

American Decency Association

PO Box 202, Fremont MI 49412 231-924-4050 www.americandecency.org
Encouraging Christians to guard their heart September 2024

Matters of the Heart

By Steve Huston



Many a pastor or Biblical counselor has encouraged a parent: “Strive to capture your child’s heart.” That may be sound advice, seeing that our loving Heavenly Father desires to capture our heart, settling for nothing less than the whole of it. Lest you’re tempted to think that “capturing the heart” is simply obedience, which many parents would settle for, I assure you it’s not. So, what does the Bible mean when it talks about the “heart?”

We might recall that in Deuteronomy 5 God reissued the commands originally given in Exodus 20. In the sixth chapter, God reminds the Israelites of their **relationship and responsibility** to Him; commands them to love Him with **ALL their heart**, and with all their

soul and with all their might; and instructs them on how to pass His commandments on to their children. These commands are to reside in their hearts and to be lived out in every area of their lives. In verse seventeen, God commands them to “*diligently keep the commandments of the LORD your God, and his testimonies, and his statutes, which he hath commanded thee.*” The word “keep” does not mean to simply obey; it is a call to guard and protect this way of life which sets them apart from the people and nations which will surround them. It’s a call for them – and us – to love God (worship, adore, and, yes, obey Him) in a manner which is reflective of how He has loved us. He has made us his “peculiar people” (uniquely special to Him) and, in the same sense, we are to make Him our “peculiar God,” (He is to be uniquely, solitarily our God – no other gods above Him). We guard against anything that would lessen God’s Word in our estimation or

our special relationship with Him.

John Wesley reminds us that God is One; “*therefore our hearts must be united in His love. And the whole stream of our affections must run toward Him. O that this love of God may be shed abroad in our hearts.*”

Is this why God uses the marriage relationship as an example? Most are familiar with Paul’s illustrative wording in Ephesians chapter 5, but such a heart relationship between God and His people is used in the Old Testament as well: “*And it shall be at that day, saith the Lord, that thou shalt call me Ishi (Husband); and shalt call me no more Baali (Master)*” (Hosea 2:16). **It’s a matter of the heart** – Now Israel by words, affections, and obedience, shall own God as their husband and delight to call Him so.

Jesus reminds us that this is still the demanded expectation: “And thou shalt love the Lord thy

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God with **all thy heart**, and with **all thy soul**, and with **all thy mind**, and with **all thy strength**: this is the first commandment” (Mark 12:30). Paul, as mentioned above, puts it in the loving, self-sacrificing, mutually giving relationship that it’s meant to reflect.

J. C. Ryle reminds us that *“They do the will of God best who do it from the heart. Would we train children right? Let us teach them to love God.”* The heart is the ruling faculty of our being; when it’s right it will chase after God in loving obedience, regardless the consequence. But contrary thoughts, emotions, or relationships will cool one’s love for God and redirect the heart.

The soul, mind, and strength fall under the heart’s direction. Is it any wonder that Solomon warned: *“Keep (Guard) thy heart with all diligence: for out of it are the issues of life”?* (Prov. 4:23)

Joseph Benson instructs: *“The Hebrew is, Above all keeping, keep thy heart, that is, thy mind and thoughts, thy will and affections, which are the more immediate cause of men’s actions. Out of it are the issues of life—The life or death of the soul proceeds from the heart: an upright, enlightened, renewed, devout, and watchful heart gives birth to those holy dispositions, words, and actions which manifest spiritual life, and lead to eternal life: on the contrary, a heart insincere, unenlightened, unrenewed, and corrupt, without knowledge, without grace, produces those tempers, words, and works, which imply spiritual death, and lead to eternal death... Guard it therefore most carefully, with every kind of diligence, and above all other cares.”*

Puritan writer John Flavel (1630-1691) wrote a beautiful treatise on Keeping the Heart. On the back of its dustjacket, we read: *“We are to guard our heart as if it was a fortress under attack, for, indeed, it is. How diligently a man will guard his fortune and his home, which are of temporal*

value; but how carelessly do most men guard that which is of eternal value, their very soul!”

Finishing Proverbs 4, Solomon lists various dangers – battering rams and catapults used to wage war against the fortress of our heart. We must take every precaution, be willing to deny ourselves whatever pleasure, and use every means of grace to evaluate eternally the consequence of letting our guard down for an instant. What will we have done to our divine Bridegroom; what to our soul?

Should the heart’s wall be breached, F.B. Meyer reminds us that the broken-hearted may still cry out to God for mercy: *“Through misconduct or mistake, as the result of folly or sin, we may have reduced ourselves and those dear to us to the last degree of misery; but the soul may always turn from its low estate to God, sure that He will have mercy, will abundantly pardon, and will turn again the adverse pressure of the tide.”*

It’s truly a matter of the heart – God’s and ours!



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