

"Watch Your Heart"

Proverbs 4:23 says, "Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life." Hello, I'm Phil Sanders, and this is a Bible study "In Search of the Lord's Way." Since your heart is the wellspring of life, guard it carefully. Stay tuned.

Welcome to In SEARCH of the Lord's Way! We're here to search the Scriptures for God's will. The Scriptures teach us about the heart of God and how He's dealt with individuals and with humanity through the ages. They reveal His promises and His warnings. They reveal His love and His wrath. The Scriptures also teach us about our own nature, what God desires and what God condemns. In all of this is the nature of the heart, it's that that determines our thoughts, our feelings, our choices, and our destiny. And that's why knowing what God says about the heart is so vital. Thanks for taking time with us today. We want to be a part of your life each week.

As the wellspring of life, the heart is where so many things in our lives begin. We're loved by others, and it causes us to love them back. We're hurt by others, and it may cause us to strike back. The heart is filled with thoughts and emotions. Some are good emotions like love, joy, compassion, and hope. Other emotions lead to sin and heartache. The Lord Jesus said in Matthew 12:34 to 35, "For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart. The good man brings out of his good treasure what is good; and the evil man brings out his evil treasure what is evil." Well, we have to ask, what's coming out of your heart?

The things coming from your heart are the very things that you're feeding into your heart. If you feed on the selfish, the fleshly, the worldly, you'll speak things that are selfish, fleshly, and worldly. Romans 12:2 urges us, "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect."

We offer this study on the heart and watching your heart for free. If you'd like a printed copy of our study and live in the United States, mail your request to In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or send an e-mail to searchtv@searchtv.org. Or you can call our toll-free telephone number. That number is 1-800-321-8633. We also have materials free on our website www.searchtv.org.

The Edmond church will now worship in song, we'll read from Matthew 26:36 to 41, and we'll explore why we must watch our hearts.

Our reading today comes from the gospel according to Matthew, chapter 26, verses 36 to 41, and it points to the Garden of Gethsemane. "Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and said to His disciples, 'Sit here while I go over there and pray.' And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be grieved and distressed. Then He said to them, 'My soul is deeply grieved, to the point of death; remain here and keep watch with Me.' And He went a little beyond them, and fell on His face and prayed, saying, 'My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will.' And He came to the disciples and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, 'So, you men could not keep watch with Me for one hour? Keep watching and praying that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.'" That's a reading from God's word.

Let's pray. "Oh Father help us to have a willing spirit and to say no to our flesh. Helps us to have a heart that loves You and wants what is right. In Jesus name, Amen."

The battle between good and evil, the battle for your soul and eternal destiny, rages within the heart. God Himself says in Jeremiah 17:9 to 10, "The heart is more deceitful than all else, And is desperately sick; Who can understand it? I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind, Even to give to each man according to his ways, According to the results of his deeds." Because this battle between our willingness to serve God and the weakness of our flesh is real, we must watch our hearts and pray that we do not enter into temptation to sin.

Temptation can hit us suddenly without warning or they can lie dormant in our hearts and arise when we're weak. Luke 4:13 says, that "When the devil had finished every temptation (that is on Jesus), he left Him until an opportune time." The devil knows when to appeal to our flesh, our eyes, or our pride. And if we're not alert and ready, we can easily fall into the devil's schemes. He's looking for an opportune time! 1 Peter 5:8 to 9 says, "Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. But resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world."

Let's talk about some of those schemes as they relate to our hearts. First, the devil loves to make our hearts angry. The Lord Jesus said in Matthew 5:21 to 22, "You have heard that the ancients were told, 'You shall not commit murder' and 'Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.' But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, 'You good-for-nothing,' shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, 'You fool,' shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell."

James 1:19 to 20 reminds us, "Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God." What do we do when we get angry? Ephesians 4:26 to 27 explains, "Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil." We must master our emotions and learn to be patient and to bear with one another.

Second, when anger continually burns in the heart, it leads to hatred, bitterness, and revenge. Bitterness describes the twisted way individuals respond to painful events. Ephesians 4:31 to 32 says, "Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you." The Lord Jesus faced all kinds of horrible injustices, insults, and cruelty. While suffering, He didn't "threaten, but He continued entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously" (1 Peter 2 and verse 23). Now Jesus left us this example, so that we might follow in His steps."

Revenge is paying back evil for evil. And the Lord Jesus taught in Matthew 5:38 to 39, "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also." Christians depend on God to deal with evildoers. Romans 12:17 to 21 says, "Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.'" To the contrary, 'if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he's thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.' Do

not be overcome by evil (he says), but overcome evil with good." A heart that must take revenge only leads to more anger, hatred, and violence. We don't overcome with vengeful violence; we overcome by showing the love of Christ.

Third, Christians are to love and treat everyone with respect. God doesn't show favoritism; He is no respecter of persons. The Jewish apostle Peter went to the Gentile home of Cornelius at God's direction. He told the people in Acts 10:34 to 35, "I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality, but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him." It doesn't matter to God who you are or where you came from, God will welcome you when you fear Him and do what is right.

God doesn't see us like man sees us. He knows what's in our hearts. He doesn't look at outward appearance; He looks at the heart (1 Samuel 16, verse 7). And He knows our hearts determine what we say and how we act. God is fair and He treats everyone alike. He will "render to each person according to his deeds" (Romans 2 and verse 6), why, because his deeds reflect his heart.

When Jesus died upon the cross, He died for every person in every nation for all time. Jesus by the grace of God tasted death for everyone (Hebrews 2, verse 9). And He himself is the propitiation (that is the atoning sacrifice) for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world (1 John 2 and verse 2). The Father wants everyone to be saved and to know the truth (1 Timothy 2:3 to 4). Now it's clear from Scripture that God treats every person fairly and wants what is best for all of us.

Not only that, He wants His children to follow His example. He wants all of His children, every Christian to want all others to be saved and to know the truth. The Lord Jesus said in Matthew 5:43 to 45, "You have heard that it was said, 'That You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and He sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous." Now if you call yourself a child of God, and then act like a child of the devil, then you're doing the wrong thing. Why now show love to all people. Ephesians 5:1 to 2 says, "Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God." A heart that loves God and loves others is like a fragrant offering; it's pleasing to both God and to man.

Sadly, some fail to love and respect people who differ from them. They love those who are like themselves and dislike everyone else. This failure to love others who are different is not unique to any one group; and it can tempt any individual, any class, or any race. It's easy to point your finger at others and miss your own failings. Be careful how you judge others; because you yourself may be guilty of doing the same thing (Romans 2:20 to 23). Prejudice, bias, and hate can tempt anyone. Stereotyping and labeling an entire class--any class--is both unwarranted and unfair and unchristian. No class, no group, and no individual are so elite that they may show partiality to other human beings.

James 2, verses 8 and 9 says, "If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law according to the Scripture, that 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself,' you're doing well. But if you show partiality (that is respect of persons), you're committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors." And so, let's examine our own hearts, watch our own mouths and behavior towards others that we may not disrespect anyone, anywhere at any time. Now each of us can change our hearts, and perhaps that will lead others to change.

Prejudice takes place when someone judges another before hearing the evidence. This is not fair or kind but presumptuous. Since we don't know the motives of other people's hearts, we've got to be careful not to judge ignorantly. The Lord warns us against unfair judging of others in Matthew 7:1 to 5,

“Do not judge so that you will not be judged. For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you. Why do you look at the speck that’s in your brother’s eye, but do not notice the log that’s in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ and behold, the log is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother’s eye.”

Some, who ignore the behavior of the judgmental Pharisees, think Jesus is here saying that we should never judge anything; but Jesus is here speaking of unfair judging. He’s speaking against how some in those days were judging others by human standards and not God’s. The Lord Jesus also said in John 7:24, “Don’t judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment.” There is a time to judge righteously, but make sure you know all the evidence. Some look only at the surface without getting the whole story. They jump to conclusions quickly and assume the worst. Proverbs 18:17 says, “The one who states his case first seems right, until the other comes and examines him.”

The apostle John tells of the man who put himself first and thought he was in charge of the church. John said in 3 John 9 to 10, “I’ve written something to the church, but Diotrephes, who likes to put himself first, doesn’t acknowledge our authority. So if I come, I’ll bring up what he’s doing, talking wicked nonsense against us. And not content with that, he refuses to welcome the brothers, and also stops those who want to and puts them out of the church.” The authority that we must acknowledge today is not in man but in God and in His inspired word. Pride led Diotrephes to trust in himself rather than listen to God. Please see the difference between man-made laws and God’s laws. God will judge us according to His inspired teaching found in Scripture, and all the pride and arrogance in the world cannot change what God says.

Fourth, some have hardened hearts. I’ve known some whose heart has hardened against God and against the word of God. They say, “I don’t care what anyone says, and I don’t care what the Bible says. I’m going to do what I want.” You can’t reason with such people. People who oppose what the Lord clearly says in Scripture reveal this stubborn heart and place their souls in jeopardy. Some don’t want to admit sin is sin. Some would rather listen to some human myth rather than hear God’s teaching; they have no desire to obey. They’ve removed God from their hearts.

Matthew 13, verses 14 to 15 describes the hard-hearted Jewish leaders in the days of Jesus, “Indeed, in their case the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled that says: ‘You will indeed hear but you’ll never understand, you will indeed see but never perceive. For this people’s heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them.’” Where is your heart? Have you allowed it to be hardened against God, against Christ, against God’s morals, or against God’s church?

Let’s pray together. “Oh Father help us to have hearts that are softened, and willing to listen to the things that You teach. And help us Father to be dedicated to doing Your will always. In Jesus name, Amen.”

Hebrews 3:12 to 13 says, “Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God. But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called ‘Today,’ so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.” Without realizing it, we can let our hearts become hardened against God. When people fall to temptation, they

may grow to love sin more than they love God. And this love for sin will deceive them about God and about their souls.

I hear people refer to sinful relationships and sinful behaviors and then use the word “love”, and they think that love justifies them, but they’re deceiving themselves. Love doesn’t change sin into sinless-ness; it doesn’t turn what is immoral into what is moral. Using the word love doesn’t change God’s word. Love may explain what one is doing, but it doesn’t excuse sin. When someone points out sin as sin, people who practice that sin may react one of three ways. They may humble their hearts and give up their sin, they may dismiss God and His word, or they may say God’s word doesn’t mean what it says, and they get angry at God and strike out against anything that God teaches. We pray that they’ll humble their hearts to God and be obedient.

Your heart will determine your choice to obey sin or to obey righteousness. To become a Christian, believe and trust the Lord, repent of your sins, confess Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and be baptized in water in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. Do it today!

We hope that today’s study about watching your heart has stirred you to consider your soul. If you live in the United States and want a free printed copy of this message, mail your request to In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or send an e-mail to searchtv@searchtv.org. Or you can call the Search office toll-free at 1-800-321-8633. There’s also a schedule of our programs and a map with the location of churches in your area. You can watch SEARCH anytime on YouTube! Just subscribe to our channel, “SearchTVMinistry.” Now be sure to like the programs that you watch. We also offer free Bible Correspondence courses. Now if you get a hold of us, don’t worry, we’re not asking for money. We’re here to help you draw close to God.

We do ask that you focus your heart on God by worshiping at church. I tell you, everyone needs a church family. And there’s probably a church of Christ that’s near you. And if you’re looking for a healthy, Biblical church home, we’ll gladly help you find one. A number of people have been calling and asking to find a local church. Well, we’ll be back next week, Lord willing. So keep searching God’s Word with us and tell a friend about this program. God bless you and we love you from all of us at In Search of the Lord’s Way.