

# Keeping the Heart

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with all diligence;  
for out of it are the  
issues of life.”  
—Proverbs 4:23*

## IT SEEMS A THING INCRED-

ible that one, having once been enlightened and come into the fellowship of the Lord’s family, could ever allow the Truth to slip away from them. However, we sadly face the fact that it has happened, and does, from time to time. Someone may say, “Well, brother, we are all in the Truth here and surely it cannot happen to us,” and we trust and pray that it will not happen to any of us. The point is, unless we are constantly on our guard, it could very easily happen to any of the Lord’s people.

As we look back to the earlier days of the harvest, to the many pilgrims and elders who helped spread the Truth, almost unbelievably, many of them lost that very Truth before they died. What was the reason? Was it because they were deceived by the Adversary? Was it the attractions of the world that overwhelmed them? Was it the weakness of the flesh? Were they not as spiritually minded as the Lord’s people of today? Surely the word of the Lord we hear spoken today is no more spiritual than those wonderful discourses from the earlier part of the harvest. Yet, many of those very

brethren lost the Truth, in large measure due to failure along the lines of their heart condition. This should be a warning to us, “Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.”—I Cor. 10:12

## **KEEPING THE HEART—OUR RESPONSIBILITY**

The Lord has promised many things to us—protection from the Adversary; wisdom and enlightenment from above; sufficiency in all things to make our calling and election sure; daily experiences that are best suited for our spiritual development. We are assured that if God be for us, no one could prevail against us (Rom. 8:31), and he has promised that he will never leave us, nor forsake us. (Heb. 13:5) However, there is one thing that the Lord will not do for us, and that is the matter of keeping the heart. “Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.” (Prov. 4:23) This we must do ourselves.

We can illustrate the point in this way. Many people have a small garden in one corner of their backyard at home where they enjoy working the soil and watching the various kinds of vegetables grow and develop until they reach maturity and fruition. Now there are three elements that are essential for a healthy garden. They are water, sunlight and soil. The sunlight and rain are provided by the Lord—we have no control over that. The soil, though, is our responsibility. We must see to it that it is cultivated regularly and supplied with the organic matter and nutrients necessary for the health of each plant.

The Lord has provided, so to speak, the ‘sunshine’ and ‘rain’ necessary for our spiritual growth,

but he has appointed us the job of preparing the soil of our heart, and unless we prepare our hearts properly and cultivate and care for it regularly, this new life—this New Creature—will not be healthy, and will not grow properly. Also, in the garden at home, we find it necessary to pull the weeds out every once in a while, and when we think we've gotten them all, in a few days we find others to get rid of.

Let us then examine our hearts regularly, and see to it that we do not allow any of these weeds to grow—impure thoughts, wrong motives, the little beginnings of pride, selfishness, etc.; for if we do not get rid of them quickly they can get us into a lot of trouble, and they are very apt to choke out the New Creature. Yes, the New Creature is rooted in the soil of our heart and the lifeblood of this newly begotten being is circulated and controlled by the heart condition.

## **THE HEART—KEY TO THE NEW CREATURE**

Why did the Lord use the symbol of the heart in this way? Just as the fleshly heart is the mainspring of the life-flow through our natural bodies, so our newly consecrated attitude is the mainspring of the life-flow through the New Creature. Our attitude toward God, Jesus, the Truth, and the brethren will determine the growth of our New Creature.

When we made a consecration to the Lord we were very sincere, we never held back anything—it was a complete consecration, otherwise the Lord would never have accepted it. Now, if we begin to draw back from the fulfillment of these vows of consecration, and if our consecrated attitude begins

to change, it would be a serious thing to the New Creature which depends upon this heart condition.

Let us notice our key text again—'Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.' The Lord is telling us that the issue is that of life, and whether we will ever be found worthy to attain unto life everlasting is fully, not partly, dependent upon whether we are now, on this side of the veil, keeping our hearts with all diligence.

## **SCRIPTURAL ADMONITIONS CONCERNING THE HEART**

The Lord considered this matter of keeping the heart so important that he gave us many admonitions in the Bible to help us understand what is required of us to keep our hearts properly. We find mentioned in the Scriptures particular attributes, or elements, of a sanctified heart. It is critical that we have them continually before our minds.

Meekness and humility are two of these elements. "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls." (Matt. 11:29) Humility is very important as an element of our heart condition. Jesus, our perfect example of humility, indicates in this verse that if we become yoked with him, and learn from him, we will become like him in meekness and humility of heart, and doing so we will find peace and rest for our souls. Sitting at the feet of Jesus is another way we develop a meek and humble attitude. We sit at his feet every time we come together for fellowship and study. Jesus said he would be there with us on these occasions. He does this through the Spirit of Truth emanating

from each consecrated heart present. If we humble ourselves, we will find it possible to learn valuable lessons from every member of the body, even those who may appear to be the weakest saints among us. Let us see to it that humility and meekness are truly a part of our heart condition.

“Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.” (Prov. 3:5) Trust with all our heart. We would not get very far if trust and confidence in the Lord were not a part of our heart condition. It is easy to trust in the written Word of God in the quietness of study and meditation. How often, though, we lean on our own understanding in meeting the trials and experiences of our daily lives, and fail to apply the things we have learned from his Word. Let us learn, rather, to seek his will and guidance in all things pertaining to our daily lives, and then to follow it in our decisions, words, and actions. If we have this trustful attitude of heart, coupled with submissiveness to his leading, we will be richly blessed through the providential overruling of our Heavenly Father.

Obedience is another important heart attitude. “Blessed are they that keep his testimonies, and that seek him with the whole heart.” (Ps. 119:2) Obedience is a universal law of God, and none will ever have life everlasting without learning this fundamental principle. For the child of God, this means a conscientious doing of the Lord’s will daily, and a sincere application of the principles of truth and righteousness in our lives. As the psalmist declared, this is not something we can do halfheartedly, but we must give wholehearted obedience to the Lord. We must obey, not out of being forced, but

because our heart delights to do the Father's will.—  
Ps. 40:8

## **THE PEACE OF GOD**

Another heart element is peace. "Let the peace of God rule in your hearts." (Col. 3:15) The 'peace of God' is wonderful. Jesus said, "My peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." (John 14:27) We can lose that peace of Christ simply by fraternizing with the world, and appropriating to ourselves some of the cares, ambitions, fears, etc., that are so much a part of this present evil world. Let us be sure that we are not allowing anything in this life to interfere with this peace of God ruling in our heart.

Next we come to patience. "Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh." (James 5:8) We are not always as patient as we would like to be, but it must become a part of our heart condition. We must learn to patiently wait upon the Lord in all things.

A very important element of our heart is love. "Thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might." (Deut. 6:5) Nothing else would matter much if love was not the crowning attribute of our heart condition. 'Love the LORD thy God with all thine heart'—a wholehearted love. Nothing short of that is acceptable to God. We love God "because he first loved us." (I John 4:19) We increase our love for him by learning more about him through the study of his Word, thus being drawn into a closer fellowship with him.

True love then is in proportion to knowledge and understanding. We love God because we know something about his wonderful character and plan. He has revealed himself to us in order that we can love him, for he wants our love and adoration. That love is increased as we seek to increase our understanding of his Word and his will for us. Our love for the brethren increases as we come to know more about them—their faithfulness to the Truth, their spirituality, etc. We love them accordingly, just as our Lord loved Peter, James, and John more than the others because of their greater zeal. So then, through fellowship together we learn to love one another more.

### **SEEKING GOD**

In Jeremiah 29:13, seeking the Lord is identified as a desired heart element. “Ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart.” It was because of our heart condition that the Lord revealed himself to us in the first place, and we consecrated our lives to him, but this must continue to be our attitude. We must daily seek the Lord’s guidance and overruling in all our affairs of life. If we do, the hand of the Lord will be revealed to us, and we will learn the lessons, and benefit by the experiences he gives us. Let us continue daily to search for the will of the Lord with all our heart.

Certainly our heart condition would not be complete without faith. “Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience.” (Heb. 10:22) We also know that “without faith it is impossible to please him [God].” (Heb. 11:6) The apostle suggests

that a true heart is one having a ‘full assurance of faith.’ We sometimes define faith as a conviction or belief, but this is not sufficient. A real faith is one in which a conviction or belief is evidenced by works. “Faith without works is dead.” (James 2:26) It would seem then that the Lord does not gauge our faith on the basis of how much knowledge and understanding we have, but rather by the way that knowledge is proven and given expression of in our daily conduct. Let us, therefore, show our faith to the Lord and to one another through our good works, and seek to have his will fulfilled in our lives continually.

## **LOVE WITH A PURE HEART**

We are to have the heart characteristic of love for the brethren. “See that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently.” (I Pet. 1:22) Loving the brethren is one of the unmistakable evidences that we are in the family of Christ. “We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren.” (I John 3:14) If we ever lose the desire to be with the fellow body members of Christ, we would have reason to fear that something has gone seriously wrong in our heart.

It is important that we consider Paul’s definition of true brotherly love in I Corinthians 13:4-7—“Love suffereth long, and is kind; love envieth not; love vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.” Let us measure our own hearts



by this standard, and if we always have this kind of love toward our brethren, our fellowship together will indeed be sweet. We notice that the Apostle Peter indicates that this love should not be just a passive one, but a fervent love. ‘See that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently.’

## **MAKING MELODY IN OUR HEART**

Finally, we want to notice Ephesians 5:19, in which we learn that our heart must always be in a rejoicing and prayerful attitude. “Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.” If the Truth really has entered deeply into our hearts, it will bring immeasurable joy into our lives. We have found this to be true as we look upon our lives. The attitude of prayer and communion with our Heavenly Father is the condition in which our heart should find itself. However, rejoicing always in the Lord is not easy. The Lord gives us experiences from time to time designed to test us along this line.

Have we ever found ourselves murmuring and complaining when things go wrong—when things seem to go different than we had planned? Have we ever chafed under trials and unpleasant circumstances? Let us each take stock of our own hearts, and perhaps we will see that there is something more yet to be done along this line. ‘Rejoicing in tribulation’ is not always easy, but this is the standard we must reach.

Let us call to mind the occasion when Paul and Silas were in prison. “When they had laid many stripes upon them, they cast them into prison,

charging the jailor to keep them safely: . . . And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God.” (Acts 16:23-25) We must give careful attention to our own hearts along this line.

## **ENLARGING OUR HEART**

As we have discussed these elements of a sanctified heart, we trust that all the Lord’s dear people have made progress along all of these lines, but after carefully examining ourselves and taking stock of our heart condition, we may feel the need to continue to have these heart elements “enlarged.” This thought is suggested in II Corinthians 6:11,13. “O ye Corinthians, our mouth is open unto you, our heart is enlarged. . . . Now for a recompence in the same, (I speak as unto my children,) be ye also enlarged.” The enlarging of our hearts is vital to the growth of the New Creature. With the natural body, the heart of a baby begins to be enlarged as the child grows toward maturity in order to take care of the needs of a growing body. So it is with the New Creature—our sanctified heart must be enlarged in proportion as the New Creature develops and grows toward spiritual maturity.

If we plant a seed in a container with just a little bit of soil it will sprout and begin to grow, but as it gets larger we must put it in a larger container with more soil, otherwise it will become sickly and perhaps even die. When we consecrated to the Lord, the soil of our hearts was sufficiently prepared so this new life, this embryo New Creature, could take root and have its beginning, but unless we are enlarging these heart elements the New Creature will not properly grow, and may become

sick and even die. Let us recall our theme text once again—‘Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life.’ The life of the New Creature is dependent upon how we keep our heart.

Another important thought is this: The Lord tries our hearts from time to time. “The fining pot is for silver, and the furnace for gold: but the LORD trieth the hearts.” (Prov. 17:3) Does the Lord try our heart so he can determine what condition it is in? We think not—he could simply read the heart and tell that, without giving us any trying experiences. The Lord gives us these experiences—he ‘trieth the hearts’—in order that we might see some of our weaknesses and imperfections. Through trying experiences, he indicates to us those areas of our heart condition which need special attention. Then it is up to us to benefit from these lessons and have them serve as stepping-stones in this work of having our hearts enlarged.

## **OUR HEART TO BE JUDGED**

We believe that in the final analysis, at the end of life’s course, our Heavenly Father will judge in the case of each one of his people, as to their worthiness or unworthiness to share with our Lord Jesus in the glory of the Divine plane. We suggest that he will make this a judgment of our heart, plus the expression of our heart sentiments through good works. This thought is expressed in Revelation 2:23, “All the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works.”

Finally, the Lord has given us all the tools and everything necessary so that we can take good care of our hearts. We must be careful not to use our pruning shears on our brother, or perhaps attempt to pull a weed or two out of our brother's heart that we think we see there. We have all we can do to prepare our own hearts, and as we seek to do this, our brethren are going to notice these heart sentiments being manifest in our lives, and they will be encouraged to do likewise. We are examples one to another in this way. May this work of 'enlarging the heart' continue in our individual lives, for the Lord has promised to pour out his rich blessings upon all those who are 'keeping the heart.'

