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Keeping The Heart With All Diligence

By Everett Hardin

The Holy Spirit said, “*Keep thy **heart** with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life*” (Prov. 4:23). This is a serious charge to every responsible individual. The word “heart” stands for the whole inner nature. Vine says the word “heart” stands for, “man’s entire mental and moral activity, both the rational and the emotional elements.” We cannot have our actions right in the sight of God while the heart is perverted. The first duty of the soldier is loyalty. The first duty of the Christian is fidelity.

The heart is that part of man from which flows the convictions, affections and will, and determines the course of his life. The functions of the heart include the understanding (Matt. 13:15); the perceptions (John 12:40), the reasoning (Mk. 2:6); the desires (Matt. 5:28); the joy (Eph. 5:19); the grief (John 14:1); the thoughts (John 9:4); the intentions (Heb 4:12); purpose (2 Cor. 9:7); and the conscience (1 Cor. 3:20).

The writer says “*the issues of life*” are from the heart. David considered the heart in that light. “*Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my **heart**, be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer*” (Ps. 19:24). The heart is the center of one’s life, and his life will show the state of his heart “*A good man out of the good treasure of the **heart** bringeth forth good things; and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things*” (Matt. 12:35).

Jesus gave a parable, recorded in Matthew 13 and Luke 8, in which He presented the state of the heart, the word of God entered. Jesus depicted these soils as different conditions of the heart into which the word of God was sown. Of the four kinds of hearts, or hearers, only one kind really profited by the hearing of the word of God. The heart is the battle ground where the devil fights against God. The heart represented by the wayside soil is a heart affected by dishonesty, prejudice, or indifference. It is an unprepared heart. The heart represented by the stony soil is a heart without strong convictions. The heart represented by the thorny ground is one that is concerned with the cares of life, money, pleasure, power, popularity, etc. The word that is sown into an unprepared heart has no better opportunity to spring forth and grow than does seed that is sown in unprepared soil. The good ground hearers are those honest souls who do not allow Satan to take away the word or bring any influence to bear on it. They make the **heart** “*honest and good.*” The word of God produces acceptable obedience only in the “*honest and good*” heart. The person himself makes the heart “*honest and good,*” or deceitful and evil. Jesus Himself taught that when He said, “*But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornication, thefts, false witness, blasphemies; these are the things which defile a man, but to eat with unwashed hands defileth not a man*” (Matt. 15:128-20).

Man Is Changed From The Inside

The gospel of Christ is addressed to the heart of man, not the belly or social needs. “*The kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost*” (Rom. 14:17). The social gospel has failed to convert man to serve the Lord, because it appeals to the appetites and not the heart of man. Salvation from sin does not occur until man turns from his sins and to the Lord. This is accomplished by repentance, which necessitates faith. Faith

comes by hearing the word of God, and from no other source (Rom. 10:17). Genuine faith produces repentance which results in the cessation from sin and the reformation of life. If the heart is not "*honest and good*," faith and repentance will not follow. "*That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus Christ, and shall believe in thy heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation*" (Rom. 10:9-10).

The gospel is the power of God to save (Rom. 1:16), and obedience comes from the heart. "*His servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or obedience unto righteousness*" (Rom. 6:17). Unless the heart is "*honest and good*," it will not receive the gospel by which that person can be saved. This makes man responsible for the integrity of his heart. This thought is further emphasized by the teaching of Jesus regarding an evil heart. He says one commits adultery in his heart by looking on a woman to lust after her (Matt. 5:28). Jesus described the heart condition of the scribes and Pharisees and many who followed them. "*This peoples heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted and I should heal them*" (Matt. 13:15). By refusing to hear, see and understand with their heart, they could not be converted. These were responsible for the condition of the hearts, and their salvation depended upon their hearing and receiving the truth which Jesus taught (John 8:32).

Satan Enters The Heart

When the heart will allow it Satan will enter the heart and lead one into all kinds of evil, in thought, word, and deed. Satan entered the heart of Judas Iscariot. "*And supper being ended, the devil having now put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him*" (John 13:2). Ananias with his wife Sapphira, lied about his gift to the work of the Lord. Peter asked "*Ananias why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price?*" (Acts 5:3). Satan enters the heart and fills it to do evil. Peter's question to Ananias indicated the he could know why Satan filled his heart. He had to give consent. Satan cannot get into the heart unless that person allows it. That make him responsible for the conditions of his heart in the area of honesty and goodness.

Simon the sorcerer was a deceiver who bewitched many people in Samaria. But when he heard the gospel preached by Philip he believed also and was baptized. He continued with Philip, observing the miracles which he did, but when Peter and John came down and imparted spiritual gifts unto them, Simon saw this and offered them money for this gift. Peter said to Simon: "*Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter for thy heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this thy wickedness and pray God, if perhaps the thoughts of thine heart may be forgiven thee. For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity*" (Acts 8:20-23). Simon asked Peter to pray for him that "*none of these things which ye have spoken come upon me*" (v. 24) Even if one's hearing is right to be saved, he must guard his heart lest it become not right in the sight of God. The Holy Spirit said, "*Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God*" (Heb 3:12).

The Lord Opens the Heart

The Lord opens the heart with the power of the Gospel. Those on Pentecost were "*pricked*" in their heart by the gospel which Peter preached. The effect that was produced within the hearts of the audience through the words they heard. God did not send the Holy spirit directly into their hearts to exert supernatural influence and affect a miraculous change in their hearts and lives. God's appeal was made through the rational presentation of facts. The Lord opened the

heart of Lydia by things that were spoken by Paul. How did the Lord open her heart? Many have speculated that He opened her heart by sending the Holy Spirit directly into her heart to change her heart miraculously, so that she would respond to the gospel. There is no hint anywhere in God's word that God sends the Holy spirit to operate on the sinner's heart. This idea is based on the unscriptural Calvinistic theory that the heart is depraved from birth to such a degree that is incapable of accepting the Lord.

The wise man said there is a special reason why we should keep our hearts; he says "*for out of it are the issues of life.*" In other words, a well guarded heart is the source of all that is best in our lives. Let us see that it is cleansed from sin and kept holy. But we cannot do this by ourselves. The blood of Christ, which cleanses from all sin, not only removes guilt, but purges out the corruption and power of evil. "*In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness*" (Zech. 13:1). We keep the heart by watchfulness, by self-control, by prayer, and above all by entrusting it to the keeping of God. God meets us in our helplessness, and offers to keep our hearts for us if we will love Him and put our trust in Him. "*Trust in the Lord with all thine **heart**: and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths. By not wise in thine own eyes; fear the Lord and depart from evil*" (Prov. 3:5-7). "*My son, give me thine **heart**, and let thine eyes observe my ways*" (Prov. 23:26).
