
Guarding Your Heart

*“Keep thy heart with all diligence;
for out of it are the issues of life”*

– Proverbs 4:23

A. W. Pink

GUARDING YOUR HEART

Contents

	<i>page</i>
Introduction	3
I. “Keep Thy Heart”	
A Good Conscience.....	4
Set the Lord Always Before Us.....	5
Watch Diligently.....	6
Attend to Holiness.....	7
II. Diligent Effort	8
1. Shut Out All That Is Opposed to God.....	10
2. Bring into Conformity with the Word.....	11
3. Keep Tender unto Sin.....	12
4. Look after Cleansing.....	12
III. “The Lord Looketh on the Heart”	14
IV. Distinctive and Critical Seasons	
1. In Times of Prosperity.....	17
2. In Times of Adversity.....	18
3. In Times of Public Danger.....	20
4. In Times of Trouble in the Church.....	23
5. In Times of Great Injuries and Abuses.....	23
6. In Times of Spiritual Gloom.....	24
7. In Time of Critical Illness.....	24
V. Other Issues	
The Nature verses the Heart.....	24
Supreme Importance.....	25
Corollaries and Consequences.....	28
VI. Benefits of Keeping the Heart	29
1. Understanding the Deep Things of God.....	30
2. The Best Evidence of Sincerity.....	31
3. Delight in Spiritual Duties.....	31
4. Stability in Resisting Temptation.....	32
5. Improving One’s Graces.....	33
6. Profitable Christian Fellowship.....	33
7. Fitting Us for God’s Providences.....	33
8. Removing Ourselves as Stumbling Blocks.....	33
Conclusion	34

© Copyright 2006 Chapel Library; Pensacola, Florida. Published in the USA.

Permission is expressly granted to reproduce this material by any means, provided:

- 1) if it is not charged for beyond a nominal sum for cost of duplication
- 2) if this copyright notice and all the text on this page is included.

Worldwide, download material directly from our website without charge, or contact one of our international distributors listed on our website:

www.mountzion.org

In the USA, for additional printed copies of this booklet or other classic Christian materials, please contact:

Chapel Library

2603 West Wright Street

Pensacola, FL 32505 USA

(850) 438-6666 fax: (850) 438-0227

chapel@mountzion.org

www.mountzion.org

GUARDING YOUR HEART

A. W. Pink

Introduction ¹

“Do you think you came into this world to spend your whole time and strength in your employments, your trades, your pleasures, unto the satisfaction of the will of the flesh and of the mind? Have you time enough to eat, to drink, to sleep, to talk unprofitably—it may be corruptly—in all sorts of unnecessary societies, but have not enough time to live unto God, in the very essentials of that life? Alas, you came into the world under this law: ‘It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment’ (Heb 9:27), and the end (purpose) why your life is here granted unto you, is that you may be prepared for that judgment. If this be neglected, if the principal part of your time be not improved with respect unto this end, you will yet fall under the sentence of it unto eternity” (John Owen, 1670).

Multitudes seem to be running, but few “pressing toward the mark;” many talk about salvation, but few experience the joy of it. There is much of the form of godliness, but little of the power of it: Oh, how rare it is to find any who know anything experimentally² of the power that separates from the world, delivers from self, defends from Satan, makes sin to be hated, Christ to be loved, Truth to be prized, and error and evil to be departed from. Where shall we find those who are denying self, taking up their cross daily, and following Christ in the path of obedience (Mat 16:24)? Where are they who hail reproach, welcome shame, and endure persecution? Where are they who are truly getting prayer answered daily, on whose behalf God is showing Himself strong? Something is radically wrong somewhere! Yes, and as surely as the beating of the pulse is an index to the state of our most vital physical organ, so the lives of professing Christians make it unmistakably evident that their hearts are diseased!

“For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward Him” (2Ch 16:9). Ah, do not the opening words indicate that those with “perfect” hearts are few and far between, that they are hard to locate? Surely it does; and it has ever been the case. David cried, “Help, LORD; for the godly man ceaseth; for the faithful fail from among the children of men” (Psa 12:1). The Lord Jesus had to lament “I have laboured in vain, I have spent my

¹ This section is taken from the July 1933 issue of *Studies in the Scriptures*.

² **experimentally** – known by and derived from experience.

strength for nought” (Isa 49:4). The Apostle Paul declared, “I have no man like-minded, who will naturally care for your state. For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ’s” (Phi 2:20, 21); “All they which are in Asia be turned away from me” (2Ti 1:15). And things are neither better nor worse today. But, my reader, instead of talking about the “apostasy of Christendom,” instead of being occupied with the empty profession all around us, what about our own hearts? Is your heart “perfect”? If so, even in these so-called “hard times,” God is “showing Himself strong” in thy behalf: that is, He is working miracles for you, and ministering to you in a way that He is not to the empty professors. But if God is not so doing, then your heart is not “perfect” toward Him, and it is high time for you to take stock and get down to serious soul business.

I. “Keep Thy Heart”

“Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life” (Pro 4:23). The pains which multitudes have taken in religion are but lost labour. Like the Pharisees of old, they have been tithing annice, mint, and cumin (Mat 23:23), but neglecting the weightier matters. Many have a zeal, but it is not according to knowledge; they are active, but their energies are misdirected; they have wrought “many wonderful works” (Mat 7:22), but they are rejected of God. Why? Because their employments are self-selected or man-appointed, while the one great task which God has assigned, is left unattended to. All outward actions are worthless while our hearts be not right with God. He will not so much as hear our prayers while we regard iniquity in our hearts (Psa 66:18)! Let us, then, endeavor to further point out what is signified by this supremely important exhortation.

A Good Conscience

To “keep” the heart signifies to have the conscience exercised about all things. In numbers of passages “heart” and “conscience” signify one and the same thing: see 1 Samuel 24:5, 2 Samuel 24:10, 1 John 3:21, etc. The Apostle Paul declared, “herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offense toward God, and toward men” (Act 24:16), and herein he sets before us an example which we need to emulate.

After the most careful and diligent manner we must strive to keep the conscience free from all offense in the discharge of every duty that God requires, and in rendering to every man what is due him. Though this is never perfectly attained in this life, yet every regenerate soul has a real concern for such a state of conscience. A “good conscience, in all things willing to live honestly” (Heb 13:18) is worth far more than rubies.

This is to be something more than an empty wish, which gets us nowhere. The Apostle said, “herein do I exercise myself” (Act 24:16): it was a matter of deep concern to him, and one to which he assiduously applied himself. He laboured hard in seeing to it that his conscience did not flatter, deceiving and misleading him. He was conscientious over both his outer and

inner life, so that his conscience accused and condemned him not. He was more careful not to offend his conscience than he was not to displease his dearest friend. He made it his daily business to live by this rule, abstaining from many a thing which natural inclination drew him unto, and performing many a duty which the ease-loving flesh would shirk. He steadily maintained a care not to break the law of love toward either God or man. And, when conscious of failure, he saw to it that by renewed acts of repentance and faith (in confession) each offense was removed from his conscience, instead of allowing guilt to accumulate thereon.

“Now the end of the commandment is charity (love) out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned” (1Ti 1:5). The “commandment” is the same as the “holy commandment” of 2 Peter 2:21, namely, the Gospel, as including the Moral Law,³ which enjoined perfect love both to God and to our neighbour. The “end” or design—that which is enjoined and whose accomplishment is prompted thereby—is love. But spiritual “love” can only proceed from “a pure heart,” that is, one which has been renewed by grace, and thereby delivered from enmity against God (Rom 8:7) and hatred against man (Tit 3:3), and cleansed from the love and pollution of sin. Spiritual “love” can only proceed out of a “good conscience,” that is, a conscience which has been made tender and active by grace, which has been purged by the blood of Christ, and which sedulously avoids all that defiles it and draws away from God; its possessor being influenced to act conscientiously in the whole of his conduct. It is solemn to note that those who “put away” a good conscience soon make “shipwreck of the faith” (1Ti 1:19).

Set the Lord Always Before Us

To “keep” the heart means to “set the Lord always before” us (Psa 16:8). Some may object that those words spoke, prophetically, of the Lord Jesus. True, but remember He has “left us an example that we should follow His steps” (1Pe 2:21). What, then, is it to “set the Lord always before” us? It means to remember that His eye is ever upon us, and that we act accordingly. It means to remember that we must yet render to Him a full account of our stewardship, and to let this fact constantly influence us. It means that we are to ever have His honour and glory in view, living not to please ourselves but acting according to His revealed will. It means that we should strive, especially, to have God before our souls whenever we engage in any religious exercises. The Omniscient One will not be imposed upon by outward forms or empty words; they who worship Him “must worship in spirit and in truth” (Joh 4:24). “Seek ye My face”—Oh, to respond with David: “my heart said unto thee, thy face, LORD, will I seek” (Psa 27:8).

“The well is seldom so full that water will at first pumping flow forth; neither is the heart commonly so spiritual—even after our best care in our worldly converse—as to pour itself into God’s bosom freely, without some-

³ **Moral Law** – the law of God which brings conviction of sin upon every person and is a universal guide for holy living, summarized in the Ten Commandments.

thing to raise and elevate it; yea, often the springs of grace lie so low, that pumping only will not fetch the heart up to a praying frame, but arguments must be poured into the soul before the affections rise” (W. Gurnall, 1660). Does not this explain why, after saying, “Bless the LORD, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless His holy name,” that the Psalmist added “Bless the LORD, O my soul” (Psa 103: 1, 2)!

Ah, note well those words, dear reader: “Bless the Lord, O my soul,” and not merely by the lips. David dreaded lest, while the outward was awake, his inner man should be asleep. Are you equally careful as to this? David laboured so that no dullness and drowsiness should steal over his faculties. Therefore did he add, “and all that is within me, bless His holy name”—understanding, conscience, affections, and will. Oh that we may not be guilty of that awful sin about which Christ complained, “This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me” (Mat 15:8). Again we would note the repetition in Psalm 103:2, “Bless the LORD, O my soul:” how this shows us that we need to bestir ourselves repeatedly when about to approach the Majesty on High, seeking with all our might to throw off the spirit of sloth, formality, and hypocrisy.

Watch Diligently

Of old God’s servants complained, “There is none that calleth upon thy name, that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee” (Isa 64:7). Are we any better, my friends? Do we really bestir ourselves to “take hold” of God: we shall never be like Jacob—successful “wrestlers” with Him—until we do. There is little wonder that so few obtain answers to their petitions unto the Throne of Grace: it is not simply prayer, but “the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much” (Jam 5:16). Before seeking to approach the Most High we need to “prepare” our heart (Job 11:13), and beg God to “strengthen” it (Psa 27:14), so that we may be enabled to draw near with becoming reverence and humility, so that we may trust in Him with all our hearts (Pro 3:5), love Him with all our hearts (Mat 22:37), and praise Him with “the whole heart” (Psa 9:1).

Oh the frightful impiety which is now to be witnessed on almost every side, of heedlessly rushing into the holy presence of God (or rather, going through the form of so doing), and gabbling off the first things that come to mind. And all of us are more affected by this evil spirit than we imagine, for “evil communications corrupt good manners” (1Co 15:33). We need to definitely seek grace and fight against so grievously insulting God. We need to fix our minds steadily on the august perfections of God, reminding ourselves of whom it is we are about to approach. We need to seek deliverance from that half-hearted, ill-conceived, careless and indifferent worship which is offered by so many.

We need to ponder God’s grace and goodness unto us, and lay hold of His encouraging promises, that our affections may be inflamed and our souls brought into that gracious temper which is suited unto Him to whom we owe our all.

But not only do we need to diligently watch our hearts when about to approach God in prayer or worship, but also when turning to His Holy Word. All ordinances, helps, and means of grace, are but empty shells, unless we meet with God in them; and for that, He must be sought: "Ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart" (Jer 29:13). We are not at all likely to obtain any more soul profit from the reading of the Scriptures than we are from the perusal of men's writings, if we approach them in the same spirit we do human books. God's Word is addressed unto the conscience, and it is only as we strive to have our hearts suitably affected by what we read therein, that we may justly expect to be helped spiritually.

God has bidden us, "My son, keep thy father's commandment, and forsake not the law of thy mother: Bind them continually upon thine heart, and tie them about thy neck" (Pro 6:20, 21). And again, "Keep My commandments, and live; and my law as the apple of thine eye. Bind them upon thy fingers, write them upon the table of thine heart" (Pro 7:2, 3). This cannot be done by reading the Bible for a few minutes, and then an hour later forgetting what has been read. Shame on us that we should treat God's Word so lightly. No, we must "meditate therein day and night" (Psa 1:2). Unless we do so, we shall never be able to say, "Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee" (Psa 119:11); nor shall we be able to say, "Blessed art thou, O LORD: teach me thy statutes" (Psa 119:12).

Attend to Holiness

To "keep" the heart signifies attending diligently to its progress or decays in holiness. What health is to the body holiness is to the soul. "I commune with mine own heart: and my spirit made diligent search" (Psa 77:6): this is absolutely essential if a healthy spiritual life is to be maintained: a part of each day should be set aside for the study of the heart and cultivation of its faculties. The more this is done, the less difficulty shall we experience in knowing what to pray for! Oh, shame on us that we are so diligent in thinking about and caring for our bodies, while the state of our souls is so rarely inquired after.

Emulate the example of Hezekiah, who "humbled himself for the pride of his heart" (2Ch 32:26). Peter's heart was lifted up with self-confidence: his fall was preceded by "a haughty spirit" (Pro 16:18).

It is in the heart that all backsliding begins. Observe closely your affections and see whether God or the world is gaining ground in them. Watch whether you experience increasing profit and pleasure in reading God's Word, or whether you have to force yourself to it in order to discharge a duty. Observe the same thing in connection with prayer: whether you are finding increased or decreased liberty in pouring out your heart to God; whether you are having more freedom in so doing, or whether it is becoming an irksome task. Examine well your spiritual graces, and ascertain whether your faith be in lively exercise, feeding upon the precepts and promises of God; whether your hope is lively, anticipating the glorious future; whether your love be fervent or cold; whether patience, meekness, self-control be greater or less.

To “keep” the heart signifies to store it well with pure and holy things. As the most effective way of getting a child to willingly drop some dirty trifle is to proffer it an apple or orange, so the best security for the soul against the allurements of Satan is to have it engaged with a lovelier and more satisfying Object. A heart which is filled and engaged with good is best protected against evil. Note well the order in Philippians 4:6-8, “Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God: And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.” The heart which casts all its care upon God is well guarded from anxiety by His peace; but a pure atmosphere must be breathed if the soul is to be kept healthy, and that is best promoted by thinking about wholesome, lovely, and praise-provoking things.

Commune frequently with Christ: dwell upon His loveliness, stay in the sunshine of His presence, refresh your soul with those gifts and graces He is ever ready to bestow, and you shall have in yourself “a well of water springing up into everlasting life” (Joh 4:14). “Were our affections filled, taken up, and possessed with these things (the beauty of God and the glory of Christ), as it is our duty that they should be, and as it is our happiness when they are, what access could sin—with its painted pleasures, with its sugared poisons, with its envenomed baits—have upon our souls? How we should loathe all its proposals, and say unto them, Get you hence as an abominable thing” (John Owen).

II. Diligent Effort ⁴

As well might a poor man expect to be rich in this world without industry, or for a weak man to become strong and healthy without food and exercise, as for a Christian to be rich in faith and strong in the Lord without earnest endeavour and diligent effort. It is true that all our labours amount to nothing unless the Lord bless them (Psa 127:1), as it also is that apart from Him we can do nothing (Joh 15:5). Nevertheless, God places no premium upon sloth, and has promised that “the soul of the diligent shall be made fat” (Pro 13:4). A farmer may be fully persuaded of his own helplessness to make his fields productive, he may realize that their fertility is dependent upon the sovereign will of God, and he may also be a firm believer in the efficacy of prayer; but unless he discharges his own duty his barns will be empty. So it is spiritually.

God has not called His people to be drones, nor to maintain an attitude of passiveness. No, He bids them work, toil, labour. The sad thing is that so many of them are engaged in the wrong task, or, at least, giving most of their

⁴ This section is taken from the August 1933 issue of *Studies in the Scriptures*.

attention to that which is incidental, and neglecting that which is essential and fundamental. “Keep thy heart with all diligence” (Pro 4:23): this is the great task which God has assigned unto each of His children. But Oh, how sadly is the heart neglected! Of all their concerns and possessions, the least diligence is used by the vast majority of professing Christians in the keeping of their hearts. So long as they safeguard their other interests—their reputations, their bodies, their positions in the world—the heart may be left to take its own course.

As the heart in our physical body is the center and fountain of life, because from it blood circulates into every part, conveying with it either health or disease, so it is with us spiritually. If our heart be the residence of impiety, pride, avarice, malice, impure lusts, then the whole current of our lives will largely be tainted with these vices. If they are admitted there and prevail for a season, then our character and conduct will be proportionately affected. Therefore the citadel of the heart needs above all things to be well guarded, that it may not be seized by those numerous and watchful assailants which are ever attacking it. This spring needs to be well protected that its waters be not poisoned.

The man is what his heart is. If this be dead to God, then nothing in him is alive. If this be right with God, all will be right. As the mainspring of a watch sets all its wheels and parts in motion, so as a man “thinketh in his heart, so is he” (Pro 23:7). If the heart be right, the actions will be. As a man’s heart is, such is his state now and will be hereafter: if it be regenerated and sanctified there will be a life of faith and holiness in this world, and everlasting life will be enjoyed in the world to come. Therefore “Rather look to the cleansing of thine heart, than to the cleansing of thy well; rather look to the feeding of thine heart, than to the feeding of thy flock; rather look to the defending of thy heart, than to the defending of thy house; rather look to the keeping of thine heart, than to the keeping of thy money” (Peter Moffett, 1570).

What the heart is

“Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life” (Pro 4:23). The “heart” is here put for our whole inner being, the “hidden man of the heart” (1Pe 3:4). It is that which controls and gives character to all that we do. To “keep”—garrison or guard—the heart or soul is the great work which God has assigned us: the enablement is His, but the duty is ours. We are to keep the imagination from vanity, the understanding from error, the will from perverseness, the conscience clear of guilt, the affections from being inordinate and set on evil objects, the mind from being employed on worthless or vile subjects; the whole from being possessed by Satan. This, this is the work to which God has called us.

Rightly did the Puritan John Flavel say, “The keeping and right managing of the heart in every condition is the great business of a Christian’s life.” Now to “keep” the heart right, implies that it has been set right. Thus it was at regeneration, when it was given a new spiritual bent. True conversion is the heart turning from Satan’s control to God’s, from sin to holiness, from the

world to Christ. To keep the heart right signifies the constant care and diligence of the renewed to preserve his soul in that holy frame to which grace has reduced it, and daily strives to hold it. "Hereupon do all events depend: the heart being kept, the whole course of our life here will be according to the mind of God, and the end of it will be the enjoyment of Him hereafter. This being neglected, life will be lost, both here as unto obedience, and hereafter as to glory" (John Owen in *Causes of Apostasy*).

1. Shut Out All That Is Opposed to God

To "keep" the heart means striving to shut out from it all that is opposed to God." "Dear children, keep yourselves from idols" (1Jo 5:21). God is a jealous God and will brook no rival; He claims the throne of our hearts, and requires to be loved by us supremely.

When, then, we perceive our affections being inordinately drawn out unto any earthly object, we are to fight against it, and "resist the devil" (Jam 4:7). When Paul said, "All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any" (1Co 6:12), he signifies that he was keeping his heart diligently, that he was jealous lest things should gain that esteem and place in his soul which was due alone unto the Lord. A very small object placed immediately before the eye is sufficient to shut out the light of the sun, and trifling things taken up by the affections may soon sever communion with the Holy One.

Before regeneration our hearts were deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked (Jer 17:9): that was because the evil principle, the "flesh," had complete dominion over them. But inasmuch as "the flesh" remains in us after conversion, and is constantly striving for the mastery over "the spirit," the Christian needs to exercise a constant watchful jealousy over his heart, mindful of its readiness to be imposed upon, and its proneness unto a compliance with temptations. All the avenues to the heart need to be carefully guarded so that nothing hurtful enters therein, particularly against vain thoughts and imaginations, and especially in those seasons when they are most apt to gain an advantage. For if injurious thoughts are suffered to gain an inroad into the mind, if we accustom ourselves to give them entertainment, then in vain shall we hope to be "spiritually minded" (Rom 8:6). All such thoughts are only making provision to fulfill the lusts of the flesh.

Thus, for the Christian to "keep" his heart with all diligence, means for him to pay close attention to the direction in which his affections are moving, to discover whether the things of the world are gaining a firmer and fuller hold over him, or whether they are increasingly losing their charm for him. God has exhorted us, "Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth" (Col 3:2), and the heeding of this injunction calls for constant examination of the heart to discover whether or not it is becoming more and more dead unto this deceitful and perishing world, and whether heavenly things are those in which we find our chief and greatest delight. "Take heed to

thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart” (Deu 4:9).

2. *Bring into Conformity with the Word*

To “keep” the heart means striving to bring it into conformity with the Word. We are not to rest content until an actual image of its pure and holy teachings is stamped upon it. Alas, so many today are just playing with the solemn realities of God, allowing them to flit across their fancy, but never embracing and making them their own. Why is it, dear reader, that those solemn impressions you had when hearing a searching sermon or reading a searching article, so quickly faded away? Why did not those holy feelings and aspirations which were stirred within you last? Why have they borne no fruit? Was it not because you failed to see that your heart was duly affected by them? You failed to “hold fast” that which you had “received and heard” (Rev 3:3), and in consequence, your heart became absorbed again in “the cares of this life” or “the deceitfulness of riches,” and thus the Word was choked.

It is not enough to hear or read a powerful message from one of God’s servants, and to be deeply interested and stirred by it. If there be no diligent effort on thy part, then it will be said “your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away” (Hos 6:4). What, then, is required? This: earnest and persevering prayer that God will fasten the message in your soul as “a nail in a sure place,” so that the devil himself cannot catch it away. What is required? This: “Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart” (Luk 2:19). Things which are not duly pondered are soon forgotten: meditation stands to reading as mastication does to eating. What is required? This, that you promptly put into practice what you have learned: walk according to the light God has given, or it will quickly be taken from you (Luk 8:18).

Not only must the outward actions be regulated by the Word, but the heart must also be conformed thereto. It is not enough to abstain from murder: the causeless anger must be put away. It is not enough to abstain from the act of adultery: the inward lust must be mortified too (Mat 5:28). God not only takes note of and keeps a record of all our external conduct, but He “weigheth the spirits” (Pro 16:2). Every thing is naked and open before Him with whom we have to do (Heb 4:13). Not only so, He requires us to scrutinize the springs from which our actions proceed, to examine our motives, to ponder the spirit in which we act. God requireth truth—that is, sincerity (reality)—in “the inward parts” (Psa 51:6). Therefore does He command us “Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life” (Pro 4:23).

3. *Keep Tender unto Sin*

To “keep” the heart means to preserve it tender unto sin. The unregenerate man makes little or no distinction between sin and crime: so long as he keeps within the law of the land, and maintains a reputation for respectability among his fellows, he is, generally speaking, quite satisfied with himself. But it is far otherwise with one who has been born again: he has been awakened

to the fact that he has to do with God, and must yet render a full account unto Him. He makes conscience of a hundred things which the unconverted never trouble themselves about. When the Holy Spirit first convicted him, he was made to feel that his whole life had been one of rebellion against God, of pleasing himself. The consciousness of this pierced him to the very quick: his inward anguish far exceeded any pains of body or sorrow occasioned by temporal losses. He saw himself to be a spiritual leper, and hated himself for it, and mourned bitterly before God. He cried, "Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me" (Psa 51:9, 10).

Now it is the duty of the Christian, and part of the task which God has set him, to see to it that this sense of the exceeding sinfulness of sin be not lost. He is to labour daily that his heart be duly affected by the heinousness of self-will and self-love. He is to steadfastly resist every effort of Satan to pity himself, to think lightly of wrong doing, or to excuse himself in the same. He is to live in the constant realization that the eye of God is ever upon him, so that when tempted he will say with Joseph, "How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" (Gen 39:9). He is to view sin in the light of the Cross, daily reminding himself that it was his iniquities which caused the Lord of Glory to be made a curse for him—employing the dying love of Christ as a motive why he must not allow himself in anything that is contrary to the holiness and obedience which the Saviour asks from all His redeemed.

Ah, my Christian reader, it is no child's play to "keep the heart with all diligence." The easy-going religion of our day will never take its devotees (or rather, its victims!) to Heaven. The question has been asked, "Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord, or who shall stand in his holy place?" (Psa 24:3), and plainly has the question been answered by God Himself: "He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart" etc. (Psa 24:4). Equally plain is the teaching of the New Testament, "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God" (Mat 5:8). A "pure heart" is one that hates sin, which makes conscience of sin, which grieves over it, which strives against it. A "pure heart" is one that seeks to keep undefiled the temple of the Holy Spirit, the dwelling place of Christ (Eph 3:17).

4. Look after Cleansing

To "keep" the heart means to look diligently after its cleansing. Perhaps some of our readers often find themselves sorrowfully crying, "O the vileness of my heart!" Thank God, if He has discovered this to you; if such be so, and you really feel it, it is clear proof that He has made you to differ from the multitudes of blindly-indifferent professing Christians all around you. But, dear friend, there is no sufficient reason why your "heart" should continue to be vile. You might lament that your garden was overgrown with weeds and filled with rubbish; but need it remain so? We speak now not of your sinful nature, the incurable and unchangeable "flesh" which still indwells you; but of your heart, which God bids you "keep." You are responsible to purge your

mind of vain imaginations, your soul of unlawful affections, your conscience of guilt.

But, alas, you say, “I have no control over such things: they come unbidden and I am powerless to prevent them.” So the devil would have you believe! Revert again to the analogy of your garden: do not the weeds spring up unbidden; do not the slugs and other pests seek to prey upon the plants? What, then? Do you merely bewail your helplessness?

No, you resist them and take means to keep them under. Thieves enter houses uninvited, but whose fault is it if the doors and windows be left unfastened? Oh heed not the seductive lullabies of Satan. God says, “purify your hearts, ye double minded” (Jam 4:8); that is, one mind for Him, and another for self; one for holiness, and another for the pleasures of sin.

But how am I to “purify” my heart? By vomiting up the foul things taken into it—shamefacedly owning them before God, repudiating them, turning from them with loathing; and it is written “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1Jo 1:9). By daily renewing our exercise of repentance, and such repentance as is spoken of in 2 Corinthians 7:11: “For behold this selfsame thing, that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea, what indignation, yea, what fear, yea, what vehement desire, yea, what zeal, yea, what revenge! In all things ye have approved yourselves to be clear in this matter.” By the daily exercise of faith (Act 15:9), appropriating afresh the cleansing blood of Christ, bathing every night in that “fountain” which has been opened “for sin and for uncleanness” (Zec 13:1). By treading the path of God’s commandments: “Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit” (1Pe 1:22).

We close this first article by pointing out, what is obvious to every Christian reader, namely, that such a task calls for Divine aid. Help and grace need to be earnestly and definitely sought of the Holy Spirit each day. We should bow before God, and in all simplicity say, “Lord, Thou requirest me to keep my heart with all diligence, and I feel utterly incompetent for such a task: such a work lies altogether beyond my poor feeble powers; therefore, I humbly ask Thee in the name of Christ to graciously grant unto me supernatural strength to do as Thou hast bidden me. Lord, work in me both to will and to do of Thy good pleasure.”

III. “The Lord Looketh on the Heart”⁵

“Man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart” (1Sa 16:7). How prone we are to be occupied with that which is evanescent,⁶ rather than with the things that abide; how ready to gauge things by our senses, instead of by our rational powers. How easily we are deceived by that which is on the surface, forgetting that true beauty lies within. How slow

⁵ This section is taken from the September 1933 issue of *Studies in the Scriptures*.

⁶ **evanescent** – vanishing, passing away.

we are to adopt God's way of estimating. Instead of being attracted by comeliness of physical features, we should value moral qualities and spiritual graces. Instead of spending so much care, time, and money in the adorning of the body, we ought to devote our best attention unto the developing and directing of the faculties of our souls. Alas, the vast majority of our fellows live as though they had no souls, and the average professing Christian gives very little serious thought unto the same.

Yes, the Lord "looketh on the heart:" He sees its thoughts and intents, knows its desires and designs, beholds its motives and motions, and deals with us accordingly. The Lord discerns what qualities are in our hearts: what holiness and righteousness, what wisdom and prudence, what justice and integrity, what mercy and kindness. When such graces are lively and flourishing, then is fulfilled that verse "My beloved is gone down into his garden, to the beds of spices, to feed in the gardens, and to gather lilies" (Song 6:2). God esteems nothing so highly as holy faith, unfeigned love, and filial fear; in His sight a "meek and quiet spirit" is of "great price" (1Pe 3:4). Oh to be careful in the cultivation of that which gives Him delight: then "keep thine heart with all diligence" (Pro 4:23).

False Profession or True Conversion

The sincerity of our profession largely depends upon the care and conscience we have in keeping our hearts. A very searching example of this is found in 2 Kings 10:31, "But Jehu took no heed to walk in the law of the LORD God of Israel with all his heart." Those words are the more solemn because of what is said of him in the previous verse: "And the LORD said unto Jehu, Because thou hast done well in executing that which is right in mine eyes, and hast done unto the house of Ahab according to all that was in mine heart, thy children of the fourth generation shall sit on the throne of Israel." Jehu was partial in his reformation, which showed his heart was not right with God; he abhorred the worship of Baal which Ahab had fostered, but he tolerated the golden calves which Jeroboam had set up. He failed to put away all the evil.

Ah, my reader, true conversion is not only turning away from gross sin, it is the heart forsaking all sin. There must be no reserve, for God will not allow any idol, nor must we. Jehu went so far, but he stopped short of the vital point; he put away evil, but he did not do that which was good. He heeded not the law of the Lord to walk in it "with all his heart." It is greatly to be feared that those who are heedless are graceless, for where the principle of holiness is planted in the heart, it makes its possessor circumspect and desirous of pleasing God in all things—not from servile fear, but from grateful love; not by constraint, but freely; not occasionally, but constantly.

"Give Me Thine Heart"

"My son, give me thine heart" (Pro 23:26). "The heart is that which the great God requires, and calls for from every one of us; whatever we give, if we do not give Him our hearts, it will not be accepted. We must set our love upon Him; our thoughts must converse much with Him; and on Him, as our

highest end, the intents of our hearts must be fastened. We must make it our own act and deed to devote ourselves to the Lord, and we must be free and cheerful in it. We must not think to divide the heart between God and the world; He will have all or none: 'thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart.' To this call we must readily answer: My Father, take my heart, such as it is, and make it such as it should be; take possession of it, and set up Thy throne in it" (Matthew Henry, 1662-1714).

Diligence

"Keep thy heart with all diligence" (Pro 4:23). Guard it jealously as the dwelling place of Him to whom you have given it. Guard it with the utmost vigilance, for not only is there the enemy without seeking entrance, but there is a traitor within desirous of dominion. The Hebrew for "with all diligence" literally rendered is, "above all:" above all the concerns of thy outward life—for careful as we should be as to that, it is before the eyes of men, whereas the heart is the object of God's holy gaze. Then "keep" or preserve it more sedulously⁷ than your reputation, your body, your estate, your money. With all earnestness and prayer, labour that no evil desire prevails or abides there, avoiding all that excites lust, feeds pride, or stirs up anger, crushing the first emotions of such evils as you would the brood of a scorpion.

Circumstances and Conditions

Many people place great expectations in varied circumstances and conditions. One thinks he could serve God much better if he were more prospered temporally; another, if he passed through the refining effects of poverty and affliction. One thinks his spirituality would be promoted if he could be more retired and solitary; another, if only he could have more society and Christian fellowship. But, my reader, the only way to serve God better is to be content with the place in which He has put you, and therein get a better heart! We shall never enter into the advantages of any situation, nor overcome the disadvantages of any condition, until we fix and water the root of them in ourselves. Out of the heart are the "issues of life," and not from our surroundings. "Make the tree good, and his fruit good" (Mat 12:33): get the heart right, and you will soon be superior unto all "circumstances."

Nature verses Heart

"But how can I get my heart right? Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots?" Answer, you are creating your own difficulty by confounding "heart" with "nature;" they are quite distinct. It is important to recognize this, for many are confused thereon. There has been such an undue emphasis upon the "two natures in the Christian," that often it has been lost sight of that the Christian is a person over and above his two natures. The Scriptures make the distinction clear enough. For example, God does not bid us keep our "nature," but He does our "heart." We do not believe with our "nature," but we do with our "hearts" (Rom 10:10)! God never tells us to

⁷ **sedulously** – industriously, with constant and continued application.

“rend” our nature (Joe 2:13), “circumcise” our nature (Deu 10:16), “purify” our nature (Jam 4:8), but He does our “hearts”! The “heart” is the very center of my responsibility, and to deny that I am to improve and keep it, is to repudiate human accountability.

Responsibility

It is the devil who seeks to persuade people that they are not responsible for the state of their hearts, and may no more change them than they can the stars in their courses. And the “flesh” within finds such a lie very agreeable to its case. But he who has been regenerated by the sovereign grace of God, cannot, with the Scriptures before him, give heed unto any such delusion. While he has to deplore how sadly neglected is the great task which God has set before him, while he has to bemoan his wretched failure in making his heart what it ought to be, nevertheless, he wants to do better; and after his duty has been pressed upon him—as it now has upon the readers of these articles—he will daily seek grace to better discharge his duty, and instead of being totally discouraged by the difficulty and greatness of the work required, he will cry the more fervently to the Holy Spirit for His enablement.

The Christian who means business will labour to have:

- A “willing” heart (Exo 35:5)—which acts spontaneously and gladly, not of necessity,
- A “perfect” heart (1Ch 29:9)—sincere, genuine, upright,
- A “tender” heart (2Ch 34:27)—yielding and pliable, the opposite of hard and stubborn,
- A “broken” heart (Psa 34:18)—sorrowing over all failure and sin,
- A “united” heart (Psa 86:11)—all the affections centered on God,
- An “enlarged” heart (Psa 119:32)—delighting in every part of Scripture, and loving all God’s people,
- A “sound” heart (Pro 14:30)—right in doctrine and practice,
- A “merry” heart (Pro 15:15)—rejoicing in the Lord always,
- A “pure” heart (Mat 5:8)—hating all evil,
- An “honest and good heart” (Luk 8:15)—free from guile and hypocrisy, willing to be searched through and through by the Word,
- A “single” heart (Eph 6:5)—desiring only God’s glory,
- A “true” heart (Heb 10:22)—genuine in all its dealings with God.

IV. Distinctive and Critical Seasons

The duty of keeping the heart with the utmost diligence, is binding upon the Christian at all times: there is no period or condition of life in which he may be excused from this work. Nevertheless, there are distinctive seasons, critical hours, which call for more than a common vigilance over the heart, and it is a few of these which we would now contemplate, seeking help from above to point out some of the most effectual aids unto the right accomplishment of the task God has assigned us. General principles are always needful and beneficial, yet details have to be furnished if we are to know how to ap-

ply them in particular circumstances. It is this lack of definiteness which constitutes one of the most glaring defects in so much modern ministry. Mere generalizations and platitudes are substituted for specific instructions, and God has good reason to complain today, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge" (Hos 4:6).

1. In Times of Prosperity

When providence smiles upon us and bestows temporal gifts with a lavish hand, then has the Christian urgent reason to keep his heart with all diligence, for that is the time we are apt to grow careless, proud, earthly. Therefore was Israel cautioned of old, "And it shall be, when the LORD thy God shall have brought thee into the land which He swore unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give thee great and goodly cities, which thou buildedst not, And houses full of all good things, which thou filledst not, and wells digged, which thou diggedst not, vineyards and olive trees, which thou plantedst not; when thou shalt have eaten and be full; Then beware lest thou forget the LORD" (Deu 6:10-12). But they heeded not that exhortation, for "Jeshurun waxed fat, and kicked" (Deu 32:15).

Many are the warnings furnished in Scripture. Of Uzziah it is recorded, "when he was strong, his heart was lifted up to his destruction" (2Ch 26:16). Of the king of Tyre, God said, "thine heart is lifted up because of thy riches" (Eze 28:5). Of Israel we read, "And they took strong cities, and a fat land, and possessed houses full of all goods, wells digged, vineyards, and oliveyards, and fruit trees in abundance: so they did eat, and were filled, and became fat, and delighted themselves in thy great goodness. Nevertheless they were disobedient, and rebelled against thee, and cast thy law behind their backs, and slew thy prophets which testified against them to turn them to thee" (Neh 9:25, 26). And again, "Of their silver and their gold have they made them idols" (Hos 8:4); "according to the goodness of his land they have made goodly images" (Hos 10:1); "According to their pasture, so were they filled; they were filled, and their heart was exalted; therefore have they forgotten me" (Hos 13:6).

Sad indeed are the above passages, the more so because we have seen such a tragic repetition of them in our own days. Oh the earthly-mindedness which prevailed, the indulging of the flesh, the sinful extravagance, which were seen among professing Christians while "times were good!" How practical godliness waned, how the denying of self disappeared, how covetousness, pleasure, and wantonness possessed the great majority of those calling themselves the people of God. Yet great as was their sin, far greater was that of most of the preachers, who instead of warning, admonishing, rebuking, and setting before their people an example of sobriety and thrift, criminally remained silent upon the crying sins of their hearers, and themselves encouraged the reckless spending of money and the indulgence of worldly lusts. How, then, is the Christian to keep his heart from these things in times of prosperity?

First, by seriously pondering the dangerous and ensnaring temptations which attend a prosperous condition, for very, very few of those that live in the prosperity and pleasures of this world escape eternal perdition. “It is easier (said Christ) for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God” (Mat 19:24).

Oh, what multitudes have been carried to Hell in the cushioned chariots of earthly wealth and ease, while a comparative handful have been whipped to Heaven by the rod of affliction. Remember too that many of the Lord’s own people have sadly deteriorated in seasons of worldly success. When Israel was in a low condition in the wilderness, then were they “holiness unto the Lord” (Jer 2:3); but when they fed in the fat pastures of Canaan they said, “We are lords; we will come no more unto thee” (Jer 2:31).

Second, diligently seek grace to heed that word, “If riches increase, set not your heart upon them” (Psa 62:10). Those riches may be given to try thee; not only are they most uncertain things, often taking to themselves wings and flying swiftly away, but at best they cannot satisfy the soul, and only perish with the using. Remember that God values no man a jot more for these things. He esteems us by inward graces, and not outward possessions: “in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him” (Act 10:35). Third, urge upon thy soul the consideration of that awful Day of Reckoning, wherein, according to our receipt of mercies, so shall be our accountings of them: “For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required” (Luk 12:48). Each of us must yet give an account of our stewardship: of every dollar we have spent, of every hour wasted, of every idle word uttered!

2. *In Times of Adversity*

When providence frowns upon us, overturning our cherished plans, and blasting our outward comforts, then has the Christian urgent need to look to his heart, and keep it with all diligence from replying against God or fainting under His hand. Job was a mirror of patience, yet his heart was discomposed by trouble. Jonah was a man of God, yet he was peevish under trial. When the food supplies gave out in the wilderness, they who had been miraculously delivered from Egypt, and who sang Jehovah’s praises so heartily at the Red Sea, murmured and rebelled. It takes much grace to keep the heart calm amid the storms of life, to keep the spirit sweet when there is much to embitter the flesh, and to say “The LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD” (Job 1:21). Yet this is a Christian duty! The following are helps thereunto.

First, consider, fellow-Christian, that despite these cross providences, God is still faithfully carrying out the great design of electing love upon the souls of His people, and orders these very afflictions as means sanctified to that end. Nothing happens by chance, but all by Divine counsel (Eph 1:11), and therefore it is that “all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose” (Rom 8:28). Ah, beloved, it will wonderfully calm thy troubled breast and sustain thy fainting

heart to rest upon that blessed fact. The poor worldling may say, “the bottom has dropped out of everything,” but not so the saint, for the eternal God is his refuge, and underneath him are still the “everlasting arms.” Then, “Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid” (Joh 14:27). The very afflictions which are so painful unto flesh and blood are designed for our spiritual blessing: God chastens for “our profit” (Heb 12:10).

It is ignorance or forgetfulness of God’s loving designs which makes us so prone to chafe under His providential dealings. If faith were more in exercise, we should, “Count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations” or “trials” (Jam 1:2). Why so? Because we should discern those very trials were sent to wean our hearts from this empty world, to tear down pride and carnal security, to refine us. If, then, my Father has a design of love unto my soul, do I well to be angry with Him? If not now, later you will see those bitter disappointments were blessings in disguise, and will exclaim, “It is good for me that I have been afflicted” (Psa 119:71).

Second,⁸ it is of great efficacy to keep the heart from sinking under affliction, to call to mind that our own Father has the ordering of them: not a creature can move either hand or tongue against us, but by His permission. Suppose the cup be a bitter one which He has given thee to drink, still there is no poison in it. Hath not God said, “I will do you no hurt” (Jer 25:6)! If you be really one of His children thou liest too near Him to injure thee. Thy highest good is ever before Him, and though He spares not the rod when we need it, yet it is love which wields it (Heb 12:6). Suppose a faithful and tender-hearted physician had studied well the case of a patient, and had prescribed the most excellent remedies to spare his life; would he not be grieved to hear him cry out “you have poisoned me,” because it gripes and pains him in the operation? Quell then those groundless and unreasonable suspicions of the designs of the Great Physician.

Third, though God hath reserved unto Himself the right to afflict His people, yet He has pledged Himself not to take His lovingkindness from them: “If his children forsake my law, and walk not in my judgments; If they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments; Then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes. Nevertheless my lovingkindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail” (Psa 89:30-33). Can I look that Scripture in the face with a murmuring or repining spirit? Oh naughty heart! Doest thou well to be discontented, when God hath given thee the whole tree with all its clusters of comfort, because He suffers the wind to blow down a few leaves! Christians have both spiritual blessings and temporal mercies, the one abiding, the other movable: since God has eternally secured the former, never let thy heart be troubled at the loss of the latter.

Fourth, may it not be that by these humbling providences God is now accomplishing that for which you have long prayed and waited for? If so, is it not foolish to be worried over the same? You have asked Him to refine your

⁸ The section that follows is taken from the October 1933 issue of *Studies in the Scriptures*.

soul, to conform you more unto the image of Christ, to deliver you from the power of sin, to discover unto you the emptiness and insufficiency of the creature, to so mortify your worldly and fleshly lusts that you might find all your enjoyment and satisfaction in Christ. Then by these impoverishing strokes God is now fulfilling thy desires. Wouldst thou be delivered from temptation?—then He has hedged up thy way with thorns. Wouldst thou see the vanity of the creature?—He has now revealed it to thy experience. Wouldst thou have thy corruptions mortified?—He has taken away the food and fuel that maintained them. As prosperity begat and fed them, so adversity, when sanctified, is a means to kill them. Wouldst thou have thy heart rest in the bosom of God?—He has pulled from under thy head the soft pillow of creature-delights on which before you rested!

Finally, if like Rebekah of old, thou still refuse to be comforted or quieted (Gen 27:46), then consider one thing more, which if it be seriously pondered will doubtless still thy soul. Compare the condition you are now in, and with which thou art so much dissatisfied, with that of the damned! Some of those you used to associate and make merry with are now wailing and gnashing their teeth under the scourge of Divine vengeance. They are roaring amid the unquenchable flames of Hell; and deservedst not thou to be among them! Oh my friend, your present lot, no matter how unpleasant it be, cannot for a moment be compared with theirs. How gladly would they change places with you. Let the knowledge that your sins deserved eternal torment make you thank God heartily for a crust of bread and a cup of water.

3. In Times of Public Danger

We do not wish to be an alarmist, or needlessly excite the fear of our readers, but judging from God's ways in the past, it would seem quite likely that social upheavals, and the menacing of property and life, are not far distant. We say this, not merely because of the discontent which is now seething within the lower and rougher elements, nor because that tens of thousands, feeling so severely the pinch of poverty, are being driven to the point of desperation, but because so very few professing Christians have yet humbled themselves beneath the mighty hand of God, and evidenced any godly sorrow for their past extravagances, or show any marked reformation in their lives today. One wonders how much distress and suffering it will take before the haughty are humbled, and before those who are lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God will give Him the place which is His right in their hearts and lives.

There can be no social revolution, no setting at defiance of established law and order, while the restraining hand of God curbs the wilder passions of men. The Almighty has perfect control of all His creatures, and therefore His people are bidden to pray "for kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty" (1Ti 2:2)—such a petition would be useless were not the helm of all events held by the hand of the Lord. And it is for the sake of His own elect that God prevents the reprobate from turning this world into bedlum and shambles. But if His own

people have wandered so far from Him as not to have His ear, if they will not repent of and turn away from their wicked ways now that His chastening hand is lightly laid upon them, then He will most probably resort to far sterner measures, and force them to their knees.

He who reads with any degree of attention the history of Israel, especially that portion of it recorded in the book of Judges, will see that God had to employ drastic means to turn them from their idols. So too he who has any fair acquaintance with the history of the "Christian" nations of Europe during the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries, will discover there several solemn illustrations of the same principle. And it seems to the writer that something more than an industrial depression, something more than financial straitness and flu epidemics, will be required to bring to an end the present frightful desecration of the Holy Sabbath, the brazen immodesty which stalks through the land, the spirit of lawlessness which abounds on every side. God may soon unleash the hounds of anarchy! Suppose He does: that would be another critical hour wherein we would need to exercise special care over our hearts. "Hear for the time to come" (Isa 42:23)!

In times of danger and public distraction the stoutest souls are apt to be surprised by slavish fear. When there are ominous signs in the heavens, and on earth distress of nations, with perplexity, then the hearts of men fail them for fear, and the looking after those things which are coming on the earth (Luk 21:25, 26). But it should not be thus with the saints: they ought to be of a more raised spirit. Those who are walking with God may say, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; Though the waters thereof roar and be troubled" (Psa 46:1-3). With David they will exclaim, "The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? the LORD is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?" (Psa 27:1).

How to respond in times of danger

How, then, may a Christian preserve his heart from distracting and tormenting fears in times of great or threatening danger?

First, even then all creatures are in the directing hand of God, and can only move as He permits them. Let this truth be well settled by faith in the heart, and it will have a marvelous quieting effect upon it. A lion at large is a terrible creature to meet, but not so when he is in the keeper's hand. Dreadful indeed will it be if a time of Bolshevism should break loose in this land, but even so He who rules Heaven and earth shall say, "Thus far shalt thou come, and no further" (Job 38:11). Even then, my brother or sister, God would still be your Father, and much more tender toward you than you are unto yourself. Let me ask the most nervous woman whether there would not be a vast difference between a drawn sword in the hand of a bloody ruffian, and the same sword in the hand of a loving husband? As great a difference is there in looking upon creatures by an eye of sense, and looking on them as in the hand of your God by an eye of faith.

Second, urging upon yourself the express prohibitions of Christ in this case, and let thy soul stand in awe of the violation of them. The Son of God has charged you, “When ye shall hear of wars and commotions, be not terrified” (Luk 21:9); then cry unto Him for supernatural grace to obey. “In nothing terrified by your adversaries” (Phi 1:28).

Three times over in Matthew 10:26-31, Christ commands us not to fear “men.” Does the voice of a creature make thee tremble, and shall not the voice of God? If thou art of such a timorous spirit, how is it that thou fearest not to disobey the plain commands of Christ? Surely His word should have more power to calm thee than the voice of a poor worm of the earth to terrify. “I, even I, am He that comforteth you: who art thou, that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die?” (Isa 51:12).

Third, consult the many precious promises which are recorded for your support and comfort in all dangers: these are the refuges to which you may fly and be safe. There are particular promises suited to particular cases and exigencies. “Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night; nor for the arrow that flieth by day; Nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness; nor for the destruction that wasteth at noonday. A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh thee. Only with thine eyes shalt thou behold and see the reward of the wicked. Because thou hast made the LORD, which is thy refuge, even the Most High, thy habitation; There shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling. For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways” (Psa 91:5-11). “Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine. When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee” (Isa 43:1, 2).

Finally, make sure of the eternal interest of thy soul in the hands of Jesus Christ: when that is done, then you may say, Now world do thy worst. You will not be very solicitous about a vile body, when you know that it shall be well to all eternity with your precious soul. “And I say unto you my friends, Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do” (Luk 12:4). If you are truly and Scripturally assured that your spirit will be received by Christ into an everlasting habitation the moment of its dismissal from the body, trouble not yourself about the instruments and means of its dismissal. “O but a violent death is terrible to nature”! But what matter is it when thy soul is in Heaven whether it be let out at thy mouth or thy throat? whether thy familiar friends or barbarous enemies close thy dead eyes? Thy soul in Heaven shall not be conscious of how thy body is abused on earth.

4. In Times of Trouble in the Church

In times of Zion’s trouble it behooves public and tender hearts to be delivered from sinking into despondency and despair. When we see the once fair gardens of the Church, with their hedges broken down, the boar running

wild therein, the flowers replaced by weeds, it makes a godly soul cry, “Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears” (Jer 9:1). Yes, but remember, no trouble befalls Zion, but by the permission of Zion’s God, and He permits nothing out of which He will not bring much good at last. Moreover, “there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest” (1Co 11:19). Again, lay hold of and persistently plead before God His promise: “When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the LORD shall lift up a standard against him” (Isa 59:19). However low the Church may be plunged under the waters of adversity, it shall assuredly rise again.

5. *In Times of Great Injuries and Abuses*

How may a Christian keep his heart from revengeful motives under the greatest injuries and abuses of men? *First*, urge upon thy soul the express commands of God: remember that this is forbidden fruit, no matter how pleasant to our vitiated appetites. Revenge is sweet, says nature; the effects thereof shall be bitter, says God. How plainly has God prohibited this flesh-pleasing sin: “Say not, I will do so to him as he hath done to me: I will render to the man according to his work” (Pro 24:29); “Avenge not yourselves” (Rom 12:19). But that is not all: “If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink” (Pro 25:21). One of the many proofs of the supernatural origin of the Scriptures is that they forbid revenge which is so sweet to nature. Then awe thy heart by the authority of God in those Scriptures.

Second, set before thy soul the blessed and binding example of Christ—never did any suffer more and greater abuses from men than did the Saviour, and never was any one so peaceful and forgiving: “When he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously” (1Pe 2:23). To be of a meek and gracious spirit is to be Christ-like.

Third, calm thy heart by the realization that by revenge thou dost but satisfy a lust, but by forgiving thou shalt conquer a lust. Again, consider more frequently how often you wrong God, and then you will not be so easily enflamed against those who wrong thee. Do you still reply, But such insults and injustices are more than flesh and blood can stand? then earnestly seek supernatural grace.

6. *In Times of Spiritual Gloom*

How may a Christian preserve his heart from utterly sinking in seasons of spiritual gloom and the hidings of God’s face? Turn unto the cheering promises which God has left on record for His backslidden people: Jeremiah 3:22, Hosea 14:4, etc. No matter what your sin or trouble be, let it drive you to God, and not from Him; cry with David, “Pardon mine iniquity; for it is great” (Psa 25:11). But suppose I can obtain no access to God, no conscious help from His Spirit, and find no ray of hope for my poor heart? Then heed this word, “Who is among you that feareth the LORD, that obeyeth the voice

of His servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the LORD, and stay upon his God” (Isa 50:10).

7. *In Time of Critical Illness*

How may the Christian, in a time of critical illness, get his heart loose from all earthly engagements and persuade it unto a willingness to die? First, by reminding himself that death has lost its sting (1Co 15:55) and cannot harm him. Second, by considering what heavy burdens he will then be rid of. The soul pays a dear rent for the house it now lives in! But death frees the saint not only from all the troubles and trials of this life, not only from all the sufferings and pains of the body, but it delivers from all spiritual diseases—“he that is dead is freed from sin” (Rom 6:7). Justification destroys death’s damning power, sanctification its reigning power, but glorification its very being and existence. At death the Christian is done forever with Satan and his temptations: then how heartily should he welcome it!

For much in this article we are indebted to the works of the Puritan, John Flavel, 1630-1691.

V. **Other Issues**⁹

The Nature verses the Heart

“God is not the author of confusion” (1Co 14:33); no, the devil causes that, and he has succeeded in creating much in the thinking of many, by confounding the “heart” with the “nature.” People say, “I was born with an evil heart, and I cannot help it.” It would be more correct to say, “I was born with an evil nature, which I am responsible to subdue.” The Christian needs to clearly recognize that in addition to his two “natures”—the flesh and the spirit—he has a heart which God requires him to “keep.” We have already touched upon this point, but deem it advisable to add a further word thereon. I cannot change or better my “nature,” but I may and must my “heart.” For example, “nature” is slothful and loves ease, but the Christian is to redeem the time and be zealous of good works. Nature hates the thought of death, but the Christian should bring his heart to desire to depart and be with Christ.

“Head religion”

The popular religion of the day is either a head or a hand one: that is to say, the labouring to acquire a larger and fuller intellectual grasp of the things of God, or a constant round of activities called “service for the Lord.” But the heart is neglected! Thousands are reading, studying, taking “Bible-courses,” but for all the spiritual benefits their souls derive, they might as well be engaged in breaking stones. Lest it be thought that such a stricture is too severe, we quote a sentence from a letter recently received from one who has completed no less than eight of these “Bible-study courses:” “There was nothing in that ‘hard work’ which ever called for self-examination, which led me to really know God, and appropriate the Scriptures to my deep need.” No, of

⁹ This section is taken from the November 1933 issue of *Studies in the Scriptures*.

course there was not: their compilers—like nearly all the speakers at the big “Bible conferences”—studiously avoid all that is unpalatable to the flesh, all that condemns the natural man, all that pierces and searches the conscience. Oh, the tragedy of this head “Christianity.”

“Hand religion”

Equally pitiable is the hand religion of the day, when young “converts” are put to teaching a Sunday school class, urged to “speak” in the open air, or take up “personal work.” How many thousands of beardless youths and young girls are now engaged in what is called “winning souls for Christ,” when their own souls are spiritually starved! They may “memorize” two or three verses of Scripture a day, but that does not mean their souls are being fed. How many are giving their evenings to helping in some “mission,” who need to be spending time in “the secret place of the Most High”! And how many bewildered souls are using the major part of the Lord’s day in rushing from one meeting to another, instead of seeking from God that which will fortify them against temptations of the week. Oh, the tragedy of this hand “Christianity”!

How subtle the devil is! Under the guise of promoting growth in “the knowledge of the Lord,” he gets people to attend a ceaseless round of meetings, reading an almost endless number of religious periodicals and books, all under the pretense of “honouring the Lord” by all this so-called “service.” He induces the one or the other to neglect the great task which God has set before us: “Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life” (Pro 4:23). Ah, it is far easier to speak to others, than it is to constantly use and improve all holy means and duties to preserve the soul from sin, and maintain it in sweet and free communion with God. It is far easier to spend an hour reading a sensational article upon “the signs of the time,” than it is to spend an hour in agonizing before God for purifying and rectifying grace!

Supreme Importance

This work of keeping the heart is of supreme importance. The total disregard of it means that we are mere formalists. “My son, give me thine heart” (Pro 23:26): until that be done, God will accept nothing from us. The prayers and praises of our lips, the labour of our hands, yea, and a correct outward walk, are things of no value in His sight, while the heart be estranged from Him. As the inspired Apostle declared, “Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not love, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not love, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not love, it profiteth me nothing” (1Co 13:1-3). If the heart be not right with God, we cannot worship Him, though we may go through the form of it. Watch diligently, then, your love for Him.

God cannot be imposed upon, and he that takes no care to order his heart aright before Him is a hypocrite. “And they come unto thee as the people

cometh, and they sit before thee as My people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them: for with their mouth they show much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness. And, lo, thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument” (Eze 33:31, 32). Here are a company of formal hypocrites, as is evident from the words “as My people:” like them, but not of them! And what constituted them impostors? Their outside was very fair—high professions, reverent postures, much seeming delight in the means of grace. Ah, but their hearts were not set on God, but were commanded by their lusts, and went after covetousness.

But lest a real Christian should infer from the above that he is a hypocrite too, because many times his heart wanders, and he finds—strive all he may—that he cannot keep his mind stayed upon God either when praying, reading His Word, or engaged in public worship: to him we answer, the objection carries its own refutation. Thou sayest, “strive all I may;” ah, if you have, then the blessing of the upright is yours, even though God sees well to exercise you over the affliction of a wandering mind. There remains still much in the understanding and affections to humble thee, but if you are exercised over them, strive against them, and sorrow over your very imperfect success, then that is quite enough to clear thee of the charge of reigning hypocrisy.

The keeping of the heart is *supremely important* because “out of it are the issues of life:” it is the source and fountain of all vital actions and operations. The heart is the warehouse, the hand and tongue but the shops; what is in these comes from thence—the heart contrives and the members execute. It is in the heart the principles of the spiritual life are formed: “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” (Luk 6:45). Then let us diligently see to it that the heart be well stored with pious instruction, seeking to increase in grateful love, reverential fear, hatred of sin, and benevolence in all its exercises, that from within these holy springs may flow and fructify our whole conduct and conversation.

This work of keeping the heart is the *hardest of all*. “To shuffle over religious duties with a loose and heedless spirit, will cost no great pains; but to set thyself before the Lord, and tie up thy loose and vain thoughts to a constant and serious attendance upon Him: this will cost something! To attain a facility and dexterity of language in prayer, and put thy meaning into apt and decent expressions, is easy; but to get thy heart broken for sin whilst thou are confessing it, be melted with free grace, whilst thou art blessing God for it, be really ashamed and humbled through the apprehensions of God’s infinite holiness, and to keep thy heart in this frame, not only in, but after duty, will surely cost thee some groans and travailing pain of soul. To repress the outward acts of sin, and compose the external acts of thy life in a laudable and comely manner, is no great matter—even carnal persons by the force of common principles can do this; but to kill the root of corruption within, to set and keep up an holy government over thy thoughts, to have all things lie straight and orderly in the heart, this is not easy” (John Flavel).

Ah, dear reader, it is far, far easier to speak in the open air than to uproot pride from thy soul. It calls for much less toil to go out and distribute tracts, than it does to cast out of your mind unholy thoughts. One can speak to the unsaved much more readily than he can deny self, take up his cross daily, and follow Christ in the path of obedience. And one can teach a class in the Sunday school with far less trouble than he can teach himself how to strengthen his own spiritual graces. To keep the heart with all diligence calls for frequent examination of its frames and dispositions, the observing of its attitude toward God, and the prevailing directions of its affections; and that is something which no empty professor can be brought to do! To give liberally to religious enterprises he may, but to give himself unto the searching, purifying, and keeping of his heart, he will not.

This work of keeping the heart is a *constant* one. “The keeping of the heart is such a work as is never done till life be done: this labour and our life end together. It is with a Christian in his business, as it is with seamen that have sprung a leak at sea; if they tug not constantly at the pump, the water increases upon them, and will quickly sink them. It is in vain for them to say the work is hard, and we are weary; there is no time or condition in the life of a Christian, which will suffer an intermission of this work. It is in the keeping watch over our hearts, as it was in the keeping up of Moses’ hands, whilst Israel and Amalek were fighting below (Exo 17:12): no sooner do Moses’ hands grow heavy and sink down, but Amalek prevails. You know it cost David and Peter many a sad day and night for intermitting the watch over their own hearts but a few minutes” (John Flavel).

As long as we are in this world we must exercise the greatest diligence in protecting the heart. A significant type for the need of this is found in Numbers 19: “This is the law, when a man dieth in a tent: all that come into the tent, and all that is in the tent, shall be unclean seven days. And every open vessel, which hath no covering bound upon it, is unclean” (vv. 14, 15). How many of our readers have sufficient discernment to perceive the spiritual meaning of this? Ponder it a moment before you read further. The “tent” into which “death” has entered, is this world (Rom 5:12). The “vessel” is the human heart (Mat 25:4; 2Co 4:7). The vessel which hath “no covering bound upon it” is an unkept heart, and this is defiled by the presence of death! It is a striking illustration of the world’s corrupting influence entering as soon as the heart be unguarded. But if the heart be “covered”—protected, vigilantly kept—then the world cannot harm it.

Corollaries and Consequences

Having sought to show that the keeping of the heart is the great work assigned the Christian, in which the very soul and life of true religion consists, and without the performance of which all other duties are unacceptable to God, let us now point out some of the corollaries and consequences which necessarily follow from this fact.

1. *The labours which many have taken in religion are lost.* Many great services have been performed, many wonderful works wrought by men,

which have been utterly rejected of God, and shall receive no recognition in the Day of rewards. Why? Because they took no pains to keep their hearts with God in those duties: this is the fatal rock upon which thousands of vain professors have wrecked to their eternal undoing—they were diligent about the externals of religion, but regardless of their hearts. Oh, how many hours have professors spent in hearing, reading, conferring and praying! and yet as to the supreme task God has assigned, did nothing. Tell me, thou vain professor, when didst thou shed tears for the coldness, deadness, and worldliness of thy heart; when didst thou spend five minutes in a serious effort to keep, purge, or improve it? Thinkest thou that such an easy religion can save thee? If so, we must inverse the words of Christ and say, “Wide is the gate and broad is the way that leadeth unto life, and many there be that go in thereat” (see Matthew 7:13).

2. If the keeping of the heart be the great work of the Christian, then *how few real Christians are there in the world!* If every one who has learned the dialect of Christianity and can talk like a Christian, if every one who has natural gifts and abilities and who is helped by the common assisting presence of the Spirit to pray and teach like a Christian, if all who associate themselves with the people of God, contribute of their means to His cause, take delight in public ordinances, and pass as Christians—if these all were real ones, then the number of the saints would be considerable. But alas, to what a little flock do they shrink when measured by this rule: how few make conscience of keeping their hearts, watching their thoughts, and judging their motives. Ah, there is no human applause to induce men to engage in this difficult work, and were hypocrites to do so, they would quickly discover what they do not care to know. This heart-work is left in the hands of a few hidden ones. Reader, are you one of them?

3. Unless real Christians spend more time and pains about their hearts than they have done, *they are never likely to grow in grace*, be of much use to God, or be possessors of much comfort in this world. You say, “But my heart seems so listless and dead”—do you wonder at it, when you keep it not in daily communion with Him who is the Fountain of Life? If your body had received no more concern and attention than your soul, what state would it now be in? Oh, my Brother or Sister, has not your zeal run in the wrong channels? God may be enjoyed even in the midst of earthly employments: “Enoch walked with God and begat sons and daughters” (Gen 5:22)—he did not retire into a monastery; nor is there any need for you to.

4. *It is high time* the Christian reader set to this heart-work in real earnest. Do not you have to lament, “They made me the keeper of the vineyards; but mine own vineyard have I not kept” (Song 1:6)? Then away with fruitless controversies and idle questions; away with empty names and vain shows; away with harsh censuring of others—turn upon thyself. You have been a stranger long enough to this work; you have trifled about the borders of religion too long: the world has deterred you from this vitally necessary work too long. Will you not now resolve to look better after thy heart? Haste thee to thy closet.

5. He that will keep his heart must *take heed against plunging himself into a multiplicity of earthly business* (either in his worldly calling or so-called religious “service”), so that he is unable to make his spiritual and eternal interests his chief concern. You say, “But I must live;” yes, and you must die! Put the claims of God and your heart first, and He will not suffer thy body to starve! Then take heed lest you neglect your soul by gratifying the immoderate clamouring of the flesh. Christ rebuked Martha because she was troubled about “many things,” and assured her that but one thing was “needful” (Luk 10:42). Oh, say with David, “One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to inquire in His temple” (Psa 27:4).

VI. Benefits of Keeping the Heart ¹⁰

The heart of man is his worst part before it be regenerate, and his best part afterwards: it is the seat of principles and the source of actions. The eye of God is, and the eye of the Christian ought to be, principally fixed upon it. The great difficulty in conversion is to win the heart to God, and the great difficulty after conversion is to keep the heart with God. Herein lies the very pinch and stress of religion; here is that which makes the way to life a narrow way, and the gate of Heaven a straight one. To afford some direction and help in this great work, these articles have been prepared. We realize their many defects, yet trust that God will be pleased to use them. No other subject can begin to compare with it in practical importance. The general neglect of the heart is the root cause of the present sad state of Christendom: the remainder of this article might readily be devoted unto the verifying and amplifying of that statement. Instead, we merely point out briefly one or two of the more prominent features.

Why is it that so many preachers have withheld from their congregations that which was, so obviously, most needed? Why have they spoken “smooth things” (Isa 30:10), instead of wielding the sword of the Spirit? Because their own hearts were not right with God: His holy fear was not upon them. An “honest and good heart” (Luk 8:15) will cause a servant of Christ to preach what he sees to be the most essential and profitable truths of the Word, however displeasing they may be unto many of his people. He will faithfully rebuke, exhort, admonish, correct, and instruct, whether his hearers like it or not.

Why have so many church members departed from the faith and given heed to seducing spirits? Why have multitudes been led away by the error of the wicked, turning the grace of God into lasciviousness¹¹? Why have so many others been attracted to companies of notional professors, which, despite their proud boasts of being the only people gathered together in (or unto)

¹⁰ This section is taken from the December 1933 issue of *Studies in the Scriptures*.

¹¹ **lasciviousness** – looseness, wantonness, indulgence of sensual desires.

the name of Christ, are, for the most part, people who have only an acquaintance with the letter of Scripture and are strangers to practical godliness? Ah, the answer is not far to seek: it was because they had no heart acquaintance with the things of God. It is they who are sickly and diseased which fall easy victims unto the quacks; so it is those whose hearts are never rooted and grounded in the Truth, which are tossed about with every wind of doctrine.

The study and guarding of the heart is the best antidote against the infectious errors of the times. And this leads us to point out some of the advantages of keeping the heart.

1. Understanding the Deep Things of God

The pondering and garrisoning of the heart is a great help to the understanding in the deep things of God. An honest and experienced heart is a wonderful aid to a weak head. Such a heart will serve as a commentary upon a great portion of the Scriptures. When such a one reads the Psalms of David or the Epistles of Paul, he will find there many of his own difficulties stated and solved: he will find them speaking the language of his own heart—recounting his experiences, expressing his sorrows and joys. By a close and regular study of the heart he will be far better fitted to understand the things of God, than graceless rabbis and inexperienced doctors—not only will they be clearer, but far sweeter unto him. A man may discourse orthodoxly and profoundly of the nature and effects of faith, of the preciousness of Christ, and the sweetness of communion with God, who has never felt the impressions or efficacy of them upon his own spirit. But Oh, how dull and dry will these notions be unto those who have experienced them!

Ah, my reader, experience is the great schoolmaster. Much in Job and Lamentations will seem dull and uninteresting until you have had deeper exercises of soul. The Seventh Chapter of Romans is not likely to appeal much unto you until you make more conscience of indwelling sin. Many of the later Psalms will appear too extravagant in their language until you enjoy closer and sweeter fellowship with God. But the more you endeavour to keep your heart, and bring it into subjection unto God, to keep from it the evil solicitations of Satan, the more suited to your own case will you find many chapters of the Bible. It is not simply that you have to be in the “right mood” to appreciate, but that you have to pass through certain exercises of heart ere you can discover their appropriateness.

Then it is that you will have “felt” and “tasted” for yourself the things of which the inspired writers treat. Then it is you will have the key which unlocks many a verse that is fast closed unto masters of Hebrew and Greek.

2. The Best Evidence of Sincerity

Care in keeping the heart supplies one of the best evidences of sincerity. There is no external act which distinguishes the sound from the unsound professor, but before this trial no hypocrite can stand. It is true that when they think death to be very near, many will cry out of the wickedness and fear of their hearts, but that signifies nothing more than does the howling of an animal when it is in distress. But if thou art tender of thy conscience, watchful of

thy thoughts, and careful each day of the workings and frames of thy heart, this strongly argues the sincerity of it; for what but a real hatred of sin, what but a sense of the Divine eye being upon thee, could put any one upon these secret duties which lie out of the observation of all creatures? If, then, it be such a desirable thing to have a fair testimony of your integrity, and to know of a truth that you fear God, then study, watch, keep the heart.

The true comfort of our souls much depends upon this, for he that is negligent in the keeping of his heart, is generally a stranger to spiritual assurance and the sweet comforts flowing from it. God does not usually indulge lazy souls with inward peace, for He will not be the patron of carelessness. He has united together our diligence and comfort, and they are greatly mistaken who suppose that the beautiful child of assurance can be born without soul pangs. Diligent self-examination is called for: first the looking into the Word, and then the looking into our hearts, to see how far they correspond. It is true the Holy Spirit indwells the Christian, but He cannot be discerned by His essence; it is His operations that manifest Him, and these are known by the graces He produces in the soul; and those can only be perceived by diligent search and honest scrutiny of the heart. It is in the heart the Spirit works.

3. *Delight in Spiritual Duties*

Care in keeping the heart makes blessed and fruitful the means of grace¹² and the discharge of our spiritual duties. Oh what precious communion we have with God when He is approached in a right frame of soul: then we may say with David, “My meditation of him shall be sweet” (Psa 104:34). But when the heart be indisposed, full of the things of this world, or weighted down by the cares of this life, then we miss the comfort and joy which should be ours. The sermons you hear and the articles you read (if by God’s servants), will appear very different if you bring a prepared heart to them! If the heart be right you will not grow drowsy while hearing the reading of the riches of God’s grace, the glories of Christ, the beauty of holiness, or the needs-be for a Scripturally ordered walk. It was because the heart was neglected you got so little from attending to the means of grace!

The same holds good of prayer. Oh, what a difference there is between a deeply exercised and spiritually burdened heart pouring out itself before God in fervent supplication, and the utterance of verbal petitions by rote! It is the difference between reality and formality. He who is diligent in heart-work and perceives the state of his own soul, is at no loss in knowing what to ask God for. So he who makes it a practice of walking with God, communing with God, meditating upon God, spontaneously worships Him in spirit and in truth: like David he will say, “My heart is inditing a good matter” (Psa 45:1). The Hebrew there is very suggestive: literally, it is “my heart is boiling up a good matter;” it is a figurative expression, taken from a living spring which is bubbling up fresh water. The formalist has to rack his mind, and as it were,

¹² **means of grace** – the instruments God chooses to use in awakening a lost sinner and sanctifying the saint, such as the preaching of the Word, Bible reading, prayer, family worship, and fellowship of the saints.

laboriously pump up something to say unto God; but he who makes conscience of heart work finds his soul like a bottle full of new wine—ready to burst, giving vent to sorrow or joy as his case may be.

4. *Stability in Resisting Temptation*

Diligence in keeping the heart will make the soul stable in the hour of temptation. The care or neglect of the conscience largely determines our attitude toward and response unto solicitations of evil. The careless heart falls an easy prey to Satan. His main attacks are made upon the heart, for if he gains that, he gains all, for it commands the whole man! Alas, how easy a conquest is an unguarded heart: it is no more difficult for the devil to capture it, than for a burglar to enter a house whose windows and doors are unfastened.

It is the watchful heart that both discovers and suppresses the temptation before it comes in its full strength. It is much like a large stone rolling down a hill! it is easy to stop at first, but very difficult after it has gained full momentum. So, if we cherish the first vain imagination as it enters the mind, it will soon grow into a powerful lust which will not take a nay. Acts are preceded by desires, and desires by thoughts. A sinful object first presents itself to the imagination, and unless that be nipped in the bud, the affections will be stirred and enlisted. If the heart does not repel the evil imagination, if instead it dwells on it, encourages it, feeds on it, then it will not be long before the consent of the will is obtained.

A very large and important part of heart work lies in observing its first motions, and checking sin there. The motions of sin are weakest at the first, and a little watchfulness and care then, prevents much trouble and mischief later. But if the first movings of sin in the imagination be not observed and resisted, then the careless heart is quickly brought under the full power of temptation, and Satan is victorious.

5. *Improving One's Graces*

The diligent keeping of the heart is a great aid to the improving of our graces. Grace never thrives in a careless soul, for the roots and habits of grace are planted in the heart, and the deeper they are rooted there, the more thriving and flourishing grace is. In Ephesians 3:17 we read of being “rooted and grounded in love:” love in the heart is the spring of every gracious word of the mouth and of every holy act of the hand. But is not Christ the “root” of the Christian’s graces? Yes, the originating root, but grace is the derivative root, planted and nourished by Him, and according as this thrives under Divine influences, so the fruits of grace are more healthy and vigorous. But in a heart which is not kept diligently, those fructifying influences are choked. Just as in an uncared-for garden, the weeds crowd out the flowers, so vain thoughts that are not disallowed and lusts which are not mortified, devour the strength of the heart. “My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness; and my mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips: When I remember thee upon my bed, and meditate on thee in the night watches” (Psa 63:5, 6).

6. *Profitable Christian Fellowship*

The diligent care of the heart makes Christian fellowship profitable and precious. Why is it that when Christians meet together, there are often sad jarrings and contentions? It is because of unmortified passions. Why is their conversation so frothy and worthless? It is because of the vanity and earthiness of their hearts. It is not difficult to discern by the actions and converse of Christians, what frames their spirits are under.

Take one whose mind is truly stayed upon God, and how serious, heavenly, and edifying is his conversation: “The mouth of the righteous speaketh wisdom, and his tongue talketh of judgment. The law of his God is in his heart” (Psa 37:30, 31)! If each of us was humbled every day before God under the evils of his own heart, we should be more pitiful and tender toward others (Gal 6:1).

7. *Fitting Us for God’s Providences*

A heart well kept fits us for any condition God may cast us into, or any service He has to use us in. He that has learnt to keep his heart lowly, is fit for prosperity; and he who knows how to apply Scripture promises and supports, is fit to pass through any adversity. So he that can deny the pride and selfishness of his heart is fit to be employed in any service for God. Such a man was Paul: he not only ministered to others, but looked well to his own vineyard: see 1 Corinthians 9:27. And what an eminent instrument he was for God; he knew how to abound and how to suffer loss. Let the people deify him, it moved him not, except to indignation: let them stone him, he can bear it.

8. *Removing Ourselves as Stumbling Blocks*

By keeping our hearts diligently we should the soonest remove the scandals and stumbling blocks out of the way of the world. Oh, how the worthy name of our Lord is blasphemed because of the wicked conduct of many who bear His name. Oh, what prejudice has been created against the Gospel by the inconsistent lives of those who preached it. But if we keep our hearts, we shall not add to the scandals caused by the ways of loose professors. Nay, those with whom we come into contact will see that we have “been with Jesus” (Act 4:13). When the majestic beams of holiness shine from a heavenly walk, the world will be awed and respect will again be commanded by the followers of the Lamb.

Though the keeping of the heart entails such hard labour, do not such blessed gains supply a sufficient incentive to engage diligently in the same? Look over the eight special benefits we have named, and weigh them in a just balance; they are not trivial things. Then guard well your heart, and watch closely its love for God. Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love that he had unto her. The labour of love is always delightful. If God has your heart, the feet will run swiftly in the way of His commandments; duty will be a delight. Then let us earnestly pray, “So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom” (Psa 90:12)—as we “apply” our hands unto manual tasks.

Conclusion

Let me now close the whole of these articles with a word or two of consolation to all serious Christians who have sought to faithfully and closely give themselves to this heartwork, but who are groaning in secret over their apparent lack of success therein, and who are fearful that their experience falls short of a saving one. *First*, this argues that your heart is honest and upright. If you are mourning over heart conditions and sins, that is something no hypocrite does. Many a one is now in Hell who had a better heart than mine; many a one now in Heaven complained of as bad a heart as thine.

Second, God would never leave thee under so many heart burdens and troubles if He intended not thy benefit thereby. You say, Lord, why do I go mourning all the day having sorrow of heart? For long have I been exercised over its hardness, and not yet is it broken. Many years have I been struggling against vain thoughts, and still I am plagued by them. Oh, when shall I get a better heart? Oh that God would thereby show you what your heart by nature is, and have you take notice of how much you are beholden to free grace! So too He would keep you humble, and not fall in love with yourself.

Third, God will shortly put a blessed end to these cares, watchings, and headaches. The time is coming when your heart shall be as you would have it, when you will be delivered from all fears and sorrows, and never again cry, "O my hard, vain, earthy, filthy heart." Then shall all darkness be purged from your understanding, all vanity from your affections, all guilt from your conscience, all perversity from your will. Then shall you be everlastingly, delightfully, ravishingly entertained and exercised upon the supreme goodness and infinite excellency of God. Soon shall break that morning without clouds, when all the shadows shall flee way; and then we "shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is" (1Jo 3:2). Hallelujah!

*For much in these articles, particularly the final one,
we are indebted to the works of the Puritan, John Flavel.*



Guarding Your Heart is a strong exhortation to all the saints of God to vigilantly protect, defend, and purify hearts from the assaults of this world. It first appeared as articles in the July through December 1933 issues of Pink's monthly journal *Studies in the Scriptures*, which was published without interruption from 1922 to 1953. Each issue of the *Studies* normally included six to eight articles; each article addressed a different topic or book of Scripture, which ran as a series over several issues (sometimes as long as several years). Sustaining single-handedly this volume of in-depth Biblical exposition over his lifetime is a testimony to the grace of God upon his labors. Chapel Library is reprinting the original editions of the *Studies in the Scriptures*, sending three monthly issues by mail each quarter in the USA.

Arthur W. Pink was born in Nottingham, England, in 1886, and born again by God's Spirit in 1908. He studied for only six weeks at Moody Bible Institute in Chicago, U.S.A., when he and the administration at MBI decided that he should enter the pastorate without delay. Pink began his pastoral work in Colorado and later pastored churches in California, Kentucky, and South Carolina before moving on to preach and teach briefly in Sydney, Australia. In 1934, he returned to his native England. With the onslaught of World War II, Pink took up his final residence on the Isle of Lewis, Scotland, in 1940, where he remained until his death in 1952. While virtually unknown to the Christian world when he died, his writings are known for their clarity, zealous exhortation, careful exposition, and Christ-centeredness.