

# ST. SIMEON ANGLICAN CHURCH, OFF FUTA ROAD, AKURE

## BIBLE STUDY, 18/02/2009

### STUDY 4

## THE HEART WORK

Proverbs 4:23

As the heart in our physical body is the centre 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 is 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 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.

*"Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life"* (Proverbs 4:23). The "heart" is here put for our whole inner being, the "hidden man of the heart" (1 Peter 3:4). It is that which controls and gives character to all that we do. To "keep" 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 is the work to which God has called us.

The duty of keeping the heart with the utmost diligence is binding upon Christians at all times; there is no period or condition of life in which Christians may be excused from this work. Nevertheless, there are distinctive seasons, critical hours (times of prosperity and adversity), which call for more than a common vigilance over the heart (Deuteronomy 6:10; II Chronicles 21:16; Ezekiel 28:5; Nehemiah 9:25; Hosea 8:6; Psalm 62:10; Romans 8:28; Psalm 119:71).

### 1. The great business of a Christian's life

Proverbs 4:23; Deuteronomy 4:9; Proverbs 22:5; 23:19; Hebrews 12:15; Proverbs 13:3; Matthew 15:18-19

The keeping and right managing of the heart in every condition is the great business of a Christian's life. To "keep" the heart right implies that it has been *set right*. At regeneration the heart 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 means: *striving to shut out from it all that is opposed to God; striving to bring it into conformity with the Word; to preserve it tender unto sin; to look diligently after its cleansing*. 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. If the heart is 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.

*"Keep thine heart with all diligence"*. 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 our outward life. We are to "keep" or preserve it more than our reputation, our body, our estate, our money. With all earnestness and prayer, we should labour that no evil desire prevails or abides there, avoid all that excites lust, feeds pride, or stirs up anger, crushing the first emotions of such evils as we would the brood of a scorpion.

## 2. Purification of the heart

Proverbs 4:23; II Kings 10:30-31; Psalm 119:80

But *how* are we to "purify" our hearts? By vomiting up the foul things taken into it; by daily renewing our exercise of repentance, and *such* repentance as is spoken of in II Corinthians 7:11; by the daily exercise of faith (Acts 15:9), appropriating afresh the cleansing blood of Christ, bathing every night in that "fountain" which has been opened "for sin and uncleanness" (Zechariah 13:1); and by treading the path of God's commandments: "Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit" (1 Peter 1:22).

The Christian who means business will labour to have a "willing" heart (Exodus 35:5), which acts spontaneously and gladly, not of necessity; a "perfect" heart (I Chronicles 29:9), sincere, genuine, upright; a "tender" heart (II Chronicles 34:26), yielding and pliable, the opposite of hard and stubborn; a "broken" heart (Psalm 34:18), sorrowing over all failure and sin; a "united" heart (Ps. 86:11), all the affections centred on God; an "enlarged" heart (Psalm 119:32), delighting in *every* part of Scripture and loving all God's people; a "sound" heart (Proverbs 14:30), right in doctrine and practice; a "merry" heart (Proverbs 15:15), rejoicing in the Lord always; a "pure" heart (Matthew 5:8), hating all evil; an "honest and good heart" (Luke 8:15), free from guile and hypocrisy, willing to be searched through and through by the Word; a "single" heart (Ephesians 6:5), desiring only God's glory; a "true" heart (Hebrews 10:22), genuine in all its dealings with God.

The task of purification of hearts 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, You require 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 You in the name of Christ graciously to grant unto me supernatural strength to do as You have bidden me. Lord, work in me both to will and to do of Your good pleasure*".

## 3. The benefits of the heart work

Proverbs 4:23; Matthew 12:35; Exodus 35:21; Proverbs 14:30; Romans 5:5; 10:9-10; Ephesians 3:17

The heart of man is his worst part before its regeneration, 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 after conversion is to keep the heart with God. The general neglect of the heart is the root cause of the present sad state of Christendom. The guarding of the heart is the best antidote against the infectious errors of the times. Some of the *benefits* of keeping the heart are as follows and much of these are indebted to John Flavel: (i) the pondering and garrisoning of the heart is a great help to the understanding of the deep things of God. An honest and experienced heart is a wonderful aid to a weak head; (ii) care in keeping the heart makes blessed and fruitful the means of grace and the discharge of our spiritual duties. What precious communion we have with God when He is approached in a right frame of soul (Psalm 104:34; 45:1); (iii) 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; (iv) 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 cause to take root, there the more thriving and flourishing grace is (Ephesians 3:17); (v) the diligent care of the heart

makes Christian fellowship profitable and precious. Why is it that when Christians meet together there are often sad contentions? It is because of unmortified passions; (vi) a heart well kept fits us for any condition God may cast us into, or any service He has to use us in. He who 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 who 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 (I Corinthians 9:27); and (vii) by keeping our hearts diligently we should the soonest remove the scandals and stumbling-blocks out of the way of the world. How the worthy name of our Lord is blasphemed because of the wicked conduct of many who bear His name. What prejudice has been created against the gospel by the inconsistent lives of those who preach it.