

# Sermon Transcript

## August 2, 2015

### “Guard Your Heart”

#### Proverbs 4:23 and more

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## Introduction

### WAR IS A STRUGGLE

Imagine if you will a battlefield with machine guns rat-a-tatting, with mortars firing shells, along with the terrible screams of those who are wounded, as well as the awful sight of those who perished strewn along the ground and many other unspeakable horrors of war. Imagine, too, an army sergeant who crawls on his belly to a place where he can get behind cover and assess the battle. He is vigilant to lookout for the dangers and, therefore, significantly reduces the possibility of being hit by enemy fire as he tries to advance his troops.

As a young man I remember watching scenes similar to this on a show called Combat which starred Sergeant Chip Saunders, played by Vic Morrow from 1962-1967. It was gritty drama, for those days, depicting the lives of a U.S. platoon fighting its way across Europe during World War II. The show was a relatively realistic portrait of the fighting, refusing to glamorize either the soldiers or the war itself. It concentrated on the struggles of the soldiers to maintain their own humanity.

War is a struggle with many facets. For Sergeant Saunders it meant watching out for and guiding his men to accomplish the orders of his superior officer. He was ever on guard against the enemies' efforts to discourage, defeat and destroy them. If he wasn't vigilant then it might mean the very life of one or more of his men! Anything less than complete care and watchfulness in the time of battle is intolerable because it can result in casualties.

**When I think of the word struggle, I have to admit that what comes to mind is the tremendous challenge of living a godly life.** We, too, have an enemy who seeks to discourage, defeat or destroy us and because of that the Bible uses the imagery of conflict, struggle and battle to portray the reality of our spiritual walk as Christian men, women, boys and girls.

Sometimes it takes all you and I have to be:

- \* Passionate in our love for the Lord who loves us
- \* Prayerful in our daily walk with God
- \* Grateful for the blessings God has given
- \* Sensitive to the multiplicity of needs around us
- \* Compassionate in our relationships with others
- \* Uncompromising in our fight against sin and the devil
- \* Merciful regarding the failings of others
- \* Pure in our thought life and so much more!!

## OUR WALK WITH GOD IS A STRUGGLE

Scripture calls our daily walk for the Lord a struggle! Ephesians 6 depicts it as a battle and, therein, describes the armor a Christian needs to stand against the enemy. Paul tells the Christians in Ephesus, *our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.*" We are much better prepared for life and all the difficulties that come with being a Christian if we realize that... Our walk for God is a battlefield; it is a war zone and it is hard work!

We, too, are engaged in a battle and must be ready for the conflict. But how do we ready ourselves, as Christians, for the inevitable struggles of our journey? To answer that question I'd like to turn our attention to Proverbs 4. Herein is a huge deal of insight from our Lord from the pen of Solomon, the son of David.

<sup>20</sup> *My son be attentive to my words; incline your ear to my sayings.*  
<sup>21</sup> *Let them not escape from your sight; keep them within your heart.*  
<sup>22</sup> *For they are life to those who find them, and healing to all their flesh.*  
<sup>23</sup> *Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.*  
<sup>24</sup> *Put away from you crooked speech, and put devious talk far from you.*  
<sup>25</sup> *Let your eyes look directly forward, and your gaze be straight before you.*  
<sup>26</sup> *Ponder the path of your feet; then all your ways will be sure.*  
<sup>27</sup> *Do not swerve to the right or to the left; turn your foot away from evil.*

## GUARD YOUR HEART

These verses are a continuation of the previous chapters all of which portray the picture of a father preparing his son for life in the world. The entire book of Proverbs is a clear plea to learn, and to turn the heart, mind and soul to God, to wisdom, to all that which is pure, lovely, admirable, excellent or praiseworthy! Solomon is strong in saying that, above all else, he must guard his heart!

In these verses there are several calls:

Attentiveness

Vigilance

Purity

Determination

## BE ATTENTIVE

He is to be attentive to what is said, to incline himself to really hear Solomon's sayings. This is to be a conscientious and determined effort to both remember and keep these admonishments! No lip service allowed! Solomon is saying, "Whatever you do, don't be indifferent or unconcerned about these words of wisdom." Why? He explains in verse 22, "They are life to those who find (and keep them), and healing to all their flesh. This is to say that, as a rule, those who walk with God experience his blessing, his protection, his presence, his joy, his peace, his love and his grace. They are not without problems, pain or even disease. But by faith in Christ and obedience to His words, they experience the "the peace that passes all understanding which guards their hearts and minds".

Solomon's plea to be attentive causes me to squirm both on a personal and a professional level. I've made so many mistakes, been nonchalant or indifferent and have lived with much regret over missteps and disobedience to God. In addition, I've easily spent a couple thousand hours in counseling sessions over the years and have observed and heard cries of disbelief as I heard stories of woe and heartache. Some have literally exclaimed, "I never expected to be in this situation!" This is why we must be attentive and listen ever so closely to the warnings and directives of God's Word.

## **BE VIGILANT**

He is to be vigilant in watching over and protecting his heart. Solomon says that this is of utmost importance! So crucial is it that Proverbs, the book that was written with the expressed purpose of "attaining wisdom and discipline; for understanding words of insight; for acquiring a disciplined and godly life," refers to the heart over 70 times in 31 chapters. Wisdom occurs 51 times, knowledge 39 times, understanding 35 times and love just 23 times.

Why is he to be so vigilant? It is because the heart is the center of man. It influences everything a person does. To know the heart of a man is to know everything about him. The heart is that which God looks upon. God knows everything to the extent that sees through the facade or the persona by which man often attempts to cover up who he truly is. Dr. James Hillman was correct when he said, "Persona either reveals or conceals."

Solomon tells us that out of the heart flows the springs of life (ESV). The KJV translates it "the issues of life"; the NLT paraphrases, "it affects everything you do" and the NIV paraphrases it "everything you do flows from it." Seeing, then, that the heart is the very core of a person it makes perfect sense that a person would defend it. But the tales of woe are abundant for those who dismiss it as unimportant and who fail to protect it. It kind of reminds me of the soldiers' Bibles from WWII. They were literally BULLETPROOF Pocket New Testaments. These were intended to be kept over the soldier's hearts and could 'deflect' bullets from piercing the heart with the Lord's Testament.

This conveys what Solomon was saying: Guard your heart from the bullets of the enemy. Peter echoes this call when he said, "Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith..." (1 Pet. 5:8). Vigilance is crucial for the man or woman of God!

## **BE PURE**

Furthermore he is to be pure! This is the fundamental nature of verses 24-27. The call is to be wholesome, chaste and without the contamination of sin. It is holistic injunction so that it is about what we say, what we see, where we go and walking a straight and upright path. The children's songs teach many invaluable life lessons. In this context the "Be Careful" song is right on point!

*Verse 1*

O be careful little eyes what you see

O be careful little eyes what you see  
For the Father up above  
Is looking down in love  
So, be careful little eyes what you see

*Verse 2*

O be careful little ears what you hear...

*Verse 3*

O be careful little hands what you do...

*Verse 4*

O be careful little feet where you go...

*Verse 5*

O be careful little mouth what you say...

So in this area of purity we are talking about every aspect of life. It goes beyond what the eyes see to what the mind thinks. It goes beyond what ears hear to what they do with what the information heard. It goes beyond what the hands do as well as what they don't do. It goes beyond where the feet to what the rest of the body does as it goes and when it arrives! It goes beyond what the mouth says to what it doesn't say to what it should say. So, we must not compartmentalize our relationship with God to simply attending church or to reading the Bible or to praying. Our faith in God touches every aspect of our life.

Consider 2 Timothy 2:19, 21 & 22, God's solid foundation stands firm, sealed with this inscription: "*The Lord knows those who are his,*" and, "*Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness.*" <sup>21</sup> *Those who cleanse themselves from the latter will be instruments for special purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work.* <sup>22</sup> *Flee the evil desires of youth and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.*"

## **BE DETERMINED**

Attentiveness, vigilance and purity are all to be carried out with an unbending determination! If it means anything determination means firmness of purpose. It means that, with God's help and enablement that our course is set, we will be unbending in our resolve and energy expended. Douglas Scott Martin Grace in the Flames states the thought very well:

"I am confident in God's grace. I am secure in his love, like a tree planted by the waters, I shall not be moved. I know that every fire is a controlled fire. What was meant for

evil from the enemy always turns out for good because all things work together for good to them that love the Lord and are called according to his purpose.

“I don’t care what gets in my way, “I’m not going anywhere. I will bloom wherever God plants me. I am his workmanship, crafted in his design. I will accomplish that which he has destined for me to do. My future is bright. My course is set. My outcome is determined and so am I!”

## ENEMIES OF THE HEART

An extremely important question to ask in this issue of guarding our hearts is the issue of what are we to defend it against? What are some of its mortal enemies? While we could consider several we have time only for two of the big boys!

### ONE - HARDNESS

#### A. Hebrews 3:7-15

1. Don't harden you heart (v. 7). What is hardness? It is *associated with rebellion* in v. 8 and with a testing of God's mercy in v. 9. Man has been rebelling against God since Adam & Eve. The more rebellious he becomes the more he tests God's grace and mercy.

2. Hardening of the heart also *involves going astray* according to v. 10. This is a recurring theme of the prophets, such as Is. 53:16 "We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way..." Going astray is going our own way. It requires hardness. The harder the heart the more quickly we stray!

3. Hardness speaks, in verse 12, of *unbelief*. While going astray denotes a wandering heart, unbelief signals a more definite decision, a more defiant decision against God. It is, therefore, a by-product of a straying heart!

4. The verses we read (7-15) are followed up with a stiff reminder of the wreckage caused by a hardened heart - *judgment* in v. 17, *death* in v. 17, and *eternal condemnation* in v. 18,19! A hard heart brings an inflexible sentence!

B. Proverbs 28:14 "*Blessed is the man who always fears the Lord, but he who hardens his heart falls into trouble.*" The price is so high for hardness! I know a man who from Delaware whose marriage was crumbling because he had a temper he couldn't control. After months of counseling he came to know Christ as His Savior.

He began to grow in his relationship with God and consequently with his wife and children. He began to read and to study the Word, he began to pray with his wife, he attended a home Bible study, and he was regularly a part of worship. But, after a few years that began to slip; it wasn't sudden. It was a slow fade. His straying wasn't too radical at first, but the more he did his own thing and went his own way, the more he couldn't believe the things he'd believed before. That moved him into rebellion until, eventually; Brian left his wife and two children and was living with another woman!

I talked extensively with his wife during the earliest days of his departure and about the relationship he had with this woman he met at work. Before I could ask about his involvement with other Christian men to encourage him and hold him accountable she remarked that Brian didn't have a Christian man who he was close to. He was a man alone in a man-killing culture! His heart went astray; he fell into unbelief and rebelled against God. Sadly, he got nailed! Many men are so duped. They can be highly intelligent but don't even see it coming. Many I've talked so stupid blind that it's embarrassing for me to have to point these things out to them. That's hardness of heart because it brings about spiritual blindness.

Charles Finney, an American Revivalist born in Warren, CT. and who lived 1792-1875, was a powerful evangelist. When he was President of Oberlin College he penned a lengthy article on hardness of heart. He called it a committal of the will to a false position; a stubbornness in regard to the claims of God and an attitude of disobedience and self-will. He shared 23 marks of the hard-hearted which is replete with insights both about the effects and the manifestations of hardness which I have not time to share. But in his concluding remarks he pointed out that "it is often the curse and ruin of families and churches... It helps us to account for the astonishing blindness of some persons... It helps us see why it is that some persons are always so full of fault-finding. They never seem to be very kind, loving or forgiving... Hardness of heart is a voluntary state of mind that continually resists the Holy Spirit; it is a self-justifying, cruel state of mind; it grieves, it dishonors God; it ruins the souls of men.

## **TWO - PRIDE**

There are many enemies of the heart. Pride is an outlook of the heart and mind to exalt oneself. It is a disposition to climb up or over others to obtain the seat of honor. C.S. Lewis observed that pride is the "vice of which no man is free; which everyone in the world loathes when he sees it in someone else; and of which hardly any people, except Christians, ever imagine that they are guilty themselves... There is no fault which makes a man more unpopular, and no fault which we are more unconscious of in ourselves. And the more we have it ourselves, the more we dislike it in others." (Mere Christianity, "The Great Sin") p. 121.

Lewis' book is truly a must read for a Christian man or woman because its insights are so incredibly penetrating and, at the same time, easily understood and discernible. He also put forth that "the essential vice, the utmost evil, is Pride. Unchastity, anger, greed, drunkenness, and all that, are mere fleabites in comparison: it was through pride that the devil became the devil: Pride leads to every other vice: it is the complete anti-God state of mind.

This fact is depicted in the life of Hezekiah. In 2 Kings 20:1-7 his story begins to unfold. Hezekiah was ill to the point of death and it was because of sin in his life. Isaiah tells him "put your house in order..." When he repented the Lord healed him and blessed him with an additional 15 years to live. What an amazing demonstration of our Lord's mercy, grace and compassion!

It's important to see the "rest of the story" as the old Paul Harvey, radio newsman, would put it. Turn to the book of Isaiah and chapter 38. (Read v. 9-20) In his sickness, at the face of death he promised to walk in humility all his days (v. 15), and yet he became proud after his recovery.

Sorry for the flip-flop through different passages but turn to just one more: 2 Chron. 32:24-26. These verses capsule the events and demonstrate the uniqueness of a proud heart. Hezekiah was ill because of sin, he repented and the Lord healed him. Yet, he became proud again and God's wrath came upon him, he repented and the Lord withdrew his wrath.

Pride is an attitude of self-sufficiency and self-admiration. When Hezekiah did not respond to the kindness and mercy shown to him by God it was not due to unbelief or rebellion. It was due to an attitude of pride and self-admiration. He looked around at all his riches and began to take credit (v. 27).

This is a big one for us isn't it guys! We take the credit for things we possess or talents we have. We consider the sweat and toil we've endured or the wisdom we acquired and admire all that we have achieved! Hezekiah had achieved and acquired much and it got in the way of his relationship with God!

## CONCLUSION

We must guard our hearts from hardness and pride; it is the wellspring of life. Hardness and pride can diminish our love for the Lord who loves us, weaken our prayers each day with the Lord, cause our hearts to complain rather than be grateful for the blessings God has given, desensitize us to the needs of and have little compassion for others, compromise and fail in our fight against sin and the devil, be merciless regarding the failings of others and so much more. The price of an unguarded heart is much higher than a person ever expects. This, of course, takes us back to those people who never expected to be in counseling trying to pick up the pieces of their broken lives!

Therefore we pray to the Lord from Psalm 51:10-12: *“Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. <sup>11</sup> Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me. <sup>12</sup> Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit.”*

Friends, I am constrained to conclude with a final caution. No, I want to change it to an APB, or all points bulletin, which is a broadcast issued from one American law enforcement agency or to its personnel, and/or to other law enforcement agencies. It typically contains information about a wanted suspect who is to be arrested or a person of interest, for whom law enforcement officers are to look who are usually dangerous or missing persons.

What is my APB? Very simply it is that attentiveness, vigilance and purity are all to be carried out with an unbending determination! These are the strong admonitions of one of the wisest men who have ever walked planet earth. Do not be lackadaisical. Instead, Guard your heart from the bullets of the enemy. Peter echoes this call when he said, “Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith...” (1 Pet. 5:8). Vigilance is crucial for the man or woman of God! So be strong in the Lord and his mighty power my friends. We're in a battle, never forget it. Never, never, never forget it and guard your heart, above all else!

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