

## GUARD YOUR HEART

### Introduction

As a teenager, Robert Robinson was sent to London to serve as an apprentice barber. While living in that city he became involved with a notorious street gang and embarked upon a life of debauchery.

One evening Robert and his friends went to hear the famous evangelist, George Whitefield. They went with the intention of mocking the gospel, but Robinson came under conviction of sin and eventually was converted. A few years later at the age of 23, Robinson wrote the hymn, *Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing*.

The third stanza of that hymn contains this prayer:

O to grace how great a debtor daily I'm constrained to be;  
Let that grace now, like a fetter, bind my wandering heart to Thee.  
Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it, prone to leave the God I love;  
Here's my heart, oh take and seal it, seal it for Thy courts above.

There is an anecdote that a number of years later Robinson was riding in a coach, conversing with a fellow passenger. When the passenger turned to the subject of religion and proceeded to quote the lines of Robinson's famous hymn, Robinson exclaimed, "Madam, I am the poor unhappy man who composed that hymn many years ago, and I would give a thousand worlds to enjoy the feeling I had then."

Robinson knew his heart very well when he wrote the words of the third stanza. Apparently he did drift away from the LORD for some time. But the LORD drew him back so that at the end he died in peace on June 9, 1790 (*Living Stories of Famous Hymns*, p.39.)

Our next topical study from the Book of Proverbs deals with the subject of guarding our heart.

### **I. Guard Your Heart, by Keeping to the Way of Life (Proverbs 22:5; Proverbs 19:16; Proverbs 15:10)**

***Thorns and snares lie in the pathway of the perverse, but he who guards his soul will stay far from them.*** (Prov. 22:5)

Proverbs 17:20 declares, "*he who has a perverse heart finds no good thing;*" indeed, as Proverbs 22:5 informs us, what he does find are "*thorns and snares.*" "*The perverse,*" from the Hebrew עֲקֵשׁ, means the false, the deceitful, the crooked. It is referring to those who are not right with God, not in line with His ways; those who have turned away from what is right and good and godly. Proverbs 22:5a

warns that the way of the perverse heart is hard (it encounters “*thorns*”) and treacherous (it encounters “*snare*s;”) it is filled with dangers to life and soul. Note Proverbs 13:15b, “*the way of the transgressor is hard;*” as well as Isaiah 63:10, “*they rebelled and grieved his Holy Spirit; therefore, he turned and became their enemy—he himself fought against them.*”

Consider 1 Samuel 12:20-21,

*And Samuel said to the people, “... do not turn away from Jehovah, but serve Jehovah with all your heart. <sup>21</sup>Do not turn away; for if you do, then you would follow vain things that cannot benefit you nor deliver you, for they are vain.”* (1 Sam. 12:20-21)

Our heart is prone to depart from the fold of God, to view that fold as too confining, and to view the far pastures as green and inviting. But to depart from that divine fold is to enter a spiritual wasteland where there is neither food nor water, but where there are wild beasts of prey.

But, as Proverbs 22:5b informs us, those who guard their heart, or, soul, (i.e.; those who keep diligent watch over the core of their being, the center from which thoughts and conduct emerge) will be kept far from such dangers and perils. Let us be sure to heed the counsel of Proverbs 4:23, “*Keep watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flows the springs of life.*” The urgent request the godly father of Proverbs makes of his son is also the request and gracious command of our heavenly Father: “*My son, give me your heart, and let your eyes delight in my ways*” (Prov. 23:26.)

***He who keeps the commandment preserves his soul, but he who is careless about his ways will die.*** (Prov. 19:16)

Departure from the fold of God is not always, nor usually, a conscious act of defiant disobedience; more often it is the result of a thoughtless, careless drifting. By way of illustration: Little boys at camp get lost not because they set out to do so, but because they pursue one adventure after another, each one leading them farther afield, and thus they lose their orientation and their bearings, soon they have drifted far off from the safety of the camp.

What are some causes of spiritual carelessness and drifting? One cause is a mistaken concept of God; namely, an ignoring of His righteousness and demand for righteousness, viewing Him as being indifferent in matters of morality and justice. The remedy is to bear in mind the warning contained in Psalm 50:16-17,21,

*But to the wicked, God says, “What right have you to recite my laws or take my covenant on your lips? <sup>17</sup>You hate my instruction and cast my words behind you*

*... <sup>21</sup>These things you have done and I kept silent; you thought I was altogether like you. But I will rebuke you and accuse you to your face.” (Psl. 50:16-17,21)*

A second cause is a mistaken concept of salvation; namely, viewing salvation merely as being the forgiveness of sins, and not coming to grips with the fact that salvation also includes the deliverance from sin for holiness. To combat this mistaken notion, let us consider the testimony of the angel as recorded in Matthew 1:21, *“She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name **Jesus**, because he **will save his people from their sins.**”*

Yet another cause is a mistaken concept of where one finds true happiness and fulfillment; namely, thinking that such things are to be found in the world and its sins rather than in the LORD and His holiness. To counteract this misconception, let us bear in mind the words of the Apostle Paul written to the Romans:

*When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness. <sup>21</sup>What benefit did you reap at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? Those things result in death. (Rom. 6:20-21)*

*... the kingdom of God consists in ... righteousness and peace and joy by the Holy Spirit. (Rom. 14:17)*

One other cause we may mention is a mistaken concept of the Christian life; namely, the idea that the Lord Jesus has set us free to go our own way, while in fact the Lord Jesus sets us free from sin in order to become united to Him and submit to His Lordship and be His disciples. Let us remember all of His invitation as it is presented to us in Matthew 11:28-30,

*Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup>Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls; <sup>30</sup>for my yoke is easy and my burden is light. (Matt. 11:28-30)*

In contrast to being careless, Proverbs 19:16a exhorts us to *“preserve”* our soul, and to do so by *“keeping the commandment.”* That is to say, we keep our soul by maintaining a conscious commitment to the Word of God.

*There is stern discipline in store for him who forsakes the way; and he who hates rebuke will die. (Prov. 15:10)*

What about the man who does not heed the instructions to keep, or guard, his heart, the man who becomes careless with regard to the course and the conduct of his life, the man who *“forsakes the way”*? Note: “To forsake,” from the Hebrew **נָטַח**, means to desert, to give up, to cease from following; i.e., to choose to travel the road of apostasy.

The answer: *“There is stern discipline”* for him. *“Discipline,”* (from the Hebrew מוֹסֵר, the root being יָסַר,) refers to chastening and correction, and that of a very severe type: *“stern,”* or, *“grievous”* (from the Hebrew עָצַב, which contains the meaning of sorrow and calamity.) But this very discipline/correction is a part of the heavenly Father’s love. Its gracious, benevolent intention is to spare the man from hell and turn him back to the course of righteousness and life—and to do so even if it takes drastic measures to accomplish that good purpose. Note the testimony of the Psalmist: *“Before I was afflicted I went astray; but now I observe your word ... <sup>75</sup>I know, O Jehovah, that your laws are righteous, and that in faithfulness you have afflicted me”* (Psl. 119:67,75.)

But what if the man adamantly rejects that correction? Such a case is described in Proverbs 1:30-31, *“they would not accept any of my advice, they despised my rebuke—<sup>31</sup>therefore, they will eat the fruit of their way and be filled with [the consequences of] their own decisions.”*

How does Proverbs 15:10 relate to the biblical doctrine of the perseverance of the saints? Everyone who has truly been born again by the Spirit of God shall persevere to the end and enter into glory, as the Lord Jesus assures us in such a passage as John 6:37,39, *“All whom the Father gives me will come to me; and he who comes to me I will by no means reject ... <sup>39</sup>And this is the will of him who sent me, namely, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but should raise it up at the last day.”* But we must understand that a true work of the Holy Spirit produces not only the reception of Christ the Savior, but also perseverance in the faith, or, discipleship, continued commitment to Christ. Consider the teaching of John 1:12-13,

*But to all who did **receive** him, to those who **believe** on his name, to them he gave the right to become children of God—<sup>13</sup>they were born, not by natural descent, nor by human will, nor by a husband’s desire, but by God. (Jn. 1:12-13)*

In this passage, the verb *“receive”* (λαμβάνω,) occurring in the Greek aorist tense, indicates a one time act; i.e., the initial act of receiving Christ the Savior. The verb *“believe”* (πιστεύω,) occurring in the form of the Greek present participle, indicates an ongoing, continuous act of faith and commitment to Christ the Savior; it may better be translated, *“those who are believing.”* Thus, the evidence of a true work of the Holy Spirit is not only the initial reception of Jesus Christ the Savior, but also the life of perseverance and discipleship, the life-long commitment to the Savior; all this is the work of the Holy Spirit in a man’s heart and life.

God employs discipline and correction as one means of guaranteeing the perseverance of His people. In the life of every Christian there is need for some measure of divine discipline. In the lives of some Christians there is need for a

severe measure of such discipline. In the life of each true child of God the divine discipline accomplishes its intended good work.

But the Bible also speaks of a category of people who may have a formal and superficial relationship with Christ but no true saving faith in Him, the apostle Paul refers to such in 2 Timothy 3:5, they are those who have *“a form of godliness by are denying its power.”* In their lives the disciplinary work of the heavenly Father has a hardening effect: they *“hate rebuke”* (Prov. 15:10b.) Consequently, their response to the divine discipline reveals that they are really numbered among the wicked and not among the redeemed. Contrast Psalm 119:71 (*“It is good for me that I have been afflicted; so that I may learn your statutes,”*) the words of the true believer, with Proverbs 21:29a (*“A wicked man hardens his face,”*) the reaction of the wicked to godly rebuke—the hardening of his face is the visible manifestation of the hardening of his heart.

Guard your heart, by keeping to the way of life. May the prayer of the Psalmist also be our prayer:

*Direct me in the path of your commandments, for there I find delight. <sup>36</sup>Turn my heart toward your statutes and not toward selfish gain. <sup>37</sup>Turn my eyes away from worthless things; renew my life according to your word.* (Psl. 119:35-37)

## **II. Guard Your Heart, because Its Contents Cannot Remain Concealed (Proverbs 14:14; Proverbs 27:21; Proverbs 20:11; Proverbs 22:11)**

*The backslider in heart will be filled with his own ways; and a good man will be filled with his ways.* (Prov. 14:14)

The point of Proverbs 14:14a is that sin cultivated in the heart shall finally dominate the life. By way of illustration: A seedling is planted, it germinates, it sprouts roots, and some time later it breaks through the surface of the ground and comes to full fruition. So it is with the sin that is cultivated in the heart, eventually it will dominate the whole life and become evident to all, it cannot remain hidden. A man may depart from God in the secret recesses of his heart, totally unbeknown and undetected by those around him. But in the course of time his life will eventually become filled and dominated by the sinful course first entertained and then pursued by the heart.

When an apparent believer denies the faith, or an apparently godly man is suddenly engulfed in public sin, you can be assured that what has now burst forth to dominate the life was first cultivated in the deep recesses of the heart.

*The crucible is for silver and the furnace for gold, and a man is proved by the things he praises.* (Prov. 27:21)

Silver and gold are proved by the refining fire; when they are exposed to the flames, the dross is consumed and the true metal is revealed. Likewise, a man is tried, or proved, by his praise; what a man praises and values demonstrates where his heart is. As the Lord Jesus declares, *“Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also”* (Matt. 6:21.) A corollary to this is the truth expressed in Proverbs 27:21; what you treasure reveals where your heart is.

You can get a pretty accurate assessment of your heart by asking yourself such questions as these: What are the things I praise and admire, the things in which I take pleasure? About what things do I spend the most time in thought? What kind of people do I most admire and seek to emulate? Why?

You should keep an inventory on the interests of your heart, and the degree of priority you allow them in your life; again asking yourself such questions as these: Does Christ have the first priority in my life? Does Christ have priority over every part of my life?

Are the interests of your heart under Christ’s control, or have they taken control of your life? How can you tell? Ask yourself such questions as these: Do you yield your interests to Christ if they are in conflict with your Christian life and witness? Or do you sacrifice your obedience to Christ in favor of pursuing or satisfying your own interests?

***Even a child makes himself known by his actions, as to whether his conduct is pure and right.*** (Prov. 20:11)

The message of this proverb is this: observe the way a child plays and interacts with others, and you will gain knowledge of his character. Is his play and interaction characterized by an inordinate selfishness or striking selflessness? Is his play and interaction characterized by spite and deceit or by fairness and respect?

The point of this proverb is that the character is revealed by the actions, and it is revealed early in life. It is impossible to conceal the character for long, because we are always interacting with others.

***He who loves a pure heart and whose speech is gracious will have the king for his friend.*** (Prov. 22:11)

Pureness of heart is revealed and expressed by speech that is *“gracious.”* A man who has a godly heart is going to be known by his speech, (which is the most difficult thing to control.) That speech will be marked by grace: it will consist of wholesome words and noble counsel. Proverbs declares that he *“will have the king for his friend.”* A truly righteous and godly king will appreciate such a man. Note the testimony of the Lord Jesus Christ, *“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God”* (Matt. 5:8.)

Guard your heart, because its contents cannot remain concealed. Again, may our prayer be that of the psalmist:

*Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. (Psl. 51:10)*

*Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my thoughts. <sup>24</sup>See if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. (Psl. 139:23-24)*

## **Conclusion**

Far from being negligent with regard to our heart, the Word of God exhorts us to guard our heart with all diligence. Let us be careful to guard our hearts, because the heart is the center and source of our spiritual life. Let us heed the counsel of Proverbs: *“Keep watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life”* (Prov. 4:23.) May the words of Robert Robinson’s hymn also be our prayer:

O to grace how great a debtor daily I’m constrained to be;  
Let that grace now, like a fetter, bind my wandering heart to Thee.  
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