

John Flavel - A Saint Indeed

"I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing."

—John 15:5 NKJV

Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life

—Proverbs 4:23

The heart of man is his worst part before it be regenerate, and the best afterwards: it is **the seat of principles, and fountain of actions.** The eye of God is, and the eye of a Christian ought to be, principally fixed upon it.

The greatest difficulty in conversion, is, to win the heart to God; and the greatest difficulty after conversion, is, to keep the heart with God. Here lies the very pinch and stress of religion; here is that which makes the way to life a narrow way, and the gate to heaven a strait gate. Direction and help in this great work, are the scope and sum of this text; wherein we have, An exhortation, keep thy heart with all diligence.

The reason, or motive enforcing it; for out of it are the issues of life.

In the exhortation I shall consider,

- The matter of the duty.
- The manner of performing it.

The matter of the duty, keep thy heart.

Heart is not here taken properly for that noble part of the body which philosophers call, the *primum vivens, et ultimum moriens*; the first that lives, and the last that dies; but by heart, in a metaphor, the scripture sometimes understands some particular noble faculty of the soul: in Romans 1:21, it is put for the understanding part, their foolish heart, (i.e.) their foolish understanding was darkened. And Psalms 119:11, it is put for the memory, thy word have I hid in my heart; and 1 John 3:20, it is put for the conscience, which hath it in both the light of the understanding, and the recognitions of the memory: if our heart condemn us, (i.e.) if our conscience, whose proper office it is to condemn. But here we are to take it more generally for the whole soul, or inner man; for look what the heart is to the body, that the soul is to the man; and what health is to the heart, that holiness is to the soul: *Quod sanitas in corpore id sanctitas in corde*. The state of the whole body

depends upon the soundness and vigour of the heart, and the everlasting state of the whole man upon the good or ill condition of the soul.

And by keeping the heart, understand the diligent and constant [I say constant; for the reason added in the text extends the duty to all the states and conditions of a Christian's life, and makes it *bind ad semper*: if the heart must be kept because out of it are the issues of life, then as long as these issues of life do flow out of it, we are obliged to keep it.—ED.] use and improvement of all holy means and duties, to preserve the soul from sin, and maintain its sweet and free communion with God. Lavater in loc. will have the word taken from a besieged garrison, begirt by many enemies without, and in danger of being betrayed by treacherous citizens within: in which danger, the soldiers, upon pain of death, are commanded to watch; and whereas the expression (keep thy heart) seems to put it upon us as our work, yet it does not imply a sufficiency or ability in us to do it. We are as able to stop the sun in its course, or make the rivers run backward, as by our own skill and power to rule and order our hearts: we may as well be our own saviours, as our own keepers; and yet Solomon speaks properly enough when he says, keep thy heart; because the duty is ours; though the power be God's. A natural man hath no power: a gracious man hath some, though not sufficient; and that power he hath, depends upon the exciting and assisting strength of Christ: *gratia gratiam postulat*, grace within us is beholding to grace without us. Without me ye can do nothing, John 15:5. So much of the matter of the duty.

The manner of performing it, is with all diligence; the Hebrew is very emphatical, *cum omnicustodia*, keep with all keeping, quid. keep, keep; set double guards, your hearts will be gone else. And this vehemency of expression with which the duty is urged, plainly implies how difficult it is to keep our hearts, and how dangerous to let them go.

The reason, or motive quickening to this duty, is very forcible and weighty: for out of it are the issues of life. That is, it is the source and fountain of all vital actions and operations; *hinc fons buni et pecandi orige*, saith Jerome; it is the spring and original both of good and evil, as the spring in a watch that sets all the wheels in motion. The heart is the treasury, the hand and tongue but the shops: what is in these, comes from thence; the hand and tongue always begin where the heart ends. The heart contrives, and the members execute, Luke 6:45. A good man out of the good treasury of his heart bringeth forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasury of his heart

bringeth forth evil things: for out of the abundance of his heart his mouth speaketh. So then, if the heart err in its work, these must needs miscarry in theirs; for heart-errors are like the errors of the first concoction, which cannot be rectified afterwards: or like the misplacing, and inverting of the stamps and letters in the press, which must needs cause so many errata in all the copies that are printed off. O then how important a duty is that which is contained in the following proposition!

Doctrine: That the keeping, and right managing of the heart in every condition, is the great business of a Christian's life.

What the philosopher saith of waters, is as properly applicable to hearts; *suis terminis: dafficile continentur*: it is hard to keep them within any bounds: God hath set bounds and limits to them, yet how frequently do they transgress, not only the bounds of grace and religion, but even of reason and common honesty? *Hic labour hoc opus est*: this is that which affords the Christian matter of labour, fear and trembling to his dying day. It is not the cleansing of the hand that makes a Christian, for many a hypocrite can shew as fair a hand as he; but the purifying, watching, and right ordering of the heart; this is the thing that provokes so many sad complaints, and costs so many deep groans and brinish tears. It was the pride of Hezekiah's heart that made him lie in the dust mourning before the Lord, 2 Chronicles 32:26. It was the fear of hypocrisy invading the heart, that made David cry, let my heart be sound in thy statutes, that I be not ashamed, Psalms 119:80. It was the sad experience he had of the divisions and distractions of his own heart in the service of God, that made him pour out that prayer, unite my heart to fear thy name, Psalms 86:11.

The method in which I shall improve the point shall be this;

Firstly, I shall enquire what the keeping of the heart supposes and imports.

Secondly, Assign divers reasons, why Christians must make this the great work and business of their lives.

Thirdly, Point at those special seasons which especially call for this diligence in keeping the heart.

Fourthly. and lastly, apply the whole in several uses.

What the keeping of the heart supposes and imports:

To keep the heart, necessarily supposes a previous work of sanctification, which hath set the heart right, by giving it a new spiritual bent and inclination; for, as long as the heart is not set right by grace, as to its habitual frame, no duties or means can keep it right with God. Self is the poise of the unsanctified heart, which biases and moves it in all its designs and actions; and, as long as it is so, it is impossible that any external means should keep it with God.

Man, by creation, was of one constant, uniform frame and tenor of spirit, held one straight and even course; not one thought or faculty ravelled or disordered: his mind had a perfect illumination to understand and know the will of God; his will a perfect compliance therewith; his sensitive appetite, and other inferior powers, stood in a most obedient subordination.

Man, by degeneration, is become a most disordered and rebellious creature, contesting with and opposing his Maker, as the first cause, by self-dependence; as the chiefest good, by self-love; as the highest Lord, by self-will; and as the last end, by self-seeking; and so is quite disordered, and all his acts irregular: his illuminated understanding is clouded with ignorance; his complying will, full of rebellion and stubbornness; his subordinate powers casting off the dominion and government of the superior faculties:

But by regeneration this disordered soul is set right again; sanctification being the rectifying and due framing, or, as the scripture phrases it, the renovation of the soul after the image of God, Ephesians 4:24 in which, self-dependence is removed by faith; self-love, by the love of God; self-will, by subjection and obedience to the will of God; and self-seeking by self denial. The darkened understanding is again illuminated, Ephesians 1:18, the refractory will sweetly subdued, Psalms 110:3, the rebellious appetite or concupiscence gradually conquered, Romans 6:6-7. And thus the soul, which sin had universally depraved, is again by grace restored and rectified.

This being presupposed, it will not be difficult to apprehend what it is to keep the heart, which is nothing else but the constant care and diligence of such a renewed man, to preserve his soul in that holy frame to which grace hath reduced it, and daily strives to hold it.

For, though grace hath, in great measure, rectified the soul, and given it an habitual heavenly temper; yet sin often actually discomposes it again; so that even a gracious heart is like a musical instrument, which, though it be ever so

exactly tuned, a small matter places out of tune again; yea, hang it aside but a little, and it will need setting again, before you can play another lesson on it: even so stands the case with gracious hearts; if they are in frame in one duty, yet how dull, dead and disordered when they come to another! And therefore every duty needs a particular preparation of the heart. If thou prepare thine heart, and stretch out thy hands towards him, Job 11:13. Well then, to keep the heart, is carefully to preserve it from sin, which disorders it; and maintain that spiritual and gracious frame, which fits it for a life of communion with God. And this includes these six acts in it;

Six things included in the keeping of the heart:

- 1 Frequent observation of the frame of the heart, turning in and examining how the case stands with it; this is one part of the work: carnal and formal persons take no heed to this, they cannot be brought to confer with their own hearts; there are some men and women that have lived forty or fifty years in the world, and have scarce had one hour's discourse with their own hearts all that while: it is a hard thing to bring a man and himself together upon such an account; but saints know those soliloquies and self-conferences to be of excellent use and advantage. The heathen could say, *anima sedendo & quiescendo fit sapiens*, the soul is made wise by sitting still in quietness. Though bankrupts care not to look into their books of account, yet upright hearts will know whether they go backward or forward, Psalms 77:6. I commune with mine own heart. The heart can never be kept, until its case be examined and understood.
- 2 It includes deep humiliation for heart-evils and disorders; thus Hezekiah humbled himself for the pride of his heart, 2 Chronicles 32:26. Thus the people were ordered to spread forth their hands to God in prayer, in a sense of the plague of their own hearts, 1 Kings 8:38. Upon this account many an upright heart had been laid low before God: O what an heart have I! They have in their confessions pointed at the heart; the pained place; Lord, here is the wound, here is the plague-sore. It is with the heart well kept, as it is with the eye, which is a fit emblem of it, if a small dust get into the eye, it will never leave twinkling and watering till it have wept it out: so the upright heart cannot be at rest till it have wept out its troubles, and poured out its complaints before the Lord.

- 3 It includes earnest supplications and instant prayer for heart-purifying and rectifying grace, when sin hath defiled and disordered it; so, Psalms 19:12, cleanse thou me from secret faults; and Psalms 86:11, Unite my heart to fear thy name. Saints have always many such petitions depending before the throne of God's grace; this is the thing which is most pleaded by them with God: when they are praying for outward mercies, haply their spirits may be more remiss, but when it comes to the heart case, then they extend their spirits to the utmost, fill their mouths with arguments, weep and make supplication: oh, for a better heart! oh for a heart to love God more! to hate sin more, to walk more evenly with God: Lord, deny not to me such a heart, whatever thou deny me; give me a heart to fear thee, love and delight in thee, if I beg my bread in desolate places. It is observed of holy Mr. Bradford, that when he was confessing sin, he would never give over confessing until he had felt some brokenness of heart for that sin; and, when praying for any spiritual mercy, would never give over that suit, till he had got some relish of that mercy; that is the third thing included in keeping the heart.
- 4 It includes the imposing of strong engagements and bonds upon ourselves to walk more accurately with God, and avoid the occasions whereby the heart may be induced to sin: well composed, advised, and deliberate vows, are, in some cases, of excellent use to guard the heart against some special sin; so Job 31:1, I made a covenant with mine eyes; by this means, holy ones have overawed their souls, and preserved themselves from defilement by some special heart-corruptions.
- 5 It includes a constant holy jealousy over our own hearts; quick-sighted self-jealousy is an excellent preservative from sin; he that will keep his heart, must have the eyes of his soul awake and open upon all the disorderly and tumultuous stirrings of his affections; if the affections break loose, and the passions be stirred, the soul must discover and suppress them before they get to an height: O, my soul, dost thou well in this? My tumultuous thoughts and passions, where is your commission? *State viri, quae causa viae? quive estis in armis?* Virgil. Ye men pause, what is the cause of journey? Why are ye in arms? Happy is the man that thus feareth always, Proverbs 28:14. By this fear of the Lord it is that men depart from evil, shake off security, and preserve

themselves from iniquity; he that will keep his heart must feed with fear, rejoice with fear, and pass the whole time of his sojourning here in fear, and all little enough to keep the heart from sin.

- 6 And lastly, to add no more, it includes the realising of God's presence with us, and setting the Lord always before us: thus the people of God have found a singular means to keep their hearts upright, and awe them from sin. When the eye of our faith is fixed upon the eye of God's omniscience, we dare not let out our thoughts and affections to vanity: holy Job durst not suffer his heart to yield to an impure, vain thought; and what was it that moved him to so great circumspection? Why, he tells you, doth he not see my ways, and count all my steps? Job 31:4. Walk before me (saith God to Abraham) and be thou perfect, Genesis 17:1. Even as parents use to set their children in the congregation before them, knowing that else they will be toying and playing; so would the heart of the best man too, were it not for the eye of God.

In these and such like particulars, do gracious souls express the care they have of their hearts; they are as careful to prevent the breaking loose of their corruptions in times of temptation, as seamen are to bind fast the guns, that they break not loose in a storm; as careful to preserve the sweetness and comfort they have got from God in any duty, as one that comes out of a hot bath, or great sweat, is of taking cold, by going forth into the chill air. This is the work, and of all works in religion it is the most difficult, constant, and important work.

- It is the hardest work; heart-work is hard work indeed: to shuffle over religious duties with a loose and heedless spirit, will cost no great pains; but to set thyself before the Lord, and tie up thy loose and vain thoughts to a constant and serious attendance upon him; this will cost thee something: to attain a facility and dexterity of language in prayer, and put thy meaning into apt and decent expressions, is easy; but to get thy heart broken for sin, whilst thou art confessing it; melted with free grace, whilst thou art blessing God for it; to be really ashamed and humbled through the apprehensions of God's infinite holiness, and to keep thy heart in this frame, not only in, but after duty, will surely cost thee some groans and travailing pains of soul: to repress the outward acts of sin, and compose the external part of thy life in a laudable and comely manner, is no great matter; even carnal persons by the force of common principles can do this;

but to kill the root of corruption within, to set and keep up an holy government over thy thoughts, to have all things lie straight and orderly in the heart, this is not easy.

- It is a constant work. The keeping of the heart is such a work, as is never done till life be done; this labour and our life end together: It is with a Christian in this business, as it is with seamen that have sprung a leak at sea; if they tag not constantly at the pump, the water increases upon them, and will quickly sink them. It is in vain for them to say, the work is hard, and we are weary; there is no time or condition in the life of a Christian, which will suffer an intermission of this work. It is in the keeping watch over our hearts, as it was in the keeping up of Moses' hands, whilst Israel and Amalek were fighting below, Exodus 17:12. No sooner do Moses' hands grow heavy and sink down, but Amalek prevails. You know it cost David and Peter many a sad day and night for intermitting the watch over their own hearts but a few minutes.
- It is the most important business of a Christian's life. Without this we are but formalists in religion; all our professions, gifts and duties signify nothing: My son, give me thine heart, Proverbs 23:26. God is pleased to call that a gift, which is indeed a debt; he will put this honour upon the creature to receive it from him in the way of a gift: but, if this be not given him, he regards not whatever else you bring to him; there is so much only of worth and value in what we do, as there is of heart in it. Concerning the heart, God seems to say, as Joseph of Benjamin, if you bring not Benjamin with you, you shall not see my face. Among the Heathens, when the beast was cut up for sacrifice, the first thing the priest looked upon was the heart; and, if that were unsound and naught, the sacrifice was rejected. God rejects all duties (how glorious soever in other respects) offered him without a heart. He that performs duty without a heart, viz. heedlessly, is no more accepted with God, than he that performs it with a double heart, viz. hypocritically, Isaiah 66:3. And thus I have briefly opened the nature of the duty, what is imported in this phrase, Keep thy heart.

Why Christians should make it the great business of their lives to keep their hearts: Next, I shall give you some rational account why Christians should make this the great business of their lives, to keep their hearts.

The importance and necessity of making this our great and main business, will manifestly appear in that, 1. The honour of God; 2. The sincerity of our profession; 3. The beauty of our conversation; 4. The comfort of our souls; 5. The improvement of our graces; and, 6. Our stability in the hour of temptation; are all wrapt up in, and dependent on our sincerity and care in the management in this work.

- 1 The glory of God is much concerned therein; heart-evils are very provoking evils to the Lord. The schools do well observe, that outward sins are *majoris infamae*, sins of greater infamy; but heart-sins are *majoris reatus*, sins of deeper guilt. How severely hath the great God declared his wrath from heaven against heart wickedness; the great crime for which the old world stands indicted, is heart wickedness, Genesis 6:5-7. God saw that every imagination (or fiction) of their heart was only evil, and that continually; for which he sent the most dreadful judgment that was ever executed since the world began: And the Lord said I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast, and the creeping things, and the fowls of heaven, for it repenteth me that I have made man, Genesis 6:7. We find not their murders, adulteries, blasphemies, (though they were defiled with these) particularly alleged against them; but the evils of their hearts: yea, that which God was so provoked by, as to give up his peculiar inheritance into the enemy's hand, was the evil of their hearts, Jeremiah 4:14. O Jerusalem, wash thine heart from wickedness, that thou mayest be saved; how long shall vain thoughts lodge within thee? The wickedness and vanity of their thoughts God took special notice of; and, because of this, the Chaldean must come upon them as a lion from his thicket, and tear them to pieces, Jeremiah 4:7. For the very sin of thoughts it was that God threw down the fallen angels from heaven, and keeps them still in everlasting chains to the judgment of the great day; by which expression is not obscurely intimated some extraordinary judgment to which they are reserved, as prisoners that have most irons laid upon them, may be supposed to be the greatest malefactors: and what was their sin? Why only spiritual wickedness. For they having no bodily organs, could act nothing externally against God. Yea, mere

heart-evils are so provoking, that for them he rejects with indignation all the duties that some men perform unto him, Isaiah 66:3. He that killeth an ox, is as if he slew a man; he that sacrificeth a lamb, as if he cut off a dog's neck; he that offereth an oblation, as if he offered swine's blood; he that burneth incense, as if he blessed an idol. In what words could the abhorrence of a creature's actions be more fully expressed by the holy God? Murder and idolatry are not more vile in his account, than their sacrifices, though materially such as himself appointed: and what made them so? The following words inform us, their soul delighteth in their abomination. To conclude, such is the vileness of mere heart-sins, that the scriptures sometimes intimate the difficulty of pardon for them. So in the case of Simon Magus, Acts 8:21, his heart was not right, he had vile thoughts of God and the things of God: the Apostle bids him repent and pray, if perhaps the thoughts of his heart might be forgiven him. O then never slight heart-evils! for by these God is highly wronged and provoked; and for this reason let every Christian make it his work to keep his heart with all diligence.

- 2 The sincerity of our profession much depends upon the care and conscience we have in keeping our hearts; for it is most certain, that a man is but an hypocrite in his profession, how curious soever he be in the externals of religion, that is heedless and careless of the frame of his heart: you have a pregnant instance of this in the case of Jehu, but Jehu took no heed to walk in the ways of the Lord God of Israel with his heart, 2 Kings 10:31. That context gives an account of the great service performed by Jehu against the house of Ahab and Baal, as also of a great temporal reward given him by God for that service, even that his children to the fourth generation, should sit upon the throne of Israel. And yet in these words Jehu is censured for an hypocrite: though God approved, and rewarded the work, yet he abhorred and rejected the person that did it as hypocritical: and wherein lay his hypocrisy? but in this, that he took no heed to walk in the ways of the Lord with his heart, i.e. he did all insincerely and for self-ends: and though the work he did was materially good, yet he, not purging his heart from those unworthy self-designs in doing it, was an hypocrite: and Simon, of whom we spake before, tho' he appeared such a person that the Apostle could not regularly refuse him; yet his hypocrisy was quickly discovered: and what discovered it but this, that though he professed and associated

himself with the saints, yet he was a stranger to the mortification of heart-sins! Thy heart is not right with God, Acts 8:21. It is true, there is a great difference among Christians themselves, in their diligence and dexterity about heart-work; some are more conversant and successful in it than others are; but he that takes no heed to his heart, he that is not careful to order it aright before God, is but a hypocrite. And they came unto me as the people cometh, and sit before thee (as my people) and hear thy words, but they will not do them; for with their mouths they shew much love, but their heart goes after their covetousness, Ezekiel 33:31-32. Here were a company of formal hypocrites, as is evident by that expression (as my people) like them, but not of them. And what made them so? Their outside was fair; here were reverend postures, high professions, much seeming joy and delight in ordinances; thou art to them as a lovely song; yea, but for all that they kept not their hearts with God in those duties, their hearts were commanded by their lusts, they went after their covetousness; had they kept their hearts with God, all had been well; but not regarding which way their hearts went in duty, there lay the core of their hypocrisy.

Objection. If any upright soul should hence infer that I am an hypocrite too, for many times my heart departs from God in duty, do what I can; yet I cannot hold it close with God.

Solution. To this I answer, the very objection carries in it its own solution. Thou sayest, do what I can, yet I cannot keep my heart with God. Soul, if thou doest what thou canst, thou hast the blessing of an upright, though God sees good to exercise thee under the affliction of a discomposed heart. There remains still some wildness in the thoughts and fancies of the best to humble them; but, if you find a care before to prevent them, and opposition against them when they come, grief and sorrow afterwards; you will find enough to clear you from reigning hypocrisy.

First, This fore-care is seen partly in laying up the word in thine heart to prevent them, Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee, Psalms 119:11; partly in our endeavors to engage our hearts to God, Jeremiah 30:21; and partly in begging preventing grace from God in our onsets upon duty, Psalms 119:36-37, it is a good sign where this care goes before a duty.

Second, It is a sweet sign of uprightness to oppose them in their first rise. I hate vain thoughts, Psalms 119:113. The spirit lusteth against the flesh, Galatians 5:17.

Third, Thy after-grief discovers thy upright heart. If, with Hezekiah, thou art humbled for the evils of thy heart, thou hast no reason, from those disorders, to question the integrity of it; but to suffer sin to lodge quietly in the heart, to let thy heart habitually and uncontrolledly wander from God, is a sad, and dangerous symptom indeed.

- 3 The beauty of our conversation arises from the heavenly frames and holy order of our spirits; there is a spiritual lustre and beauty in the conversation of saints; The righteous is more excellent than his neighbour: they shine as the lights of the world; but whatever lustre and beauty is in their lives, comes from the excellency of their spirits, as the candle within puts a lustre upon the lanthorn in which it shines. It is impossible that a disordered and neglected heart should ever produce well ordered conversation: and since (as the text observes) the issues or streams of life flow out of the heart as their fountain, it must needs follow, that such as the heart is, the life will be: hence 1 Peter 2:11-12, Abstain from fleshly lusts—having your conversation honest, or beautiful, as the Greek word imports. So, Isaiah 55:7, Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts. His way notes the course of his life, his thoughts the frame of his heart; and therefore since the course of his life flows from his thoughts, or the frame of his heart, both or neither will be forsaken: the heart is the womb of all actions: these actions are virtually and seminally contained in our thoughts, and these thoughts being once made up into affections, are quickly made out into suitable actions and practices. If the heart be wicked, then, as Christ saith, Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries...Matthew 15:19. Mark the order; first wanton, or revengeful thoughts; then unclean, or murderous practices.

And if the heart be holy and spiritual, then, as David speaks from sweet experience, My heart is (inditing) a good matter, I speak of the things which (I have made); my tongue is as the pen of a ready writer, Psalms 45:1. Here is a life richly beautified with good works, some ready made; I will speak of the things which I have made: others upon the

wheel making, my heart is inditing, but both proceeding from the heavenly frame of his heart.

Put but the heart in frame, and the life will quickly discover that it is so. I think it is not very difficult to discern, by the duties and conversations of Christians, what frames their spirits are under; take a Christian in a good frame, and how serious, heavenly, and profitable will his conversations and duties be! what a lovely companion is he during the continuance of it! It would do any one's heart good to be with him at such a time, The mouth of the righteous speaketh wisdom, and his tongue talketh of judgment, the law of his God is in his heart, Psalms 37:30-31.

When the heart is right with God, and full of God, how dexterously and ingeniously will it wind in spiritual discourse, improving every occasion and advantage to some heavenly purpose! Few words run then at the waste spout.

And what else can be the reason why the discourses and duties of many Christians are become so frothy and unprofitable, their communion both with God, and one another, become as a dry stalk, but because their hearts are neglected? Surely this must be the reason of it, and verily it is an evil greatly to be bewailed; for want of this Christian-fellowship, it is become a sapless thing; so the attracting beauty that was wont to shine from the conversation of the saints upon the faces and consciences of the world, (which if it did not allure, and bring them in love with the ways of God, yet at least left a testimony in their consciences of the excellency of those men and their ways) this is in a great measure lost, to the unspeakable detriment of religion.

Time was, when Christians did carry it at such a rate, that the world stood at a gaze at them. Their life and language were of a different strain from others, their tongues discovered them to be Galileans, wherever they came; but now, since vain speculations, and fruitless controversies have so much obtained, and heart-work, practical godliness, so much neglected among professors, the case is sadly altered, their discourse is become like other men's; if they come among you now, they may (to allude to that Acts 2:6) hear every man speak in his own language. And truly I have little hope to see this evil redressed, and the credit of religion again repaired, till Christians fall to their old work, till they ply heart work closer. When the salt of heavenly

mindedness is again cast into the spring, the streams will run clearer and sweeter.

- 4 The comfort of our souls doth much depend upon the keeping of our hearts; for he that is negligent in attending his own heart, is (ordinarily) a great stranger to assurance, and the sweet comforts flowing from it.

Indeed, if the Antinomian doctrine were true, which teaches you to reject all marks and signs for the trial of your conditions, telling you, it is only the Spirit that immediately assures you, by witnessing your adoption directly without them; then you might be careless of your hearts, yea, strangers to them, and yet no strangers to comfort: but, since both scripture and experience do confute this dotage, I hope you will never look for comfort in that unscriptural way. I deny not but it is the work and office of the Spirit to assure you, and yet do confidently affirm, that if ever you attain assurance, in the ordinary way wherein God dispenses it, you must take pains with your own hearts; you may expect your comforts upon easier terms, but I am mistaken if ever you enjoy them upon any other: Give all diligence, prove yourselves: this is the scripture way. I remember Mr. Roberts, in his treatise of the covenant, tells us, that he knew a Christian who, in the infancy of his Christianity, so vehemently panted after the infallible assurance of God's love, that for a long time together he earnestly desired some voice from heaven, yea, sometimes walking in the solitary fields, earnestly desired some miraculous voice from the trees and stones there: this, after many desires and longings, was denied him; but in time a better was afforded in the ordinary way of searching the word, and his own heart. An instance of the like nature the learned Gerson gives us of one that was driven by temptation upon the very borders of desperation; at last being sweetly settled, and assured, one asked him, how he attained it? He answered, non ex nova aliqua revelatione...not by any extraordinary revelation, but by subjecting his understanding to the scriptures, and comparing his own heart with them. The spirit, indeed, assures by witnessing our adoption; and he witnesseth in two ways:

First, Objectively, i.e. by working those graces in our souls which are the conditions of the promise; and so the Spirit, and his graces in us, are all one: the Spirit of God dwelling in us, is a mark of our adoption. Now the Spirit cannot be discerned in his essence, but in his

operations; and to discern these, is to discern the Spirit; and how these should be discerned, without serious searching and diligent watching of the heart, I cannot imagine.

Second, The other way of the Spirit's witnessing is effectively, i.e. by irradiating the soul with a grace-discovering light, shining upon his own work; and this in order of nature follows the former work: he first infuses the grace, and then opens the eye of the soul to see it. Now since the heart is the subject of that infused grace, even this way of the Spirit's witnessing also includes the necessity of keeping carefully our own hearts: for,

First, A neglected heart is so confused and dark, that the little grace which is in it, is not ordinarily discernible: the most accurate and laborious Christians, that take most pains, and spend most time about their hearts, do yet find it very difficult to discover the pure and genuine workings of the Spirit there: how then shall the Christian which is (comparatively) negligent about heart-work, be ever able to discover it? Sincerity, which is the *quaesitum*, the thing sought for, lies in the heart like a small piece of gold in the bottom of a river, he that will find it must stay till the water is clear and settled, and then he shall see it sparkling at the bottom. And that the heart may be clear, and settled, how much pains and watching, care and diligence will it cost!

Second, God doth not usually indulge lazy and negligent souls with the comforts of assurance; he will not so much as seem to patronize sloth and carelessness; he will give it, but it shall be in his own way: his command hath united our care and comfort together; they are mistaken that think the beautiful child of assurance may be born without pangs: ah how many solitary hours have the people of God spent in heart-examination! how many times have they looked into the word, and then into their hearts; sometimes they thought they discovered sincerity, and were even ready to draw forth the triumphant conclusion of assurance; then comes a doubt they cannot resolve, and dashes all again: many hopes and fears, doubtings and reasonings they have had in their own breasts, before they arrived at a comfortable settlement.

To conclude, suppose it possible for a careless Christian to attain assurance, yet it is impossible he should long retain it; as for those whose hearts are filled with the joys of assurance, if extraordinary care be not used, it is a thousand to one if ever they long enjoy it: for a little pride, vanity and carelessness, will dash to pieces all that for which they have been labouring a long time, in many a weary duty. Since, then, the joy of our life, the comfort of our souls, rises and falls with our diligence in this work, keep your hearts with all diligence.

- 5 The improvement of our graces depends on the keeping of our hearts; I never knew grace thrive in a negligent and careless soul; the habits and roots of grace are planted in the heart; and the deeper they are radicated there, the more thriving and flourishing grace is. In Ephesians 3:17, we read of being rooted in grace; grace in the heart is the root of every gracious word in the mouth, and of every holy work in the hand, Psalms 116:10; 2 Corinthians 4:13. It is true, Christ is the root of a Christian; but Christ is *origo originans*, the originating root; and grace *origo originata*, a root originated, planted, and influenced by Christ; according as this thrives under divine influences, so the acts of grace are more or less fruitful, or vigorous. Now in a heart not kept with care and diligence, these fructifying influences are stopped and cut off: multitudes of vanities break in upon it, and devour its strength; the heart is, as it were the pasture, in which multitudes of thoughts are fed every day; a gracious heart diligently kept, feeds many precious thoughts of God in a day. How precious are thy thoughts to me, O God! how great is the sum of them! if I should count them, they are more in number than the sand; and when I awake, I am still with thee, Psalms 139:17-18. And as the gracious heart feeds and nourishes them, so they refresh and feast the heart. My soul is filled as with marrow and fatness whilst I think upon thee...Psalms 63:5-6. But in the disregarded heart, swarms of vain and foolish thoughts are perpetually working, and jostle out those spiritual ideas, and thoughts of God, by which the soul should be refreshed.

Besides, the careless heart makes nothing out of any duty or ordinance it performs or attends on, and yet these are the conduits of heaven, from whence grace is watered and made fruitful: a man may go with an heedless spirit from ordinance to ordinance, abide all his days under the choicest teaching, and yet never be improved by them; for heart-

neglect is a leak in the bottom, no heavenly influences, how rich soever, abide in that soul, Matthew 13:3-4. The heart that lies open and common, like the highway, free for all passengers; when the seed fell on it, the fowls came and devoured it. Alas! it is not enough to hear, unless we take heed how we hear; a man may pray, and never be the better, unless he watch unto prayer. In a word, all ordinances, means, and duties, are blessed unto the improvement of grace, according to the care and strictness we use in keeping our hearts in them.

- 6 Lastly, The stability of our souls in the hour of temptation will be much according to the care and conscience we have of keeping our hearts; the careless heart is an easy prey to Satan in the hour of temptation, his main batteries are raised against that fort-royal, the heart; if he wins that, he wins all; for it commands the whole man: and, alas! how easy a conquest is a neglected heart! It is no more difficult to surprise it, than for an enemy to enter that city, whose gates are open and unguarded: it is the watchful heart that discovers and suppresses the temptation before it comes to its strength. Divines observe this to be the method in which temptations are ripened and brought to their full strength.

There is, First, The irritation of the object, or that power it hath to work upon and provoke our corrupt nature; which is either done by the real presence of the object, or else by speculation, when the object (though absent) is held out by the phantasy before the soul.

Second, then follows the motion of the sensitive appetite, which is stirred and provoked by the phantasy, representing it as a sensual good, as having profit or pleasure in it.

Third, then there is a consultation in the mind about it, deliberating about the likeliest means of accomplishing it.

Fourth, next follows the election, or choice of the will.

Fifth, and lastly, the desire, or full engagement of the will to it; all this may be done in a few moments, for the debates of the soul are quick, and soon ended: when it comes thus far, then the heart is won: Satan hath entered victoriously, and displayed his colours upon the walls of that royal fort; but had the heart been well guarded at first, it had never come to this height; the temptation had been stopped in the first or second act. And indeed there it is stopped easily; for it is in the motions of a tempted soul to sin, as in

the motion of a stone falling from the brow of a hill, it is easily stopped at first, but when once it is set a going, *vires acquirit eundo*: it acquires strength by the going; and therefore it is the greatest wisdom in the world to observe the first motions of the heart, to check and stop sin there. The motions of sin are weakest at first: a little care and watchfulness may prevent much mischief now, which the careless heart not heeding, is brought within the power of temptation; as the Syrians were brought blindfold into the midst of Samaria, before they knew where they were.

By this time, reader, I hope thou art fully satisfied **how absolutely and necessary a work the keeping of the heart is**, it being a duty that wraps up so many dear interests of the soul in it.