

“Keep your heart with all vigilance” Proverbs 4:23

Why does the spiritual condition of your heart ultimately determine the course of your life and the effectiveness of your service to God? How can we know what is in our hearts? What are some practical steps for keeping our hearts pure? How does this Old Testament verse relate to Jesus’ teaching on the heart, and the teaching of the rest of the Bible? This lecture will explore questions such as these.

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Introduction

A. The secular culture has different ideas about our “heart”

B. Today: talk about what the *Bible* calls your “heart”

Proverbs 4:23 Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life (ESV)

NASB: “watch over” your heart

NIV: “guard” your heart

C. Context:

D. After ____ years of seminary teaching,

1. What does it mean - “keep your heart *with all vigilance*”?

A. Heb. text: “above all guarding” keep your heart

B. In practical terms: may have to neglect other good things

C. If “keep it” / “guard it” => not evil

“But wait!” - Jeremiah 17:9 The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?

Romans 5:5 and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

Romans 6:17 But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed,

Hebrews 10:22 let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

1 John 3:21 Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God;

D. Yet our hearts are not perfect: you can't always "follow your heart"

Matt 5:28: everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her *in his heart*.

James 4:8 Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and *purify your hearts*, you double-minded.

John Flavel - like musical instrument - tune it

E. I saw this happen in my own life - (summer 2000 - Cambridge)

2. Why should you keep your heart?

Two reasons: (1) this verse, (2) whole Bible

A. "for from it flow the springs of life"
literally: "for from it are the outgoings of life" Heb. *totse'ot* (related to verb *yatsa'*)

B. Jesus probably had this verse in mind -

Luke 6:45 The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.

Mark 7:21 For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, 22 coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. 23 All these evil things come from within ...

- C. Why do people do evil things?
- D. Do you see why the Bible tells us to keep our hearts “above all guarding,” above everything else?
- E. Some friends - - Margaret and I love - be with them
- F. Many of you have leadership responsibilities in church
- G. Why theological liberalism - denying the truthfulness of Bible, denying many of its teachings

Charles Hodge - Princeton Seminary (1820-1878) Professor of Oriental and Biblical Literature (and later of Systematic Theology): (Princeton - that time - center of solid, orthodox belief in Bible and all it teaches):

Studied in Germany, 1826-1828:

After two years of study in Europe, Hodge returned to Princeton in 1828 and in his introductory lecture asked how it was that in the former great centers of Protestantism -- especially Germany -- Christianity had ceased to be even the nominal religion? Hodge said the cause was the decline of "vital religion"

"Holiness is essential to the correct knowledge of divine things and the great security from error Wherever you find vital piety, there you find the doctrines of the fall, of depravity, of regeneration, of atonement, and of the deity of Jesus Christ." Hodge then exhorted seminary students, "keep your hearts with all diligence, for out of them are the issues of life Holiness is essential to correct knowledge of divine things, and the great security from error When men lose the life of religion, they can believe the most monstrous doctrines, and glory in them." (David B. Calhoun, *Princeton Seminary: Vol.1: Faith and Learning, 1812 - 1868* (Edinburgh and Carlisle, Pennsylvania: Banner of Truth, 1994, p. 123)

- H. Why does God not just drive out all wrong doctrine from all churches?

- 1. First reason: “for from it flow the springs of life”

2. Second reason: Throughout the whole Bible, God is constantly testing people's hearts

Gen 2: test

Gen 6:5 every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

Rest of OT:

1 Samuel 13:14 But now your kingdom shall not continue. The LORD has sought out a man after his own heart, and the LORD has commanded him to be prince over his people, because you have not kept what the LORD commanded you."

Psalms 51:10 Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.

1 Kings 11:4 For when Solomon was old his wives turned away his heart after other gods, and his heart was not wholly true to the LORD his God, as was the heart of David his father.

2 Chronicles 16:9 For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to give strong support to those whose heart is blameless toward him. You have done foolishly in this, for from now on you will have wars."

Jer 31 promised New Covenant - God would write his laws on people's hearts

Jesus -
for us who have trusted in Christ -
one day - Jesus will return - 1 John

Still today: God tests our hearts:

1 Thessalonians 2:4 but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the

gospel, so we speak, not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts.

Still today, 2 Chronicles 16:9 is true:

For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to give strong support to those whose heart is blameless toward him.

Second reason we should keep our heart w/ all vigilance: whole Bible shows - our hearts - very important to God

- I. God will let diff. heart tests come into your life from time to time
 - a. pastor -
 - b. former student
 - c. For you: what will it be?
 - i. Friends may turn against you
 - ii. Illness
 - iii. Financial setback
 - iv. Difficulties w/ children, w/ neighbors - 1000 other things
 - v. In all of this - God is watching: will you continue to trust him,

3. How can you keep your heart?

A. This verse => you can know your heart

B. What do you see in your heart?

C. And don't pollute your heart:

D. I believe one aspect of Christian maturity - learning to know your own heart.

E. How can you keep your heart?

- quiet moments during the day - thinking - "now what is happening in my heart"

- Galatians 5:22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.
- “means of grace” - disciplines of Ctn life

F. What if you have not trusted in Christ?

4. Conclusion: Will you keep your heart w/ all vigilance today? this week? for your whole life?

5. Pray -