

GUARD YOUR HEART

“Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life” (Prov. 4:23)

Two people can do the same thing while one of them will be condemned by God and the other will not. This may seem confusing and contradictory, but it is not. The key to understanding this dilemma involves the heart. The heart is the “wellspring” or “source” of life. Others may not know your heart, but God does. That’s why David was anointed to be the king of Israel. God knew his heart. Samuel explained why David was selected by reminding his family that **“man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart” (1 Sam. 16:7)**. This is also precisely why King Saul was rejected. Samuel explained to Saul: **“But now your kingdom will not endure; the Lord has sought out a man after his own heart and appointed him leader of his people, because you have not kept the Lord’s command” (1 Sam. 13:14)**. David, as you know, was a man after God’s own heart (Acts 13:22). Apparently, Saul wasn’t! This emphasizes the importance of guarding your heart above all else for it is the “wellspring” of life.

Jesus was once criticized for eating with unwashed hands. He responded by reminding His disciples that what goes into a man’s mouth does not make him unclean, but what comes out of his mouth does (Matt. 15:11). Mark explains that what we eat doesn’t defile us because it enters into our stomach and not our heart (Mk. 7:19). Jesus continued His explanation: **“For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. These are what make a man unclean; but eating with unwashed hands does not make him unclean” (Matt. 15:19,20)**.

PLEASING GOD OR MEN

Every day we make decisions. Sometimes we succumb to peer pressure and make decisions to please men. This is always wrong! It is the pure in heart that see God (Matt. 5:8). If we love God with all our heart our primary focus will always be to please God and not men.

- King Saul disobeyed God because he was afraid of the people (1 Sam. 15:24).
- Many leaders refused to confess Christ because they feared the Jews and loved the praise of men more than the praise of God (Jn. 12:42,43).
- Pilate handed Jesus over to be crucified because he was more interested in pleasing Caesar than in pleasing God (Jn. 19:12-16).
- It is totally irrational to obey the peasants who have no power, and totally ignore the commands of an all powerful king!

- Peter and John correctly chose to obey God rather than men (Acts 4:19).
- Paul said that if he was trying to please men he could not be a servant of Christ (Gal. 12:10).
- Before we do something, it is wise to ask “why” we are doing it.
- Doing something to merely please men, however, is never acceptable to God!

Rome was the capital of the ancient world and consequently was a melting pot of races and religions from all over the world. Some of the brethren in Rome were weak in their faith and ate only vegetables. Others who were more mature ate everything. Some of the brethren considered one day more sacred than another, and others considered every day alike. Paul explained: **“Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. He who regards one day as special, does so to the Lord. He**

who eats meat, eats to the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who abstains, does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God” (Rom.14:5,6).

Note that the activities of these brethren were either be right or wrong depending on “why” they did it. If they did it “to the Lord” it was acceptable. If they didn’t it was not! If we do something while doubting we are condemned because everything that does not come from faith is sin (Rom. 14:23). As we have said, true obedience comes from the heart (Rom. 6:17). That’s why we must guard our heart for it is the wellspring of life.

We are specifically warned not to pass judgment on others regarding disputable matters (Rom. 14:1-4). Remember! Man can only look on the outward appearance while God looks at the heart.

A NEW HEART

Jeremiah wrote: **“The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?” (Jer. 17:9).**

It is undeniable that the heart is key to our conduct. The heart is the wellspring of life. Since the heart of unconverted people is deceitful and desperately wicked it naturally follows that their conduct will also be deceitful and desperately wicked. In order to change a man’s life you must first change his heart. This is precisely what God has promised to do.

Please prayerfully consider this promise of God: **“I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws” (Ex. 36:26,27).**

Receiving a new heart and a new spirit results in such a complete transformation that those who experience it are called a “new creation”. Note: **“If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come” (2 Cor. 5:17).** The Bible word for “transformation” is “metamorphoo” from which we get our English word “metamorphosis” (See Rom. 12:2; 2 Cor. 3:18). This word comes from “meta” which implies “change”, and “morphe” which means “form”. This is how a caterpillar becomes a butterfly, and this is also how a deceitful sinner is transformed into the likeness of Christ.

SAUL OF TARSUS

When Saul of Tarsus was converted to Christ he became known as the Apostle Paul. He described himself in his former life as the worst of sinners (See 1 Tim. 1:12-16). As an unconverted sinner he was a blasphemer, a persecutor of Christians, and a violent man. So many sinners were being saved in those days, however, that the early church had a “saying” - **“Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners”**. The conversion of Saul exemplified this saying. Saul, as the worst of sinners, considered himself an “example” to other unbelievers. The point is that if the worst of sinners can be saved, anyone can be saved.

Please consider Paul’s own testimony: **“Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in**

Christ Jesus. Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance. Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners – of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life” (1 Tim. 1:13-16).

Transformation of Paul’s life is undeniable. He went from persecuting Christians to being persecuted as a Christian. Here are a few verses demonstrating his change of heart:

- He had continual sorrow in his heart for the Jews who persecuted him (Rom. 9:2).
- He wrote to the Corinthians with anguish of heart and tears (2 Cor. 2:4).
- He insisted that his ministry in Christ was written, not on stone tablets, nor with ink, but with the Spirit of Christ on the tablets of human hearts (2 Cor. 3:1-3).
- Paul’s heart was opened wide to the Corinthians (2 Cor. 6:11).
- Paul became all things to all men so that by all possible means he might save some (1 Cor. 9:22).
- Paul remembered to pray for the Philippians because he had them in his heart (Phil. 1:3-11).
- He wrote to the Colossians: **“Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual song with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him” (Col. 3:15-17).**
- As you know, the most important commandment in the Bible is to **“Love the Lord your God will all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength” (Mk. 12:30).** These inspired words of Jesus are found three times in the Bible (Matt. 22:36-40; Mk. 12:28-31; Lk. 10:25-27). In every instance loving God will all our heart comes before anything else.

A DIVINE INVITATION

“Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me” (Rev. 3:20).

The late Seth Wilson once observed: “I cannot by my own will overcome my own will”. He was right! Fortunately, we don’t have to. Jesus is knocking at the door of our heart waiting for us to open the door and let Him in. He is ready and able to give us a new heart and a new spirit that we might be transformed into His image (2 Cor. 3:18). **“He (Jesus) came unto that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who received him, to those who believe in his name, he gave the right to become children of God – children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will but born of God” (Jn. 1:11-13).**

Even now Jesus is right outside the door of your heart. Please let Him in!

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