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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."