

~Other Speakers S-Z: Thomas Watson:

The Spiritual Watch

by Thomas Watson

"Keep your heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life." Proverbs 4:23

This book of Proverbs is full of many divine aphorisms. Other parts of Scripture are like a golden chain—the verses linked together by coherence; but this book is like a heap of golden rings: many precious sentences lie scattered up and down in it like so many jewels or sparkling diamonds!

That title which some have given to Peter Lombard, "the master of sentences," Solomon might justly challenge. Solomon was the wisest of kings. As his kingdom was a map of the world's glory—so his head was the epitome of the world's wisdom. He was endued with a divine spirit; while he wrote, the Holy Spirit dictated. And surely, among all his golden sentences, none is more weighty and important than this: "Keep your heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life."

This text is about matters of life and death. The words are mandatory; for all counsels in Scripture carry in them the force of a command. "Keep your heart." Here is God's solemn charge to every man, like a judge's charge given from the bench. I shall first explain the text—and then apply the text.

"Keep." The Hebrew word "to keep" has various meanings. Sometimes it means "to arm or fence." A stroke to the heart kills—so fence your heart. Sometimes it means "to take care of something so that it is not lost," as someone would take care of a piece of precious metal so that it is not taken away. Sometimes it means to keep in safe custody. So keep your heart; lock it up safely so that it is forthcoming when God calls for it.

"Your heart." The heart is taken diversely in Scripture. Sometimes it is taken for the vital organ (Judges 19:5), sometimes for the soul (Deuteronomy 13:3), sometimes for the mind (Proverbs 10:8), sometimes for the conscience (1 John 3:20), and sometimes for the will and affections (Psalm 119:36). I shall take it in its full latitude—for the whole soul with all its noble faculties and endowments. The heart is the deposit or charge every man is entrusted with.

"With all diligence." The original word is literally translated "with all keeping." The Hebrew word signifies to keep with watch and ward; a Christian is to set a continual guard around his heart. Some read the words "above all keeping." Nothing requires such strict custody; a Christian's heart must ever be in his eye.

"For out of it are the issues of life." Since the heart is the fountain of life—if the heart lives, the body lives; if the heart is touched, death follows. So the soul is a spiritual fountain: out of it issues either sin or grace. From this spring-head, flow the streams either of salvation or damnation!

In these words there is:

A duty: "Keep your heart."

The manner: "with all diligence."

The reason: "for out of it are the issues of life."

DOCTRINE: It must be a Christian's great care to keep his heart with all diligence, with all keeping.

We are to keep our eyes, as Job set a watch there. Job 31:1: "I have made a covenant with my eyes." We are to keep our lips, as David bridled his tongue. Psalm 39:1: "I will keep my mouth as with a bridle." But we are especially to look to our hearts. "Keep your heart with all keeping."

The heart, like Dinah in the Old Testament, will be gadding abroad; and it seldom returns home without being defiled. Christian, your chief work lies with your heart: "Keep your heart." When any danger is near, the serpent keeps his head safe, and to preserve his head will expose his whole body to injury. So a wise Christian should

especially keep his heart; he should jeopardize his skin to keep a wound from his heart.

To amplify this, I will:

show that the heart must be kept with all kinds of keeping,
show that it must be kept at all times,
and then give the reasons that enforce this idea.

I. The DUTY: "keep your heart." The heart must be kept with all kinds of keeping.

Keep your heart as you would keep a TEMPLE. The temple was a hallowed place, set apart for God's worship. Just so, the heart is the temple of God (1 Corinthians 3:16). This heart-temple must be kept pure and holy—no filth may lie here; sweep the dust out of the temple. The vessels of the temple were cleansed (2 Chronicles 29:15). Thus the memory, affections, and conscience, these temple vessels, must be cleansed (2 Corinthians 7:1). Christ whipped the buyers and sellers out of the temple in John 2. The cares of the world will be crowding into the heart. Now you must get a whip made of the threatenings of the law, and drive these money-changers out of the temple of your heart. Do not let God's temple be turned into a worldly market.

The temple had a fire burning on the altar; take heed of strange fire. But keep the fire of zeal and devotion flaming upon the altar of your heart; do temple work and offer up the sacrifice of a broken heart. When the heart is a consecrated place, a holy of holies, then God will walk there. Many a man's heart is a pest-house, a bedlam, being polluted with sin. This is to put swine into God's temple! This is to let the devil come into God's temple! David's heart was a dedicated temple (Psalm 119:38).

Keep your heart as you would keep a TREASURE. A man who has a great treasure of money and jewels, will keep it with lock and bolt so that it is not stolen. Christian, you carry a precious treasure with you, even all that you are worth—a heart! The devil and the world would rob you of this jewel. Oh, keep your heart as you would keep your life. If you are robbed of this treasure—you are ruined.

Few know the value of their hearts. A farmer can set a price on his grain—but not on jewels. Men do not know the worth of that treasure they carry around with them; therefore they prefer other things. Keep your heart like a treasure.

Keep your heart as you would keep a GARDEN. Your heart is a garden (Song of Solomon 4:12); weed all sin out of your heart. Among the flowers of the heart, weeds will be growing—the weeds of pride, malice, and covetousness: these grow without planting and cultivating. Therefore be weeding your heart daily by prayer, examination, and repentance.

Weeds hinder the herbs and flowers from growing; the weeds of corruption—hinder the growth of grace. Where the weed of unbelief grows—it hinders the flower of faith from growing.

Weeds spoil the walkways. Christ will not walk in a heart overgrown with weeds and briars. Christ was sometimes among the lilies (Song of Solomon 6:3)—but never among the thistles. Poor sinner, you complain that you have no communion with God. There was a time when God made Himself known to you—but now He has grown unfamiliar, and never comes near you. This is the reason: Sin has spoiled Christ's walks. Your heart lies like the field of the sluggard (Proverbs 20:4). And will Christ walk there? Indeed, we read that Christ was once in the wilderness when He was tempted (Matthew 4:1)—but He did not go there for delight—but so that he might duel and skirmish with Satan. It is the garden, which Christ delights in. Oh, weed your heart daily; do not let it become a thicket for Satan!

Keep your heart as you would keep a GARRISON. The heart of man is a garrison or a royal fortress. This garrison is besieged; the devil shoots his fiery darts of temptation. So keep your heart as a tower or a castle.

Keep a close sentinel on your heart. Habakkuk 2:1: "I will stand upon my watch, and set upon the tower." Discover where Satan labors to make a breach—what grace he most shoots at—and there set a double guard and fortify that spot.

Make use of all your spiritual ammunition: meditation and prayer. Prayer is the great ordinance; discharge this cannon, and be sure to put the bullet of faith in it (Matthew 21:22; 1 Peter 5:9). If the devil takes the garrison by storm, it will be sad. Remember how he tore and tormented that man in whom he was (Matthew 9:18)? It is easier to let Satan in—than it is to get him out! If the devil gets the garrison of your heart, you are his slave;

and remember, he gives no quarter.

Keep your heart as you would a PRISONER. The heart is guilty, and is ready every now and then to break prison. We need to lay bolts and fetters upon it! A prisoner in the jail may promise that he will not stir—but when he sees an opportunity, if you do not watch him, he will file off his fetters and be gone! So the heart promises that it will keep from such sins—but if you are not careful it, will steal out to vanity. Therefore, keep your heart as a prisoner! When you perceive it breaking loose, lay chains and fetters upon it; bind it fast with the terrors of the law; keep it with the flaming sword of a reproof.

As John the Baptist said to Herod in Mark 6:18, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife!" So say to your heart, "It is not lawful for you to meddle with forbidden fruit! You may not be proud, vain, or worldly!" Lay the commands of God upon your heart. A man may be too jealous of his friend—but he cannot be too jealous of his heart. Let it be kept as a prisoner—closely under guard.

Keep your heart as you would keep a WATCH. The heart will unwind to the world; therefore wind it up every morning and evening by prayer. The motion of a watch is not constant: sometimes it goes fast, sometimes slower. And so it is with the heart: sometimes it goes faster in vanity and sometimes it goes slower in duty. Therefore set this spiritual watch by the sundial of the Word.

II. The MANNER: "with all diligence." The heart must be kept at all times!

Keep your heart when you are ALONE. It was Satan's subtlety to set upon Eve, when she was alone and less able to resist. He is like a cunning suitor who woos the daughter, when her parents are away from home. The devil breaks through the hedge commonly, where it is weakest. I confess that privacy and retirement is good; if a Christian had a fruitful heart, what sweet thoughts he might have of God when he is alone! (Psalm 139:17) But, alas, by reason of innate corruption, how many vain, proud, impure thoughts will steal into our hearts when we are most secluded from the world! The fowls will be eating at the sacrifice; the devil will be shooting in his fireballs and, when we least suspect him, will be tempting us to deliver up the castle of our heart to him.

Keep your heart when you are in COMPANY. Vain company is the bait by which Satan is angling for the heart. Under the Law, he who touched a dead body was unclean (Numbers 5:2). The heart is apt to be defiled by being among those who are dead in sin; it is easy to catch a disease when in company.

Indeed, in the state of innocence, the heart might be compared to those plants of paradise which Athanasius said impart an aromatic, sweet savor to the adjoining trees; but, since the fall, our hearts are ready to pollute and infect one another, being like that withered vine the poet speaks of, which took away the fresh color and sap from a neighboring vine. A good eye, by looking at a watery eye, many times falls to watering itself. Just so, often a good heart, by beholding and conversing with a profane one, gathers corruption. If you mingle bright and rusty metal together, the rusty metal will not be made bright—but the bright will become rusty. So an evil companion who is rusted with sin, will always rub some of his unholy rust upon a man who is bright with grace.

Christians, look to your hearts even in good company. Those who may, like Abijah, have some good thing in them (1 Kings 14:13)—yet find that good thing to be very small, like a pearl in a heap of stones; or like filings of gold among the dirt. There may be much levity of discourse among those who are good, and even if there is no filth or scum—yet froth may boil up. These are the most dangerous, because they are the least suspicious. Who would suspect the plague, in perfumed linen? Though the lungs are sound, the breath may not be sweet. Such as we hope have sound hearts, yet may lack some grains of solidity, and are not as sweet and heavenly in their speeches, as they should be (Colossians 4:6).

The devil does harm by a good instrument sometimes, which he cannot do by a bad one; he hands over a temptation by such: he tempted Christ by an apostle. The devil once crept into a serpent, and here he crept into a dove; but Christ spied his cloven hoof. "Get behind Me, Satan!" (Matthew 16:23). How watchful, then, we need to be in company!

Keep your heart especially after good DUTIES. When Christ had been praying and fasting, then the devil came and tempted Him (Matthew 4:2-3). When we have been most enlarged in our services, then Satan will tempt us to pride and carnal security. Many Christian's hearts, like bows, stand unbent after shootings; they are apt to grow more remiss, as if duty were a sufficient spell and antidote against temptation. Do we not know that Satan always lies waiting to tempt? He is more angry with us after duty; those prayers which appease God—incense Satan, and if we lay down our weapons, he will attack us and wound us!

After David's victory over the Assyrians, he grew lustful, and defiled Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11:4). After we have gotten a victory over Satan in duty, then let us fear, lest our hearts give us the slip. When God had driven Adam out of the garden, He placed a flaming sword at the east of it, to guard the Tree of Life (Genesis 3). When we have cast out the devil by prayer and fasting, let us set a strong guard about our hearts to keep them, so that the enemy does not make a re-entry.

Keep your heart in times of ADVERSITY. The devil makes use of all winds, to toss the soul and make it suffer shipwreck. Adversity has its temptations; many souls have been cast away in a storm. In adversity the devil tempts to unbelief and desperation. Job 2:9: "Do you still retain your integrity?" Satan used Job's wife as a ladder by which he would have scaled the impregnable tower of Job's faith. "Do you still retain your integrity?" was a cutting kind of speech, as if the devil had said, "God has pulled down your hedge. He has smitten you in your children. And are you so senseless as to still serve and worship God? What have you gotten by His service? Where are your earnings? What have you to show but your boils? Throw off religion. Curse God and die!"

Satan's medicines are always poisons. Malachi 3:14: "You have said it is vain to serve God, and what profit is it that we have kept His ordinances?" They have mourned and fasted and almost fasted away all they had. When a man's estate is low and his spirit is troubled, then Satan begins to throw in his hooks of temptation. And oftentimes Satan makes use of poverty to put a man upon indirect courses. Agur feared for his heart in poverty (Proverbs 30:8-9). Oh, keep your heart in adversity; beware of taking the forbidden fruit!

Keep your heart in time of PROSPERITY. The fuller the moon is, the more remote it is from the sun; and oftentimes the more full a man is of the world, the further his heart is from God. Deuteronomy 32:15: "Jesurun waxed fat—and kicked." It is hard to abound in prosperity—and not abound in sin. A full cup is hard to carry, without spilling. The trees are never more in danger of the wind, than when they blossom. Pride, idleness, and luxury, are the three daughters which are bred by prosperity. Samson fell asleep in Delilah's lap; millions have slept their way to hell, in the lap of prosperity. Agur prayed, "Give me not riches" (Proverbs 30:8). He knew his heart would run wild into sin. The world's golden apple, bewitches. When God sets a hedge of prosperity around us, we need to set a hedge of caution and circumspection.

III. The REASON: "for out of it are the issues of life." The reasons for keeping the heart are these:

1. The heart is a slippery substance—it is deceitful. Jeremiah 17:9: "The heart is deceitful above all things." In the Hebrew it is "the heart is a Jacob above all things," a supplanter. If we are not very cautious and watchful, our hearts will cheat us. There is deceit in money, in friends, and in books; but the heart has an art of deceiving beyond all these! "The heart is a desperate impostor," said Augustine. The way of the heart, is like a serpent upon a rock. Oh, the pleats and folds, the subtleties and labyrinths of a self-deceiving heart! Let us trace a little, the heart in its fallacies and strategies, and see if there is not reason to keep a sentinel continually, and to set a strong guard around it. The heart will deceive us about sinful things, lawful things, and religious things.

First, the heart will deceive us about SINFUL things. The heart will tell us that sin is but small—and, being small, it is venial. The heart will apologize for sin, masking bad transactions over with golden pretenses. The heart will tell a man that he may keep his sin—and yet keep his religion too. 2 Kings 17:33: "They feared the Lord—and served their idols." The heart will secretly suggest to a man that, as long as he goes to church and gives alms, he may secretly indulge corruption, as if religious duties gave a man a right and license to sin.

The heart will even quote Scripture to justify sin! 1 Corinthians 9:20, 22: "To the Jews I became as a Jew that I might gain the Jews. I am made all things to all men." The heart will bring this text out for sinful compliance. Oh, subtle and deceitful heart, which can find a Scripture to damn yourself with! Though Paul would conform to others in things which were indifferent in order that he might save their souls—yet he would not violate a law or deny an article of his creed, to gratify them. And if the heart is so treacherous (being always more ready to excuse sin than examine it), what care and circumspection should we use in keeping our hearts, so that they do not decoy us into sin before we are aware of it!

Second, the heart will deceive us about LAWFUL things in two cases. The heart will tell us that it is lawful to endeavor to preserve our reputation. A good name is a precious ointment—but under a pretense of preserving our good name, the heart is ready to tempt a man to self-seeking and make him do all to get such a name. John 12:43: "They loved the praise of men, more than the praise of God."

The heart will tell us that it is lawful to take comfort in estate and relations (Deuteronomy 26:11). But the heart will be ready here to overshoot. How often the wife and child are put in God's place. The full stream of the affections runs out to the creature—and scarcely a drop of love is left for Christ! This is the deceit of the heart—it makes us offend in lawful things. More are killed with wine, than poison; they are afraid of poison—but take wine in excess. Gross sins frighten—but how many go to excess in lawful things? When we overdo, we undo.

Third, the heart will deceive us about RELIGIOUS things—our duties and graces.

With regard to our duties, the heart will tell us that it is enough to come to the Word and the Sacrament, though the affections are not at all wrought upon. This is like the salamander, which lives in the fire—but (as naturalists say) is never the hotter. Will it be any plea at God's bar—to tell the Lord how many sermons you have heard? Surely it will be like bringing Uriah's letter: it will be evidence against you! How treacherous the heart is—to plot its own death—and bring a man to hell by way of duty!

With regard to our graces, the heart is like a flattering mirror which will make a hypocrite look good. The foolish virgins thought they had oil; many strongly think that they have grace, when they have none. The hypocrite's knowledge is no better than ignorance (1 John 2:4). He has illumination—but not assimilation; he has not been made like Christ. He 'believes'—but his heart is not purified. He pretends to trust God in greater matters—but dares not trust Him in lesser ones. He will trust God with his soul—but not with his estate.

Well, if the heart is this deceitful, see what need we have to keep the heart with all diligence! Do with the heart as you would do with a cheater. We will trust a cheater no further than we can see him. The heart is a grand cheater; it will supplant and delude; test it—but do not trust it. Proverbs 28:26: "He who trusts in his own heart is a fool!"

We must keep the heart with watch and ward, because it is not only false—but fickle! God complains of Israel that their goodness was as the early dew (Hosea 6:4). The sun rises and the dew vanishes. The heart sometimes seems to be in a good frame—but it soon alters. The heart is changeable like water. Set water on a fire and it boils; set it in the frigid air and it freezes. Those good affections which boil in the church—often freeze in the shop. One day a Christian is quick and lively in prayer, another day he is like the disciples, heavy and sleeping (Luke 22:45).

At one time a Christian is like David, when he danced before the ark with all his might (2 Samuel 6:14); at another time he is like Samson when his hair was shaved and his strength left him (Judges 16:19). When the gold has been made pure in the fire, it remains pure; but it is not so with the heart. When the heart has been purified in an ordinance, it does not remain pure—but soon gathers new dirt and dross. The heart is humble one day—and proud the next; it is meek one day—and angry the next; it is quick in its motions towards heaven one day—and the next day, the affections are worldly. It is with the heart as with a sick man's pulse, which alters by the moment. Since the heart is so full of variation and inconstancy, it is needful to keep the heart with all keeping. Like a violin, the heart will soon be out of order; therefore we must often keep the instrument in tune, so that we may make melody in our heart to the Lord (Ephesians 5:19).

2. The heart must especially be looked to and watched over, because the heart is the fountain of all our actions and purposes. The heart either sweetens or poisons all that we do! The heart is the spring which makes the current of our life, run either pure or muddy; the heart is the throne of either sin or grace. If the root is sour, no sweet fruit can grow upon it—for if there is a root of bitterness springing up in the heart, it is impossible that our services should give a sweet relish!

In the natural body, the heart is the fountain of life; if the heart lives, the whole body lives; if the heart is diseased and poisoned, the body dies. So it is in a spiritual sense: if the inner man of the heart is holy, then the thoughts and actions are holy. But if the soul is earthly and impure, the actions receive a bad tincture. In religion, the heart is everything. We judge men's hearts by their actions. God judges men's actions by their hearts. The heart distinguishes actions. 2 Chronicles 25:2: "Amaziah did that which was right in the sight of the Lord—but not with a perfect heart." But of Asa it is said, "His heart was perfect all his days" (2 Chronicles 15:17). It is the heart which gives the meaning to a thing. Now if the heart is the spring which makes our actions good or bad—then the heart is chiefly to be watched over and tended. Keep the spring pure; "keep your heart with all diligence."

APPLICATION

I. INFORMATION. This shows the difference between the godly and the wicked. The hypocrite looks most to externals. He keeps his external actions from blotting; he sets a watch before his lips. But the godly man sets a watch before his heart—his main work lies within doors; he sees the first risings of sin and grieves for them; he labors to set his heart right. The heart is the altar that sanctifies the gift.

II. REPROOF. If we are to keep our hearts with all keeping, then this reproves four kinds of people.

First it reproves such as have no care at all about their hearts. They will have a care to keep their land so that it is not mortgaged—but no care to keep their hearts! Salvation and blessedness depend upon keeping the heart—yet how few mind their hearts; they let the devil get into them! The shepherd keeps his flock; the physician keeps his prescriptions; the lawyer keeps his evidence; the merchant keeps his wares, and the covetous man keeps his gold—but few keep their hearts!

QUESTION. Why do men not keep their hearts?

ANSWER 1. Men do not keep their hearts, because they do not study the preciousness of them. What a treasure is the heart! It is divinely ennobled; it is capable of glory—but few know the worth of this jewel!

ANSWER 2. Men do not keep their hearts, because they are taken up with keeping other things. Song of Solomon 1:6: "My own vineyard have I not kept." Many a man may say, "I have been encumbered with the world. I have been keeping my estate and tending my lusts; but my own heart has been neglected! My own vineyard I have not kept!" Judas was keeping the money bag—when he should have been keeping his heart!

ANSWER 3. Men do not keep their hearts, because they keep themselves in sloth. To keep the heart requires diligence—and how few are willing to put themselves to the trouble. But would not a merchant keep his account books—even though it were difficult to do so?

ANSWER 4. Some think that their hearts are so good, that they do not need to spend time keeping them. Many a bold sinner is presumptuously confident of heaven; he thinks that he needs to do nothing but take possession of it. Hence he never looks into his heart or searches for evidence of salvation, until it is too late.

Second, this reproves those who, when they should be keeping their hearts, fall asleep. Matthew 13:25: "While men slept, the enemy came and sowed tares." When men are asleep and neglect their spiritual watch, the devil comes and sows poisonous seeds in their hearts—seeds of malice, pride, and lust. It is death for a soldier to fall asleep while on guard.

Third, this reproves those who, instead of keeping their hearts, allow them to be stolen away. The love of the world has stolen away men's hearts. Satan catches men's hearts with golden bait! This is the reason why preaching the Word does so little good: ministers preach to men's hearts—but the world has stolen their hearts away!

Fourth, this reproves those who keep half of their heart—but not all; they have desire for some good things—but let out some rooms of their heart to sin. Herod did many good things—but he let out one room of his heart to the devil—he lived in immorality! The true mother would not have the child divided, and God will not endure to have the heart divided. He will have the whole heart kept for Himself.

III. EXHORTATION. This exhorts Christians to keep their hearts. Merchants complain of their losses at sea; but whatever we lose, if we can keep our hearts, we shall do well enough. "Keep your heart with all diligence." This, I confess, is a hard work. Elijah found it easier to shut heaven by prayer—than to shut his heart from evil thoughts. But this is the work every sincere Christian must set himself upon—keeping his heart.

QUESTION. But if my heart is evil, must I keep the evil in it?

ANSWER. No, cast away the evil of it—and keep that which is good. When we preserve fruit—we pare off the skin, cut out the core, and preserve that which is best. Do the same with your heart: what is evil in it cast away—what is good preserve. If your heart is hard, cast away the stone and keep it soft. If your heart is hypocritical, cut out the rotten part and keep that which is sound. Separate between the precious and the vile.

Throw the sin in your heart away; keep and nourish the grace. In a word, do with your heart as they did with the fish in the parable in Matthew 13:48: "They gathered the good fish into vessels—but cast the bad fish away."

This is the great Christian duty: heart-keeping. Sinners, look to your hearts; do not let your hearts be bewitched and stolen away with the pleasures of the world! Hosea 4:11: "Whoredom and wine take away the heart." Many have drowned their hearts in wine! Clement Alexandrius reports that there is a certain fish that is different from other fish, because it has its heart in its belly. Worldlings are like the Epicureans: they have their heart in their belly.

QUESTION. What is the holy frame and posture in which I should keep my heart?

ANSWER 1. Keep your heart **AWAKE**. Song of Solomon 5:2: "My heart awakes!" Psalm 108:2: "I will awaken early." Though we have been sluggish—but yet now it is high time to awake out of our sleep! Take heed of sleeping in ignorance, impenitence, and carnal security; the heart is naturally asleep, and sin may be compared to sleep.

A man who is asleep has his senses tied up. Just so, a sinner whose heart is asleep in sin has his spiritual senses tied up. He is not sensible of sin or wrath (Ephesians 4:9). He is going to hell—but does not know it; he sleeps himself into hell.

Though the senses are bound fast in sleep—but yet the imagination is let loose, and the man dreams he is at a banquet. So when the heart of a sinner is asleep in sin—but yet his fancy is still quickened. He imagines that he is an heir of the promise, that God loves him.

Sleep hinders from action. He who is asleep cannot work. So a sinner who has fallen asleep in sin, cannot work out his salvation.

A man who is asleep is in danger of being robbed; his money or jewels may be taken away. So while the sinner is asleep, he may be robbed of his precious soul. Oh, therefore keep your heart awake; let the judgment of God on sinners be as a drum to awaken you! Make David's prayer from Psalm 13:3 your own: "Enlighten my eyes, that I sleep not the sleep of death."

ANSWER 2. Keep your heart **JEALOUS**. Towards others exercise charity; towards yourself exercise jealousy. The better the heart is, the more suspicious it is. Satan has a party within us; the heart is not true to itself, therefore it needs guarding and caution. Little did Hazeel know what was in his heart (2 Kings 8:13). Had one come to Noah and said, "Noah, you will be drunk shortly!" he would have sternly defied him. There is the seed of all sin—in every person's heart! Where will the heart not run—if we do not guard it? It will run to idolatry, atheism, and immorality! Be ever jealous. Jealousy breeds vigilance, and vigilance breeds safety. Let your heart be ever in your eye! Keep it in with the curb and bit of mortification!

ANSWER 3. Keep your heart **SERIOUS**. Take heed of a light heart. Zephaniah 3:11: "His prophets are light." The heart of the wicked is vain, and in this sense is said to be worth little (Proverbs 10:20). If you put a feather on the scale, it weighs nothing; just so "feathery" is the heart of a sinner. Vanity swims on the top—and deceit lies at the bottom of a sinner's heart! Christ said of the sparrows, "Are not two of them sold for a farthing?" (Matthew 10:29). Thousands of the sinner's thoughts, are not worth a farthing! A light heart is like a ship without a ballast—it soon overturns.

A vain heart will be unstable. Light things are blown in every which way. A flashy professor is not broken for sin; sin seldom lies heavy on a light heart. Keep the heart serious; fix it upon God. Psalm 57:7: "O God, my heart is fixed." Grace solidifies the heart, and keeps it from floating in levity. Balance your heart with the thoughts of hell and judgment!

ANSWER 4. Keep your heart **HUMBLE** (1 Peter 5:5). That is the best frame of heart, which fits a man for God's presence. The humble heart is the valley where God delights to walk. The humble heart is the house where He will take up residence. The humble heart has a low esteem of itself—and a high esteem of others (Philippians 4:3). The more humble the heart is—the more fertile in grace it is; those meadows which lie low are the richest grounds. Keep your heart humble; view your own deficiencies—and others abilities. The abscess of pride kills. The eagle lifts up the tortoise into the air—and then throws it down upon a rock and breaks it. Just so, the devil lifts the heart up in pride—and so destroys it!

ANSWER 5. Keep your heart **HEAVENLY**. Colossians 3:1-2: "Seek those things which are above." Keep your

heart down with the weight of humility—yet mount it up with the wing of heavenly-mindedness. When the heart is touched with the influence of the Spirit, it ascends.

Thus you have seen the holy frame and posture, the heart is to be kept in.

QUESTION. What MEANS are to be used to keep the heart?

ANSWER 1. If you would keep your heart, keep the WORD in your heart. Psalm 119:11: "Your Word have I hid in my heart—that I might not sin against You." The Word is a preservative and antidote—to keep the heart from spiritual infection. What are all the golden precepts of the Word of God—but various prescriptions for keeping the heart? If a mariner would keep his ship, he must have his eye on the stars and the compass; the best way to keep our heart is to sail by a Scripture compass.

ANSWER 2. If you would keep your heart, have a care what COMPANY you keep; incorporate yourselves into the society of the saints. When the people of God are together, they heat and quicken one another; their counsels are seasonable and their prayers are helpful. That ship is most likely to be preserved from pirates—which goes with a convoy. Christian, would you keep your heart safe on your voyage to heaven? Then let the fellowship of saints be your convoy; take heed of coming near such as are impious; they are infectious and will poison your heart! Let your delight be in those who excel in virtue (Psalm 16:3). The saints carry the lantern of the Word along with them, and it is good to walk with those who carry a light.

ANSWER 3. If you would keep your heart, watch over your PASSIONS. The heart is ready to be destroyed by its own passion, just as a ship is ready to be overturned by its sail. The heart sometimes sinks in sorrow, swells with anger, and abounds excessively with carnal joy. Diogenes, seeing his three sons crowned conquerors in one day, died for joy. Passion transports beyond the bounds of reason; it is a kind of temporary madness which possesses a person. Lay the bit of restraint upon your passions—or your heart will run wild in sin; take heed of inflaming your spirits. Cut off all occasions that may awaken this fury. Take away the fuel which feeds this fire! When this viper of passion begins to gather heat, pray it down. Luther said that prayer takes down the swelling of the soul—and abates the heat of inordinate affections. How dangerous these fiery passions are! In a passion, Moses spoke unadvisedly with his lips (Psalm 106:33). A man in a rage is like a ship in a tempest—which has neither pilot, sails, or oars to help—but is exposed to the waves and the rocks. How many have lost their souls in such a storm!

ANSWER 4. If you would keep your heart, keep all the passages to your heart. He who would keep a city, keeps the forts and outworks. Especially keep the two portals of the heart safe, the eye and the ear.

Keep your EYE. The eye often sets the heart on fire. Job made a covenant with his eyes in Job 31:1. The serpent sometimes creeps into the house, through a window. That old serpent the devil, creeps into the heart—through the window of the eye! The eye is the tempter for the appetite. First Eve saw the tree was good for food, then she took of the fruit! (Genesis 3:6). Look to your eyes! Some of the heathens have pulled out their eyes, because they did not want to be enticed by impure objects. I say do not pull out the eye—but keep the portal shut! The Romans never let their prisoners go abroad, without their guards going with them. Just so, never send your eyes abroad, without sending their guards with them.

Keep your EAR. Much sin is conveyed to the heart through the ear. The apostle calls it corrupt communication in Ephesians 4:29 because impure discourse corrupts and poisons the heart. Keep your ear open to God—and shut out sin! Deafen your ears to the lies of the slanderer and the heretic. Do not let him have your ear—who comes to rob you of your heart!

ANSWER 5. If you would keep your heart, get CHRIST into your heart. Ephesians 3:17: "That Christ may dwell in your heart." Nothing can truly hurt us—but sin. If Christ is in the heart, He will purify it. His Spirit is the refiner's fire spoken of in Malachi 3:2. If Christ is in the heart, He will adorn it. He will bring in the rich furniture of His graces, and so beautify the hidden man of the heart. If Christ is in the heart, He will defend it; the castle of the heart can never be captured, if Christ is in it. Let Satan dig his mines, lay his snares and traps, and shoot his fire-balls of temptation—yet if the Lord Almighty pitches His tent in the heart, it can never be taken by storm!

ANSWER 6. If you would keep your hearts, be careful to keep your THOUGHTS. Jeremiah 4:14: "How long shall vain thoughts lodge within you?" What will it matter—if you set a guard before the door of the lips—if you let your heart run out in vain, impure thoughts? The heart is the presence chamber which is to be kept for God; vain thoughts defile the room and make it unfit for God to come into. The thoughts make way for sin. While the

mind is musing, the heart burns. David let his heart rove into impure thoughts—**and that made way for the act of adultery (2 Samuel 11:4).** Thoughts are scouts for sin; they first start looking for sin—**and then the heart hunts it!**

ANSWER 7. If you would keep your heart, keep your close **ACCOUNTS**. Bring your heart often to trial; put searchings questions to your heart: "O my heart, what are you doing? Where are you going?" See what work lies undone, what sin you have to bewail, what grace to strengthen; search your evidences for heaven, and examine your title to Christ (2 Corinthians 13:5). Carefully scrutinize your soul; see if there is any sin nourished there; search your heart—as Israel did for leaven; keep a diary in your heart; see how things go with your soul; do not be a stranger at home. For lack of this parlaying with the heart, many are kept in the dark and do not understand the true state of their souls. They live known to others—but die unknown to themselves!

Oh, what wisdom it is, for a Christian to be much acquainted with his own heart. He who would keep his estate, must keep his account books well. Christian, redeem time every day to turn over the book of conscience; examine your own heart. It will be stealing out to sin; call it to account often. Every night when Seneca's candle was out, he would ask himself what he had done that day. Frequent reckonings keep God and the conscience friends.

ANSWER 8. If you would keep your heart, set **FENCES** around your heart. Those who would keep fruit or flowers, fence them in. There are four fences which we should set around our hearts to keep them:

1. The **FEAR** of God. Proverbs 23:17: "Be in the fear of the Lord all the day long." As natural fear guards and preserves the body—so the fear of God preserves the heart. Fear puts a holy awe upon the soul and keeps it from sinful excursions; fear bolts the door of the heart against vanity. Proverbs 16:6: "By the fear of the Lord men depart from evil." As a nobleman's porter stands at the gate to keep out everything that is harmful from being brought into the house—so the fear of God stands as an armed man at the gate of the heart, to keep temptations from entering. Fear lies as a sentinel; it stands as a watchman on the tower and looks every way to see what danger is approaching. The fear of God will not admit anything into the soul, which is dishonorable to God.

2. **LOVE** to God. This is the most forcible argument to prevail with a sincere spirit. Love without fear, makes us presume. And fear without love, makes us despair. Love argues like this: "Has God given me Christ? Has He included me in the promises? Has He settled heaven upon me? And shall I walk unworthy of this love? Shall I voluntarily sin against this God? No! I will rather die than sin!" This made Anselm say, "Let me rather fall into hell—than into sin!" Would you keep your heart? Then surround it with love! Even death cannot break this fence!

3. **FAITH** in God. This is called a shield in Ephesians 6:16. The shield guards the head and the vital parts; this blessed shield of faith preserves the heart from danger. The shield defends all the armor, the helmet and the breastplate. The shield of faith defends the other graces: the breastplate of love, the helmet of hope, and the belt of truth. When Satan strikes at a Christian's heart—faith beats back the blow and wounds the head of the old serpent! 1 Peter 5:9: "Whom resist steadfast in faith." Faith is the best safeguard; faith brings in peace. Romans 15:13: "Peace in believing." And peace fortifies the heart. Philippians 4:7: "The peace of God shall keep your heart."

4. A good **CONSCIENCE** before God. The heart is placed in the midst of the body and, as it is strongly secured with ribs around it, so it has a bulwark around it in which it is kept. To the ribs around the heart which fence it in—I may compare the graces; to the bulwark in which the heart is kept—I may compare a good conscience. This keeps the heart, so that nothing can annoy it. A good conscience is a brazen wall around the castle of the heart.

These are the fences which keep the heart.

ANSWER 9. If you would keep your heart, beseech God to keep it for you. Do not set about this work in your own strength—but look higher—go to God. He is the great Lord Keeper. Psalm 121:5: "The Lord is your Keeper." It is good to always go with such a Keeper, and this is the reason none of the saints are lost—because the Lord is their Keeper. 1 Peter 1:5: "Who are kept by the power of God." Every ward has a guardian to keep it. Choose God for your guardian. They are safe, whom God keeps. Lock up your heart with God—and give Him the key!

There are **MOTIVES** which may persuade us to look after the keeping of our hearts:

MOTIVE 1. If we do not keep our hearts—the devil will keep them. Shall we let Satan have them! When an invading army gets into a town, what a horrible devastation they do: rapes, plunderings, and massacres. When Satan possesses hearts, he carries them at last violently into the sea of hell, as he did with the swine.

Satan is both crafty and cruel. He is crafty: his work is to fish for men's hearts, and he is very subtle. He has deceitful schemes and strategies (2 Corinthians 2:11).

He observes the tempers of the body and soul—and lays suitable baits and traps. The devil cannot know the heart—but he may observe the temper and constitution of the body. He tempts a lustful man with beauty, and a covetous man with gold. Satan is like the farmer who knows what ground is fit for barley and what ground is fit for wheat. He has been a tempter so long, that by this time he has gained experience, and has become a master of his black art.

Satan can bait his hook with religion; he tempts to sin under a pretext of piety, thus transforming himself into an angel of light. He tempts some to do away with themselves so that they will not live any longer to sin against God. Who would suspect Satan when he comes as a theologian, and quotes Scripture? Just so cunningly does the devil angle for hearts.

Once he has gotten his prey, he is cruel. His cruelty exceeds the rage of all earthly tyrants. We read of Nero, who covered the Christians with tar and brimstone, and then burned them all night so that they might be a living torch to those who passed by. This is nothing to the unparalleled barbarism and cruelty of Satan! His name is Apollyon, or Devourer. He tore and tormented the man in whom he dwelt, and threw him into the fire (Matthew 17:15). If Satan was so fierce when he was chained, what will he do when he has full power? When he had taken away all Job's estate, smitten his body full of sores, and thrown the house down upon his children and killed them—yet all this was, in the devil's account—but a touch of the finger (Job 1:11). If the touch of his finger is so heavy, what will the weight of his arms be?

Oh, then, if Satan is so subtle and deceitful in fishing for hearts, and so savage and cruel when he gets men's hearts, let us take care to keep our hearts. If we do not keep them, Satan will keep them for us! And then see what havoc he will make!

MOTIVE 2. He who keeps his heart, keeps his peace. Where do our distresses and disquiets come from, but the neglect of our spiritual watch? He who keeps his heart all day, may lie down in peace at night. What a comfort this will be to a Christian in every condition! In a poor condition he may think: "Though I have lost my friends and estate—yet I have kept my heart." In a sick condition he may think: "I am chained to a sickbed—but it comforts me that I have kept my heart." In a dying condition he may think: "Death may take away my life—but not my heart."

The heart is a jewel that God lays claim to—and it is kept for Him!