

## **“HEARTKEEPING”**

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The text of Scripture upon which we wish to base our remarks, is found in Prov. 4:23, *“Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life.”*

In choosing this topic we had in mind the thought of the general topic of the day, which is “Helpfulness.” We recognized, as is stated, by our text, that the thing which would be most helpful to any of the Lord’s children, would be the keeping of the heart. The most important thing, to anyone who is striving to make his calling and election sure, is the condition of the heart. In making this statement of our text the wise man did not mean the physical heart, as we all recognize, although the physical heart is a good illustration of the heart referred to in our text. The heart here refers to the mind, the affections, the innermost thoughts and desires, the intents.

Just as in the physical, when a physician is called in, the first thing he determines is the condition of the heart, so in the spiritual, the first thing to be noticed and corrected is the heart condition. We well know that the blood which is propelled by the physical heart is the life of the individual. If the heart is found to be very weak, intermittent, and slow, the physician recognizes that a stimulant is needed, and he applies it. If such condition be permitted to continue there will come a coldness of the extremities, and eventually there will be a gradual dying of the physical man. It is just so in connection with the spiritual sickness. If we find an intermittent, slow, unsteady condition of the new heart, the new mind, then we recognize the need of a stimulus in that case. If such condition be permitted to go on it will mean the death of the new creature.

The Scriptures tell us of one kind of heart which is pleasing to our Heavenly Father. The statement of our Lord is, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” No others will be able to see God but those who are pure in heart. There are two kinds of hearts in the world. The human race in general have a natural heart, depraved and sinful. It is the kind of heart spoken of in the Lord’s Word as being “deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.” I am sure we can all agree to the statement of God’s Word in connection with this matter. We have all had sufficient experience with the natural, depraved appetites and desires of the heart, so that we realize this statement to be absolutely true. God’s Word tells us that we were all born in sin, and misshapen in iniquity from the very beginning.

The mind to which our particular attention is called in the text, however, is the regenerate mind, or heart, the new mind. The only ones in the world to whom this text applies

particularly and specially, are those who are in this condition. It applies to those who have recognized their undone, sinful, depraved condition; those who have recognized the need of a Savior to regenerate and renew this condition of heart; those who have accepted the arrangement of our Father through the ransom sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ, for our justification; those who have made a full consecration of themselves to do the will of God; those who have been begotten of His Holy Spirit, and become new creatures in Christ Jesus. They are the only ones who can follow the injunction of our text.

The statement of the text is that we are to keep our heart, for out of it are the issues of life. A great many people have thought that it is not necessary to keep the heart; that all that is necessary is to come to the Lord Jesus and accept Him as our Savior; that having received Him and confessed Him we became Christians; that from this time on we have nothing to fear respecting our condition. They tell us that if we are once in grace we are always in grace. But when we turn to the Lord's Word we find it to teach something very different from the thought just expressed, and which many have held for centuries. The Lord calls attention to the fact that it is only those who endure to the end who will receive the crown of life. "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me in My throne." Many statements of the Scriptures emphasize the fact that after we have received this new heart, this new mind, we are to keep it.

So we might put the thought of our text this way: "You keep your heart." The Lord is not keeping our hearts, from this standpoint. We recognize that without His strength, without reliance upon Him, we would make a miserable failure of trying to live as He would wish us to live. But He has put the responsibility upon us, and so He tells us in another statement of His Word, "Keep yourselves in the love of God." We have something to do in connection with this matter ourselves. While the Lord's strength is always available for us, and while He has assured us that His grace is sufficient for every time of need, we are expected to keep our hearts in submission to His will; in submission to the instruction of His Word. By living in this attitude we can rely upon the Lord's assistance, and He will help us in keeping our hearts.

A garden is often used as an illustration of the new heart, the new mind. In the spring of the year those who do the gardening go out and break up the soil, taking out the weeds and smoothing the ground, and mellowing it, in preparation for the sowing of the seed, that a crop may be produced for the summer, and fall, and winter. After having prepared the ground the different kinds of seeds are placed in it which will bring forth a fruitage—something pleasing, helpful, nourishing to the physical man. After planting these good seeds—onions, tomatoes, cabbage, and all this garden truck, perhaps the man will go away, and in a few days he will return to see how the crop is progressing. He will find that the plants from the seeds he has planted are peeping through the soil, and perhaps all

around these plants from the good seed, he will find other plants springing up. Perhaps there will be little difference in their appearance, and it may be difficult to tell one from the other at first. He will let them all grow together for a time and go away again. In several days he will return again to see his garden. He will probably find that some of the good plants are over-grown and over-shadowed by the evil plants, the weeds. If this condition is allowed to continue his good plants, will become yellow, they will lose their life and vitality, while the ragweed and other noxious weeds are sapping the fertility of the soil.

This illustration seems to be a good one to apply to the new mind, or heart. At the time we realized our condition of heart, and accepted the Lord Jesus, there was a breaking up of the old heart condition. We became very penitent. We saw our undone condition. In this way the ground was properly broken up. All the weeds of roughness are taken away, and the ground of the heart is mellowed to receive the good seed. Having come into this condition we accepted the assistance of the Lord Jesus and made a consecration of our lives to the Lord. Then the seed is sown. You remember the Apostle tells us something of the different kinds of seed that are to be planted in this new mind, and the fruits that are to be brought forth. We are told that the good seed is sown on different kinds of soil. Some ground receives it, and brings forth 30, 60, or 100 fold. Other ground is stony, and the crop does not mature. Upon other ground the thorns and briars choke out the good seed, so that the maximum results are not realized. But we are told that there are certain kinds of fruit that the Lord expects in connection with the matter.

The Apostle enumerates the fruits as love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance. All of these are fruits of the Holy Spirit. These are the good seeds to be sown, cultivated and developed. Now while the garden was prepared by having all of the visible weeds, and everything of that kind removed, still we find the seeds and roots of former conditions still remaining, and these spring up with the good seed. It is just so with the new heart condition. After the breaking up and mellowing operation we have still the motions of sin in our minds, in our flesh. Although, under the impulse of the Holy Spirit we make a good start, we are energized and the fruits begin to develop, it takes time for them to mature. During this time there are trials and testings which prove to us the necessity for rooting out these motions of sin that remain from the old heart condition. Just as in the physical condition, so it is in the new heart and mind. It was there necessary to root out and destroy all those noxious weeds, and cultivate the good plants.

So with this new heart condition it is likewise true. You remember the Apostle tells us that we are to be very careful respecting the things that we permit to spring up in our hearts. He says, "Lest a root of bitterness spring up and defile many." We know how

very easy it is to have such a condition result, even though we have the new heart, the new mind, and desire earnestly to do the Lord's will. Every little while something comes in that tests our loyalty and alertness in the matter of obeying the Lord's will. Perhaps some brother or sister has been overheard to say something, or has been seen to do something, that would seem to us to be altogether wrong for a new creature in Christ. Perhaps we will say in our minds, "I do not think that a brother or sister in the Lord would do anything like that. I am very sure I would not do such a thing. Of course, I am not judging the brother; I would not do that. I will not say anything about it. I will not tell another but I will know in my mind that such a condition is altogether wrong." Perhaps there was nothing wrong in what he did, so far as the new heart and mind were concerned. We may think of the matter again from time to time, as the adversary brings it to our attention. Perhaps the adversary brings it to our mind at a time when there would be a good opportunity to mention to a brother or sister some circumstances connected with it. We may say, "I do not intend to mention any names, but I know a brother, or sister, who did such and such a thing. I do not think a brother, or sister, would do such a thing as that. I have my doubts about such one being a brother or sister." We have stirred up the matter. Perhaps it has touched us a little bit personally. We allow it to grow, and grow, and eventually it becomes a very large matter in our minds. In due time a root of bitterness springs up. We now have a little of prejudice in the matter. The root continues to grow until it becomes quite a plant in our heart garden. The result is that in a little time it will be overshadowing some of the other plants. Perhaps the plant of joy is being over-shadowed a little. There is not quite so much joy, not quite so much freedom in fellowship with the Lord's children. Perhaps the matter of peace has been affected a little bit. If we allow this bitterness to develop we will find that it is gradually choking out the good fruit, the good seed, and the heart is becoming corrupted to the extent that development along the lines of the fruits of the Spirit is being interfered with. The only logical thing to do in a case of this kind is to follow the course we would pursue in a natural garden. Root out the weeds, and throw them away. Destroy everything that would interfere with our full submission to the Lord.

It is a very important matter, as our text states, that we keep the heart. It means life to those who keep the heart. There was a time, perhaps, when it would not have had so much meaning to us; when we thought we were dead it meant that we were not dead; when we thought, no matter what kind of a heart we possessed, we could not die; when we thought our eternal state would be bliss in heaven, or an everlasting state of misery. Failing to understand what death means, we could not appreciate the value of life properly. Having come to a knowledge of the fact that a man is dead when he dies, and that but for the exercise of the power of God all of the dead would forever remain in that state of extinction, we begin to appreciate what an important thing it is to keep our heart in proper condition, that we may continue in life.

How may we keep the heart? If this is the only possible way by which we may gain eternal life, then the knowledge of how to keep the heart is a very important matter. The Scriptures tells us that where our treasure is, there will our heart be also. Now this is one of the ways in which we can keep our hearts, namely, by having our treasure in the proper place. If we have our treasure in heaven where the Lord is; if we are setting our affections upon heavenly things, and can keep our treasure there, then we may be sure our heart will be there. There are many statements of Scripture showing how necessary it is for us to exercise ourselves to keep our affections set upon heavenly things. Someone may say, "I never find it difficult at all to set my affections upon heavenly things; I just delight to think about the heavenly things, about the Heavenly Father and His great love for man. I love to think of His plan for the human race, and His love for them while they were yet in rebellion as sinners; and how God so loved them that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him might not perish, but have everlasting life. I delight to think of the character of the Heavenly Father, and that of the Lord Jesus—how He voluntarily gave himself as a ransom sacrifice to purchase back the whole human family from death. I just delight to think of such things as these. delight to think of the heavenly beings, and all who are in harmony with the Heavenly Father." That is a very easy matter. But when we stop to analyze the matter, and put it into practice, it is not so easy. We may for a time set our affections upon heavenly things, and rejoice in them, but the first things we know we will find that our affections have been displaced and some earthly object has taken our attention, it may be legitimate, but very often it is not. Almost before we realize it our minds will be filled with other things related to the earth. Then we will have to make an effort to set our affections upon the heavenly things once more. We will find that they will slip off again, and again, and again. It is necessary for us to occupy our minds with earthly things to some extent, but I fear they are thus occupied to a greater extent than need be. It requires a great deal of effort to keep our affections set on heavenly things. To the extent that we are able to do this, and make proper comparisons between earthly things, and spiritual blessings, we will be successful in cultivating the fruits of the Holy Spirit.

Then the Master suggests another way that is helpful. He tells us in Matt. 5:29, speaking on the other side of the question, "If thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee; if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off." In these ways we will be able to keep our heart in proper condition, to a considerable extent. Of course, we understand that He did not mean that we should literally pluck out our eye, or cut off our hand. If we followed the instructions literally it would not be long until we would have neither eyes nor hands, for we are continually transgressing. The Apostle tells us that he could not do the things that he would, and our experience is much the same. The Lord's thought in these words evidently was, no matter if a thing was as dear to us as our right eye, or our

right hand, if it was interfering with our spiritual progress we should put it away. He used this forcible illustration to show how very necessary it is to keep the heart.

Again, the Lord tells us of the things that we are to think about. In another statement He tells us that, “as a man thinketh in his heart, so is he.” The things that we keep in our mind and heart will determine exactly what we are, and what progress we are making. In Phil. 4:8 we have an outline of some of the things that will be helpful to us in keeping our hearts right. The Apostle says there, “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.” If we think of the true, honest, just, lovely things, and things of good report, filling our minds therewith, we will have such condition that the weeds cannot thrive there. There will be no place for them. The mind must be filled with something. If it is not filled with good it certainly will be filled with the other kind of thoughts, because the mind is active, and continually in exercise.

While we are to “keep ourselves in the love of God,” and to “keep our hearts with all diligence,” the Lord has given us in His Word some very comforting assurances relative to our standing with Him. There is nothing that can separate us from the love of God, the Apostle tells us. We have in the 38th and 39th verses of the 8th chapter of Romans a statement that is very comforting, respecting our security, our standing with the Lord: “For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” I do not think we could add anything to that, as to the security of those who are in Christ Jesus. The first statement is, “I am persuaded that death cannot separate us from the love of God.” We recognize something of the power of death. We realize that those who have gone into death are extinct if it were not for God’s promise, and His power. So, if there were no power exercised in our behalf, then the power of death would separate us from God; it would separate us from existence, from life. But we have God’s assurance that He has overcome death; that He has power to raise the dead. So He has promised that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust. The power of death cannot separate us from God’s love, no matter how great that power may be.

Then the next statement refers to the power of life, and the power of angels. From God’s Word we have learned that we are lower than the angels, having been created on a lower plane, and with less power. The angels have greater power than man. If we did not have the Lord’s word of assurance for it that the power of angels cannot separate us from His love, we would rightly have reason to doubt about it. We recognize that the great adversary, and those in league with him, are at all times striving to win us away from

loyalty to the Lord; to bring us into this condition suggested by the opposite statement of the text. But we have the Lord's assurance that the power of the angels, which are mightier than we, and which are opposed to righteousness, cannot separate us from His love. We might go through the entire list, of things present, things to come, height, depth, and every other power that might be imagined, and we have the assurance of the Lord's Word that none of these things can separate us from His love.

But he shows there is one power which can separate us from the love of God. That power we have within ourselves. The Lord did not compel us to become Christians; He did not compel us to become followers of Christ. He invited us to follow the Lord Jesus and having voluntarily taken this position at his invitation, we may voluntarily repudiate it if we choose. God is not coercing the will of any, so we have it within our power to remove ourselves from this position of favor with the Heavenly Father if we will.

We are living in a time in which, I am sure we all agree, we have the greatest opportunities for obtaining a knowledge of the truth, for understanding the Lord's will, and the greatest opportunities for serving the truth and the brethren that any have had since the days of the early church, and even greater than they had. We are to put on the whole armor of God and enter into these privileges in the different ways open to us—the colporteur work, the volunteer work, speaking the truth to individuals with whom we may come in contact, and keeping our hearts and minds filled with the heavenly things in connection with the service of the Lord. We are very sure that those who enter heartily and zealously into the Lord's service are in a very favorable position. They are in position to have the Lord's blessing in connection with the things they do, and the things they think about. They are also in a position of trial and testing.

As suggested in the beginning, the text does not apply to any except those who are new creatures in Christ Jesus. The latter part of the text is of interest to us. "Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life." As we have suggested before, there is an issue in connection with the keeping of the heart. For the Lord's people the issue is being tried now. Those who are successful in keeping their hearts will receive immortal life on the divine plane. They will be joint heirs with the Savior in His coming kingdom, and have the privilege of reigning with Him. Those who are not faithful, but who repudiate their contract with the Lord, will have another issue entirely. The issue is not one of life, no matter whether we keep our hearts or not, but it is one of life or death. It will be death to those who fail to keep the heart, and become rebellious, and life to those who do keep the heart. We have the three possibilities at the present time. Those who are more than conquerors receive the prize of joint heirship with the Lord. Those who have been unfaithful to a considerable extent; those who have failed to set their affections upon heavenly things as they should, and who have thus fallen short of the prize will,

nevertheless, receive life, but on a lower plane. Those who prove themselves wholly disloyal will go into the second death.

It is a very important matter for each one to strive to keep his heart as the Lord has instructed. We recognize that there must be a great number who will fail to receive this prize, as surely as there is a small company, a little flock, that will make their calling and election sure to a place in the kingdom. It behooves each one of us, in striving to make our calling and election sure, to give earnest heed to the exhortation of the Lord, to “Keep our heart with all diligence.”

This text of Scripture will finally apply to the whole human race. God has assured us that no one will receive lasting life who is not pure in heart. None but the righteous will enter into life. So during the Millennial reign of Christ all of the human family will enter into their judgment, an opportunity to gain life. The Scriptures assure us that the world at large is not on trial for life at the present time. The Apostle tells us that the whole world of mankind “lieth in the wicked one”; that only those who have accepted the Lord Jesus have passed from death unto life. But when the condemnation is lifted from the human race they will have this same condition of heart to attain to. They must reach perfection of heart. This injunction of the Lord will apply to every human being at that time. It will then be a matter of keeping the heart, and being developed more and more toward the condition of perfection until they actually reach that condition, or they will go into second death.

So we see that this issue that is before us is an all-important one, not only for the church, who have the new mind now, but ultimately for every human being. All must reach this condition of perfection in which the first man was created in order to be worthy of life. They must also be tested as to their loyalty, to demonstrate their worthiness of the reward of eternal life.