

SETTING AND GUARDING YOUR HEART

A study examining the attributes of our bodies, souls, spirits, and hearts, and how they interrelate with each other in determining the direction of our spiritual pathway.

Key Bible Reading

Prov 4:23

**“Keep your heart with all diligence,
For out of it spring the issues of life.”**

Before commencing the main topic of setting and guarding our hearts, we will enlarge on our previous knowledge of the nature and respective functions of our spirit, soul, body, and heart.

Generally speaking, God dwells in the spirit, self dwells in the soul, while senses dwell in the body. Man has a spirit, and is a soul.

BODY

It is through the body with its senses that enables man to come into contact with the material world, and relate to the material things around us. The body is that part of us that gives us world-consciousness. It is the visible material part of us, and with its unique features makes it easy for others to see us and recognize who we are.

SOUL

The soul is the essential “self” or ego of man with its desire for life and well-being. It is the seat of the emotions, and defines our personality. The emotions, which are affected by the senses, relate all things to self, and how we feel in our circumstances. The soul is also defined as the source of our self-consciousness. The mind is considered part of the soul, and our mode of thinking is coloured by the action of our souls.

The Volition or Will of the Soul

The soul, because it is naturally orientated towards self-seeking and self satisfying, volition and self will belong to it, choosing, and willing what we will do or how we will react as each occasion arises in daily experience. For instance, our inherent emotions decide things like whether we will give way to fleshly temptations or obey the higher spirit with its conscience -- to react in anger, to accept criticism, to be cheerful, jealous, loving, unkind, generous, and so forth.

The power of the soul is most substantial, since the spirit and the body cannot act without the self will and consent of the soul. The spirit, the God-centred higher part of man, cannot itself induce a person to act. It can only do so through the medium of the soul. For instance, a person, through his spirit, may know that it is the right thing to forgive a person. But emotions of the soul, such as resentment, jealousy, anger, or hatred, may influence the will of the soul into ignoring to do what is morally right.

It is only when the soul is willing to assume the humble position of laying ‘self’ aside, that the spirit can influence the whole man. If the soul rebels against taking such a position, the spirit will be powerless to rule. Man possesses the authorization to choose either to follow God’s will, or to resist Him and follow Satan’s will instead. God desires that the spirit, being the noblest part of man, should control the whole being. Yet, the will—the crucial part of individuality—belongs to the soul. It is the will of the soul that determines whether the spirit, the body, or itself, is to rule. This is the basis of the statement that man has a free will.

SPIRIT

The spirit is that part of us through which we are able to commune with God,

and to apprehend His blessings, and truly worship Him. Because it is our spirit that relates us with God, it is that part of us that gives us God-consciousness. The conscience is part of our spirits, being the medium through which we are convicted of right and wrong.

Before the fall of man, Adam's spirit enabled him to know God and converse with Him freely. But because Adam chose to obey Satan, his spirit 'died,' in that it lost its God-centred consciousness. That was the condition of all mankind following Adam.

It was only by the grace of God that we were enabled to receive Christ's salvation, and the moment we believed in Him and proclaimed Him Lord, our spirits were regenerated. We were then enabled to understand spiritual things, to receive the knowledge and experience of Jesus dwelling in us, and to appropriate the blessing of the fatherhood of God. We are now able to converse freely with God, and to learn to know His will for us.

Literally 'spirit' is translated as breath, or wind, and in the Scriptures the Holy Spirit is sometimes referred to as the breath of God, and man's spirit is the breath of man. **"Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you." And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit."** John 20:21-22.

The free flowing nature of man's walk when it is under the Spirit's guidance is illustrated in the following reading, which infers that his purposes and actions are not fixed, but always open to the influence of the Spirit. **"The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit."** John 3:8.

It is through our spirits that the Holy Spirit searches our hearts to determine our overall attitude and commitment towards God.

**"The spirit of a man is the lamp of the LORD,
Searching all the inner depths of his heart."** Prov 20:27

HEART

The heart is the inner essence of man's being. It is what his inner settled state is, formed from the influences of his soul, spirit, and body, and what reactions they have produced that have made a lasting impression on his life. The heart is the indicator of a person's essential character and beliefs, and is the indicator of the direction on his life.

The Volition of the Heart

The heart has a much higher office of volition than the soul. Whereas the soul wills and chooses how we will react to the many incidents we encounter in our daily life, it is the heart that decides the way we will conduct our life -- how we are to live in an overall sense. For instance it is the heart that decides whether a person allows his soul to dictate his life, obeying the desires of self, the flesh, and the world, or to allow his spirit [with its conscience] to lead us into righteousness in God's will.

It is the heart that decides our commitment to God, or conversely, the areas we allow Satan to control. It is the heart that decides to step on the path of holiness, placing the soul's self-desires on the altar of the cross to be put to death by the Holy Spirit.

It is the heart that makes the major commitments in our lives—to be honest, to be true to our word, to obey the commandments in the bible, to turn away from illicit sex, to love and to serve others, to give school our best shot, to honour and obey our parents. These are decisions of the heart, and the state of our heart is the indicator of the overall state of a man—what kind of a person he is.

"Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves [with a decision of the heart] slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness?" Rom 6:16.

When Elijah confronted the Israelites with this stern choice, he was asking them to stop their complacency, and make a firm decision of their hearts.

“And Elijah came to all the people, and said, "How long will you falter between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him." 1 Kings 18:21.

Because God reigns in justice and righteousness, it is the state of our hearts that decides if He is able to intervene and set us free from all the bondages of Satan. That is why God tests our hearts to see where our allegiance lies—to obeying Satan by pursuing the lusts of the flesh, or whether we hunger and thirst for His righteousness.

**“I, the LORD, search the heart,
I test the mind,
Even to give every man according to his ways,
According to the fruit of his doings.” Jer 17:10**

If our heart yearns for righteousness, God leads us on a path of refinement and holiness. If our heart yearns to obey the immoral desires of the soul and body, God allows Satan to keep us in his bondage.

Manifestations of the Soul and Heart

The heart is sometimes attributed with the same emotions, thoughts, will and attitudes as the soul, and spirit. E.g. faint, tender, understanding, distressed, overwhelmed, jealous, cheerful, proud, sorrowful, stiff-necked, grieved, carnal, and so forth—so much so that many think that their names may be used interchangeably.

But it is the soul rather than the heart that is the originator of these reactions in a person. For instance, it may be said that a person has a proud heart. First of all, the soul of a person manifests pride. The heart itself cannot be attributed with pride unless it has made a choice to adopt a proud demeanour as a way of life.

When a person, with his heart, chooses to make particular manifestations of his soul, say laziness, as an acceptable way of life, it becomes a part of the character of his heart.

We should be continually making choices of the heart, particularly in our relationship to God as part of our prayers. For instance, ‘Father, I choose to accept my circumstances without resentment or complaining, but with a gladness of heart, knowing that You are in all things, and are able to turn all things to my good.’

Notice in Psalm 101 how many times King David says, “I will,” or “I shall,” in setting his heart before God.

“I will sing of mercy and justice; to You, O LORD, I will sing praises.

I will behave wisely in a perfect way. Oh, when will You come to me? I will walk within my house with a perfect heart.

I will set nothing wicked before my eyes; I hate the work of those who fall away; it shall not cling to me. A perverse heart shall depart from me; I will not know wickedness.

Whoever secretly slanders his neighbour, him I will destroy; the one who has a haughty look and a proud heart, him I will not endure.

My eyes shall be on the faithful of the land, that they may dwell with me; he who walks in a perfect way, he shall serve me. He who works deceit shall not dwell within my house; he who tells lies shall not continue in my presence. Early I will destroy all the wicked of the land, that I may cut off all the evildoers from the city of the LORD.” Ps 101.

Unfortunately, another choice would be to decide to cater to the desires of the flesh, with an attitude that the body was made for pleasure.

Perhaps the most important time to make choices or commitments of our hearts is when we reach young adulthood, and the direction of our lives is before us. Unfortunately the coming together of a sense of growing maturity and independence can mean that the wise counsel of

parents is overlooked. The heart choices we make have a profound effect on the direction our life takes. That is why the Key Bible Reading implores us to

**“Keep your heart with all diligence,
For out of it spring the issues of life.”** Prov 4:23.

The Continual Change of the State of the Heart

The condition of a person’s heart may change for the good or bad as his attitude to life changes. In an unregenerate person, the soul dominates his conduct, and he is controlled by his fleshly desires. As a person matures in the Lord, his spirit, or God-centred part gains ascendancy, and he begins to maintain a steady walk in the will of the Lord. If our spiritual pilgrimage is on the path of holiness, the Holy Spirit gradually puts to death the deeds of the flesh, or carnal desires of the soul. His spirit grows in governing power and the soul loses its control over the person.

On the other hand, if a person chooses to entertain a certain characteristic of the soul, like anger, and pursues it until it becomes a pattern of living, it becomes part of his heart attitude, and eventually leads to spiritual death.

“Therefore, brethren, we are debtors -- not to the flesh, to live according [controlled by] to the flesh [the carnal desires of the soul]. For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.” Rom 8:12-14.

The Continual Battle to Control Our Hearts

Because the state of our hearts ascertains the way we live and the outcome of our lives, their setting is the subject of continual warfare between God and Satan. Satan endeavours to direct our heart desires towards satisfying self and the demands of the body, whilst God directs us towards a life of self-sacrifice in obeying the Lord and by loving and caring for the needs of others.

We have a free will that allows us to walk according to the carnal desires of the flesh, or to put our carnal fleshly natures on the altar of the cross to be put to death by the Holy Spirit.

We read that God is a God of justice and righteousness.

**“Righteousness and justice are the foundation of Your throne;
Mercy and truth go before Your face.”** Ps 89:14.

When a person disobeys God’s righteous commandments, he has turned his back on God and is obeying Satan instead. When a person has given over an area of his life to Satan, God is bound by His justice and righteousness to allow Satan to invest such a person with a demon spirit that strengthens that carnal desire. E.g. a spirit of lust.

The paradox is that it is the life of self-sacrifice and service to others that leads to peace and contentment, whilst the life of fulfilling self-desires is never satisfied, and invariably leads to dissatisfaction and lack of inner peace. The word ‘keep’ in the Key Bible Reading (**“keep your heart with all diligence”), means, “protect, preserve, maintain and to guard with all fidelity;”** [fidelity means with diligence and faithfulness].

An example of the constant warfare between God and Satan for the control of our hearts occurs immediately after we have been saved and have made a commitment to Jesus to submit to Him as Lord, and to obey His commandments. Satan immediately endeavours to erode that heart commitment, and draw us back into loving the world and satisfying the demands of our flesh.

The Most Important Life Changing Heart Decision

“...if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. “For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.” Rom 10:9-10.

The State of Our Hearts Determines the State of Our Spiritual Walk

We are responsible for the setting of our hearts by continually making life-changing decisions. The state of our hearts has a direct bearing on the nature of our spiritual walk. Jesus illustrated this in His parable of the sower. He explained that the seed was the word of God, and the ground in which it was sowed was the heart of the hearer.

"Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. *Those by the wayside* are the ones who hear; then the devil comes and takes away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved. But *the ones on the rock* are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, who believe for a while and in time of temptation fall away. Now *the ones that fell among thorns* are those who, when they have heard, go out and are choked with cares, riches, and pleasures of life, and bring no fruit to maturity. But the ones that fell *on the good ground* are those who, having heard the word with a noble and good heart, keep it and bear fruit with patience." Luke 8:11-15.

The, FIRST, described as "by the wayside," is a 'shallow' heart, that doesn't receive truth seriously, and the devil is able to snatch the given truth away because it has not thought about the truth deeply, and stored it in his memory.

The SECOND is a fickle heart that receives truth gladly, but not steadfastly, and so when temptation comes, it is easily succumbed.

The THIRD heart is one that is not fully committed, and so when the distractions of the world and temptations vie for his commitment, he caves in to their demands.

Jesus described the heart that was diligent in receiving the word, and then clung on to it steadfastly, as "**a noble and good heart.**"

Other common descriptions of the heart are--

A true, or pure, a heart that remains set in the direction of seeking God, and being obedient to His commandments. A pure heart is the result of the fleshly nature being removed. When a person has a pure heart, and they are one with the Lord, the veil hiding the disclosure of God is taken away, and the light of the knowledge of God enters.

A divided heart is one in which different areas of a person's life are given over to obeying the desires of the flesh, whilst other parts are set towards obeying God. With a divided heart, part of a person may be under the control of God, and part under the power of Satan. Because God is a God of justice and righteousness, Satan is allowed to implant his demons in that part that is given over to his control.

A seeking heart is that of a person dedicated to finding and walking in truth. He is not content to be indifferent to whether something is truth or error. A seeking heart is continually seeking to draw closer to the Lord in his spiritual search.

A shallow or fickle heart is one that continually changes—at one time making Jesus Christ Lord, but oscillates, and soon after, obeys the desires of the body and the world.

A circumcised heart is one in which the influence of the self governed soul has been removed, by being "put to death" by the Spirit. Conversely, an uncircumcised heart is carnal, or controlled by self-centeredness and fleshly desires.

Bringing Our Soul, Spirit, Body and Heart Into Oneness with Jesus Christ

It is the desire of God the Father, and Jesus Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit, to bring every part of our being into oneness with the Lord.

1. Through subjecting every part of us -- our body with its members, our soul, spirit, and heart, to His Lordship and desire for us.
2. When every part of us has been voluntarily subjected to Him and the carnal flesh put to death by the Spirit, the Lord is enabled to fill every part of us with the fullness of His Being.

3. Christ is then able to establish His kingdom every part of us -- body, soul, spirit, hearts and minds, so that He is able to bear lasting fruit through us.
4. We are complete in Him. For this purpose we were created, and when Christ's purpose for us has been accomplished, we are spiritually complete in Him. We become **"...members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones."** Eph 5:30.

These readings refer to this process.

"And He [God] put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all." Eph 1:22-23.

"He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things." Eph 4:10.

"For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power." Col 2:9-10.

"For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell..." Col 1:19.

"And of [of means part of His fullness, and that this is a work in progress] His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace." John 1:16-17.

Even though the above pathway describes our spiritual walk to maturity, it is important to realize that all of the graces of God are available to all of us to meet any special need, no matter how far we have advanced in spiritual maturity. Christianity is not just a belief in Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord. When we become Christians, Jesus dwells in us, and His life giving power is always available for us to draw on, as a branch continually draws on the life-giving power of the vine.

The Soul has to be Redeemed and Restored, Not Destroyed

Because we have stressed the necessity of putting carnal flesh on the cross to be 'put to death' by the Spirit, some may conclude that the soul itself is all bad and has to be destroyed, or even put out of the way. Not so! The mind, the emotions, and the personality, are essential parts of our being. It is the baser parts of the soul that must be removed so that Christ can reign in our souls—things like pride, ego, self-determination, self-centredness, and all of the corrupt emotions like hatred, jealousy, lust, covetousness, pride, envy etc. Our souls have to be restored to the likeness of Christ, not eliminated.

He restores [restored to what it should be] **my soul;**

He leads me in the paths of righteousness

For His name's sake. Ps 23:3.

Our personalities are part of God's creation, and God does not interfere with their uniqueness without our consent. However, when the soul is refined and restored with our volition, our personalities are continually changing for the good. This is God's work, for He **"builds the house."** When we attempt to change our personality from what was given to us by God—like deciding to be more domineering or self-assertive, [when our God-given personality is one of obligingness], we open the door to Satan reinforcing our 'new' personalities with his spirits, as in an autocratic spirit. If we make a decision to satisfy our fleshly demands, our God-given personality suffers a change for the worse.

Man Compared With The Temple

The Apostle Paul had received a revelation that man was likened to the temple. **"Do you not know,"** he wrote, **"that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?"** (1 Cor. 3.16). He also declared that, as God formerly dwelt in the temple, so He, Father, Son, and Spirit, indwells man today, in His spirit.

We know the temple is divided into three parts.

1. The first is the Outer Court that is seen by all and visited by all. All external worship is offered here. The Outer Court is likened to the body, occupying an external

position with its presence and life visible to all. The next two parts of the temple are out of sight to those in the Outer Court.

2. Going in further is the Holy Place, into which only the priests could enter, and where they present oil, incense, and bread to God. The Holy Place is compared to man's soul, which constitutes the inner life of man, embracing his emotions, volition and mind. The Holy Place may be likened to the soul of a regenerated person, for his love, will and thought are fully enlightened that he may serve God, even as the priest of old did. The Holy Place was not illuminated with natural sunlight, but from light within from the seven-branched candlestick. The soul of a regenerated person also resembles the Holy place in that it has a source of inner illumination from the Spirit, as he begins to gain spiritual knowledge and revelation.
3. God dwelt within the veil, in the Holy of Holies, where there was no earthly illumination. However, a spiritual light that came from the presence of the Almighty overshadowed the darkness. The Holy of Holies was so sacred that no man could enter, with the exception of the High Priest, who entered once annually to offer blood for the unintentional sins committed by the people during the previous year. It must be noted that before the veil of The Holy of Holies was rent at the death of Jesus Christ, no man could enter the Holy of Holies into the presence of God. Figuratively, the Holy of Holies represents man's spirit, the God-centred part of man. The spirit lies beyond man's self-consciousness and above his sensibility. Here man unites and communes with God. God indwells man's spirit, like the Holy of Holies. There everything is carried out by faith, beyond the sight, sense, and even the understanding of the believing one.

It may seem to us that nothing is done in the Holiest because it is pitch dark. All activities in the Holy Place; and even those activities of the Outer Court, seem to be under the complete control of the priests ministering in the Holy Place. Yet, from a spiritual point of view all the activities of the Holy Place are actually directed by the revelation given by God in the utter quietness and peace of the Holy of Holies.

In our spiritual pilgrimage, our final quest is to enter into a state of rest abiding in God, where we are completely still, entrusting our protection, our provision, our health and length of days, and our life's purpose into His hands.

Remember that this is a spiritual walk, and all associated with the Holy of Holies is by faith. God dwells in our spirits, the equivalent to the Holy of Holies, and it is not presumptuous in times of stress and warfare, to spiritually retreat into Christ, and in Him into God. In fact the writer of Hebrews entreats us to enter boldly into the presence of God.

“Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, and having a High Priest over the house of God...” Heb 10:19-21.

The basis of our faith to retreat into God in our spirits, must always rest on the righteousness and sanctification Christ procured for us by His shed blood and sacrificed body. Without faith in these, there is no rent veil, and no acceptance into the presence of God.

The Indwelling Presence of God and Christ is Well Supported by Scripture

“Jesus answered and said to him, “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him.” John 14:23.
“And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said:
“I will dwell in them

*And walk among them.
I will be their God,
And they shall be My people."* 2 Cor 6:15-16.

"Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are." 1 Cor 3:16-17.

"...but Christ as a Son over His own house, whose house we are if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end." Heb 3:6.

"But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His." Rom 8:9.

"No one has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us. By this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as Saviour of the world. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God." 1 John 4:12-15.

"Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God." 1 John 4:14-15.

"And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God." Rev 21:3.