see that we have been provided a means which is *good for us* by uniting our sorrow for sin and sufferings to Christ’s Cross. “Deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow me.”

*Practical actions: Confession and acts of penance*

**B. Shame** - To rend our heart w/r/t shame is to prioritize above all else our relationship with God, especially as a means to restore our relationships with others. Shame entails rejection, but is undone by union. We are united with God through mutual indwelling: (1) The Trinity resides in us, and (2) we reside in Christ as His members. We dwell within each other and thereby are intimately united with each other, and *also with those who themselves have such mutual indwelling*.

*Practical actions: Meditative/contemplative prayer, cultivation of holy friendships*

**C. “The stain of sin”** - To rend our hearts w/r/t the stain of sin is to invite Christ into those areas where the effects of sin are still apparent. For our memories, we invite him to those places and ask Him to sanctify them. For visible adverse effects, we specifically entrust them to the Lord’s providence and care: “Lord, please make up for my failures. Heal what I’ve harmed; restore what I’ve broken; make right what I’ve done wrong.”

*Practical actions: Specific entrusting to the Lord of the remaining effects of our sins*

**D. External Woundings** - To rend our hearts w/r/t external woundings involves (1) As robust an attempt at forgiveness as we can muster given our state, and (2) a repudiation of any lies or maladaptive behaviors we’ve accrued in response to said woundings.

*Practical actions: Choosing to forgive and introspection regarding false beliefs and responses to hurt*

**Common thread: To rend our hearts is to make them vulnerable, to expose them to the open air. But only then can the Healer do His work.**

