

GUARD YOUR HEART

“Above everything else, guard your heart; for it is the source of life’s consequences.” *These earnestly given words of advice to King Solomon in Proverbs 4:23 were direct from God who knew the idolatrous course that would come to overtake and corrupt the young king’s once fabulous reign. Psalm 119:111 stresses that God’s instruction to humankind must be regarded as “a permanent heritage, because it is the joy of one’s heart.” These amazingly comprehensive statements remain two pillars of life-living advice offered to kings, now offered to us occupying a much lower station in life!*

*Basic definitions are in order to capture the significance of these two scriptures. The distinction between “heart” and “mind” should be clarified. Besides being the circulatory organ of the body, the term “heart” through the centuries has assumed broad definitions such as ones quoted out of many from the **American Heritage College Thesaurus**: (1) the most central or essential part, quintessence, root, soul, spirit. (2) The seat of a person’s innermost emotions and feelings including sympathetic concern for someone in misfortune. (3) The quality of mind enabling one to face danger or hardship resolutely. As “mind” is included in the third definition of “heart,” mind and heart have blended meanings much like “faith” and “trust.” Some definitions of the word “mind” include: (1) The seat of the faculty of intelligence and reason. (2) The thought processes characteristic of an individual. (3) To act in conformity with, heed, obey, observe; also reason, object, guard, be on the lookout, minister to.*

Based on these definitions, the duality of a heart-mind co-interaction causes the truth of you to become founded upon what you actually do, embracing how you live, driven by one’s mind (heart) which coincidentally defines the validity of our faith predicated upon our actions, in other words on what we do. Digging deeper into these original verses, the words “above everything else” grabbed my attention. I assume these words convey utmost importance, a first priority, something to really take notice of, start doing. In contrast, what has become the priorities of American present-day society? Basically anyone over forty (and perhaps not wishing to insult those considerably younger) are readily witnessing God’s mandated values sharply dimming, fading as red-light caution against rampant sinning with significant deviations from the straight line morally ordained path escalating.

God is not gently persuading us. NO! We are commanded plain, loud, and clear to “guard” our heart, meaning keeping it actively safe from danger, attack, or harm; to protect, safeguard, and secure it. All these precautions underscore its incalculable value that demands such a priority effort. The rationale in this verse imputes the critical value for the heart performing as “the source effecting life’s consequences”! Consequences are somethings brought about by a cause, an outcome, an aftermath, accomplishment, producing an affect positive or negative. The word “source” would conjure at least in my mind a picture of someone throwing a large stone into a placid pond. The source would be the impulse to initially throw that stone to strike an otherwise smooth water surface causing waves of disturbance to radiate from the center of stone impaction on the water. Thus similarly our heart in essence becomes the source of behavior, the motivator, prime mover, true spiritual state, the precursor which stirs initial action or feelings, to excite, prod, trigger, stimulate. It can provoke positively or negatively, also impart courage, and inspiration, each response in turn animating its own individual consequence(s)!

Mt 15:18-19 But what comes out of your mouth is actually coming from your heart, and that is what makes a person unclean. **19** For out of the heart come forth wicked thoughts, murder, adultery and other kinds of sexual immorality, theft, lies, slanders. . . .

Proverbs 5:22-23 A wicked person's own crimes will trap him, he will be held fast by the ropes of his sin. **23** He will die from lack of discipline; the magnitude of his folly will make him totter and fall.

Verse 111 in Psalm 119 uses “heritage” and “joy” in association with “heart.” This verse states that instruction from God should be revered as a “heritage,” something immaterial, a philosophy that is passed from one generation to another, a legacy, a precious tradition. “Joy” is defined as a condition of well-being and good spirits. But also blessedness, bliss, felicity that ties in with joy that is God instructed and ordained which can only be pure, sinless and timeless. Humanity’s joy can be transitory: sexually focused, monetary, especially massive lottery winnings, new house, vacation home, flashy new car, sleek new boat. Such thing-based joy can become tainted with sins of pride similar to what happened to Saul and Solomon, their mutual worldly-centered idolatries corrupting their respective kingships.

1Corinthians 3:16-20 Don't you know that you people are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you? **17** So if anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you yourselves are that temple. **18** Let no one fool himself. If someone among you thinks he is wise (by this world's standards), let him become "foolish," so that he may become really wise. **19** For the wisdom of this world is nonsense, as far as God is concerned; inasmuch as the Tanakh says, "He traps the wise in their own cleverness," **20** and again, "ADONAI knows that the thoughts of the wise are worthless."

James 1:13-16 No one being tempted should say, "I am being tempted by God." For God cannot be tempted by evil, and God himself tempts no one. **14** Rather, each person is being tempted whenever he is being dragged off and enticed by the bait of his own desire. **15** Then, having conceived, the desire gives birth to sin; and when sin is fully grown, it gives birth to death. **16** Don't delude yourselves, my dear brothers.

James 1:19-25 Therefore, my dear brothers, let every person be quick to listen but slow to speak, slow to get angry; **20** for a person's anger does not accomplish God's righteousness! **21** So rid yourselves of all vulgarity and obvious evil, and receive meekly the Word implanted in you that can save your lives. **22** Don't deceive yourselves by only hearing what the Word says, but do it! **23** For whoever hears the Word but doesn't do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror, **24** who looks at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. **25** But if a person looks closely into the perfect Torah, which gives freedom, and continues, becoming not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work it requires, then he will be blessed in what he does.

Much of the New Testament is devoted to the spiritual path of genuine repentance that a believer must follow in becoming a new creation, endowed with a new life way that mandates constant vigilance in an overcoming of self to receive Yahshua as Lord God. The submission-conversion of one's mind-heart is the chief player in this process. 2Peter 3:18 And keep growing in grace and knowledge of our Lord and Deliverer, Yeshua the Messiah. To him be the glory, both now and forever! Amen.

2Corinthians 10:3-6 For although we do live in the world, we do not wage war in a worldly way; **4** because the weapons we use to wage war are not worldly. On the contrary, they have God's power for demolishing strongholds. We demolish arguments **5** and every arrogance that raises itself up against the knowledge of

God; we take every thought captive and make it obey the Messiah. **6** And when you have become completely obedient, then we will be ready to punish every act of disobedience.

2Tim 2:21-25 If a person keeps himself free of defilement by the latter, he will be a vessel set aside for honorable use by the master of the house and ready for every kind of good work. **22** So, flee the passions of youth; and, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart, pursue righteousness, faithfulness, love and peace. **23** But stay away from stupid and ignorant controversies - you know that they lead to fights, **24** and a slave of the Lord shouldn't fight. On the contrary, he should be kind to everyone, a good teacher, and not resentful when mistreated. **25** Also he should be gentle as he corrects his opponents. For God may perhaps grant them the opportunity to turn from their sins, acquire full knowledge of the truth,

Mark 7:21-23 For from within, out of a person's heart, come forth wicked thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, **22** greed, malice, deceit, indecency, envy, slander, arrogance, foolishness... **23** All these wicked things come from within, and they make a person unclean."

Isaiah 55:7 Let the wicked person abandon his way and the evil person his thoughts; let him return to ADONAI, and he will have mercy on him; let him return to our God, for he will freely forgive.

1Timothy 6:6-12 Now true religion does bring great riches, but only to those who are content with what they have. **7** For we have brought nothing into the world; and we can take nothing out of it; **8** so if we have food and clothing, we will be satisfied with these. **9** Furthermore, those whose goal is to be rich fall into temptation; they get trapped in many foolish and hurtful ambitions which plunge them into ruin and destruction. **10** For the love of money is a root of all the evils; because of this craving, some people have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves to the heart with many pains. **11** But you, as a man of God, flee from these things; and pursue righteousness, godliness, faithfulness, love, steadfastness, gentleness. **12** Fight the good fight of the faith, take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you testified so well to your faith before many witnesses.

Conclusion: Ecclesiastes 12:13, 14:13 Here is the final conclusion, now that you have heard everything: fear God and keep his commandments; this is what being human is all about. 14 For God will bring to judgment everything we do, including every secret, whether good or bad.

Note all verses unless otherwise noted are excerpted from the Complete Jewish Bible, An English Version by David H. Stern.

Proverb to ponder: 21:4 Haughty looks, a proud heart — what the wicked plow is sin.

Also Psalm 139:23: Examine me God, and know my heart; test me, and know my thoughts.

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