

KEEP YOUR HEART!

Proverbs 4:23

"Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life" . . . Proverbs 4:23

The heart of man is the worst part of his being before his conversion, and the best afterwards. It is the fountain of all his actions. The eye of God is always fixed on the heart. And believers should be carefully watchful of their hearts.

John Flavel very wisely observed that, "The greatest difficulty in conversion is to win the heart to God; and the greatest difficulty after conversion is to keep the heart with God." Christianity is a religion of the heart. It is not a system of moral conduct. It is the life of Christ in a man's soul. Salvation is the work of God in a man's heart. The conviction of sin, repentance, faith, and, worship are all works of the heart. The kingdom of God is not in meat and drink, things of the body; but in righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. These are things of the heart.

The state of a man's natural life depends upon the soundness and vigor of his heart. And the state of a man's spiritual life depends on the good or evil condition of his heart. Inasmuch as the heart of man is the most important part of his being, "for out of it are the issues of life", it is only reasonable that it should be guarded "with all diligence". Therefore, I give you this exhortation— Keep Your Heart. There is no responsibility placed upon the shoulders of a believer of greater importance than the keeping and proper government of his heart in all conditions, by faith in Christ the Lord.

I. Before anyone can keep his heart in a manner that will please God - There Must Be A Complete Renovation of the Heart - by the sanctifying presence and power of the Holy Spirit.

The human heart is ruined by the plague of sin. But that has not always been the case. God created Adam with a pure and holy heart. In the original creation, our father Adam had a heart that loved God. He enjoyed the sweet fellowship and communion of God. His life was governed by the will of God. It was his pleasure to serve God. Adam was made a holy and happy creature, with no bias to evil. But Adam fell by the temptation of Satan. He sinned against God; and, immediately, his heart was corrupted. And now every son of Adam inherits that corrupt heart; so that all men's hearts are by nature plagued with sin. "God saw that . . . every imagination of the thoughts of man's heart was only evil continually." The prophet states this very plainly. "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." Our Lord himself declared that every kind of evil in the earth proceeds "out of the heart" (Matt. 15:19). Because man's heart is evil, his entire being is corrupt, and subject to the wrath and curse of God.

The plague of the human race is in the heart. It is dead in trespasses and sins. The mere moralist forgets the ruin of man's heart, and tries to change him by human powers that will do him no good. Some try to help men by social reformation. They suppose that the problem with man is outside of himself. Therefore they try to change his environment to help him. Others try to help men by reforming their principles. Many today think that man's problems all arise from his ignorance. And they try to help by enlightening his understanding. The poor Arminian comes very near to man's problem. He says, "The problem with man is his free-will. He has made the wrong choice." Now that is very true. But the problem with his will is the nature of his heart. If man's heart is changed, his will will be changed.

The only hope of man whose heart is plagued with sin is the complete renovation of his heart by the sovereign power of God. Only a new creation will do the dead sinner good. Poor sinners are totally unable to change their own hearts. The Holy Spirit must come in sovereign, lifegiving power, and create the heart anew in Christ Jesus. The new birth is nothing less than a new creation. It is a spiritual resurrection! The Holy Spirit implants within us the new principle of faith which works by love. He gives us a new will, which hungers and thirsts after the righteousness of Christ. Where there was blasphemy, there is praise. Where there was pride, there is humility. Where there was despair, there is hope. Where there was death, there is life!

But, how does the Holy Spirit accomplish this mighty work? The only instrument he uses is the gospel of the glory of Christ. He sovereignly applies the preaching of the gospel to the hearts of poor sinners. He opens their hearts. He enlightens their hearts. And he wins their hearts to Christ. This is a lesson that we need to learn. If preachers and churches are going to do men any eternal good, we must focus our energies upon their hearts. The church is not a community center for social gatherings. It is not a musical hall for entertainment. And it is not a school for education. The church is a center for preaching - preaching the gospel! Our pulpits are not designed for lecturing on politics, science, and economics. Pulpits are made for preaching. And preaching is the proclamation of the gospel.

Have you been given a new heart? Have you been created anew in Christ Jesus? Your religious badge is meaningless; you need a new heart. Your religious exercises are meaningless; you need a new heart. If you have not yet gotten a new heart, go to Christ, the Great Physician. He alone can heal the plague of sin in your heart by creating it anew.

II. But the text which heads this article speaks of The Careful Regulation of the Heart. This is an exhortation to believers. God has graciously given us a new heart. Now it is our responsibility to keep this heart "with all diligence". This work, "keep" means to guard diligently against the enemy, or to regulate with careful discipline, or to maintain with proper supplies. Now I want to raise just two questions about this matter of keeping your heart. I trust that the answer to those questions will be helpful to you.

The first question is this - Why must we diligently guard our hearts? What is the importance of this exhortation, "Keep thy heart with all diligence?" The answer is not hard to find. Solomon gives it to us plainly. We must diligently guard our hearts, because out of the heart are the issues of life. Our Lord said, "A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil: for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh." Christianity is a heart matter. If our hearts are not right, our lives cannot be. If our hearts are right, our lives will be. If our lives are full of bitterness, hatred, malice, slander, drunkenness, and adultery, it is because our hearts, the fountain of life, are evil. If our lives are such as bring forth fruit unto God, of love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance, it is because God has graciously implanted within us a new heart.

We must diligently guard our hearts, because this is a most difficult work. Henry Mahan made this wise observation, "Heart worship, heart love, and heart obedience are far more difficult than the outward forms and duties of religion, because they are unseen, unrecognized, and unrewarded of men." Not only is heart work difficult, it is constant. Satan hurls his most vicious attacks upon the heart. He does so constantly, subtlety, and deceptively. When we rise in the

mornings, when we kneel to pray, when we go about our daily business, and when we retire at night, Satan is always there tempting our hearts. And this is the most important work. Our Father constantly calls to us, "My son, give me thine heart." If our hearts are not right before God, all of our religious exercises are mere formalities; and abominations before God. Unless our hearts are right before God, all that we do is rejected by him, no matter how much it is applauded by men (Is. 66:2-4; I Cor. 13:1). But heart worship, unseen by men, is recognized and rewarded by God.

The next question is this - How can we keep our hearts with all diligence? The motive for keeping our hearts must be the glory of God. If we are God's children we seek to magnify him in our hearts. We love him, and endeavor to keep our hearts for him, just as a loving wife keeps herself for her husband. We delight in the assurance of God's love; and the only way our hearts can be assured is if they are kept for Christ. If we keep our hearts, it will bring the beauty of holiness into our lives, and sweeten our spirits with the grace of heaven. Now let me give you some suggestions for keeping your heart.

1. Keep Your Heart Full. Keep it full of God, full of heaven, full of Christ, full of the cross, and full of eternity. A full-hearted man is a powerful man. A full head is good, but a full heart is better. Men who are full of God, have power with God. May God give us full-hearted preachers. With that he would give his churches power. Let your heart be filled with the love of Christ, and you will be "filled with all the fullness of God."

2. Keep Your Heart Pure. Brethren, we must keep our hearts pure, for if the heart is not pure, the life cannot be. "Whatsoever things are pure . . . think on these things." Carnality, covetousness, division, strife, pride, slothfulness, and unbelief, may all be traced back to a corrupt heart. Keep your hearts pure by keeping them full of the cross. Think of the blessed Person who died, the Son of God. Why did he die? It was out of pure love, to redeem my soul from sin and its penalty. Think of the way he died, under the wrath of God, in shame and agony, rejected and alone as my substitute. Oh brethren, keep your hearts full of the cross. This is the tree that makes the bitter waters of Marah sweet.

3. Keep Your Heart Undivided. Give your heart to Christ alone. Do not divide your affections with anyone, or anything else. Live for Christ's glory. Serve no master, but Christ. Let this be your prayer:

*"Here's my heart, O take and seal it,
Seal it for thy courts above."*

4. Keep Your Heart Tender. "Let your gentleness be known unto all men, the Lord is at hand." Be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." Keep your heart tender toward men, sympathizing with them, rejoicing with them, forgiving them. And "Walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us." And keep your heart tender toward God. Dear children of God, we should be as sensitive toward God as the eye is to any foreign matter, quickly responding to his Word, his work, his will, and his presence.

5. Keep Your Heart Generous. "Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be made rich." Was there ever a heart so generous as the heart of our Redeemer? Let us follow his

example. Be generous toward God and man. "For God loveth a cheerful giver." A cheerful giver is one who rejoices in his heart to give.

III. To conclude, I want to say a word or two about The Complete Reliance of the Heart. It is a remarkable blessing of God's grace that when a child of God is admonished in one part of Scripture, there is always another place where the grace needed is guaranteed to them, having been provided in Christ. What God requires, he always supplies. So we are promised that God does keep our hearts, as we trust him by faith. "The peace of God which passeth all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:7).

The power of Christ keeps our hearts in peace. Through the shedding of his blood and his death at Mt. Calvary, Christ Jesus, our Mediator, our Daysman, our Priest, has reconciled God to his people, and the power of that blood, when it is applied to our hearts by the Holy Spirit, gives us peace in our own hearts. "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself." And now, Christ is in us reconciling us to God. The great God-Man Mediator has brought God and his people together in peace. The power of Christ's presence sanctifies us and gives us such peace in the world, that even the beasts of the field are at peace with us. And the power of Christ living within us subdues our passions and gives us peace among our fellow men.

The presence of Christ keeps our hearts in peace. We rejoice in Christ, and joy brings peace. His presence teaches us to live in moderation, and moderation brings peace. His presence secures our hopes, and hope, secured, brings peace to our hearts. We live in the expectancy of his coming, and that keeps our hearts peaceful.

Once more, the providence of Christ keeps our hearts in peace. We are at peace in all our circumstances, because Christ is ever present to hear our prayers. We have peace in all things, because Christ is ours, and we are his. He guards, and keeps, and maintains our hearts in peace. He speaks peace to our hearts in the storms of adversity. He gives us peace in berevement; so that we sorrow not as others which have no hope. And Christ even keeps our hearts in peace in death. When we go through that "valley of the shadow of death" he is with us to comfort our hearts and keep them in peace. "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee."

Child of God, "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life." Keep your heart by Prayer. Keep it by resisting temptation. Keep it by reading and hearing the Word of God. Keep it by faith. Keep it in communion with Christ. "And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." AMEN.

Don Fortner, Pastor

GRACE BAPTIST CHURCH of DANVILLE

2734 Old Stanford Road
Danville, Kentucky 40422-9438 USA
Telephone 859-236-8235
DonFortner@all-of-grace.net