

"THE ISSUES OF LIFE"

"Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life."
– Proverbs 4:23.

ORIGINALLY man was created in God's image and likeness. As a result of the fall our hearts are not perfect, but are prone to sin. The Lord invites us to give our hearts, our affections, to Him: "My son, give Me thine heart." (Prov. 23:26.) God has provided the Channel whereby He can restore us to the relationship of sons, that Channel being the Lord Jesus. After we have accepted the Lord's proposition and given Him our hearts, we become the Lord's dear children, as the Apostle expresses it. The next thing is to keep the heart in loyalty, in full submission to the Divine will. The necessity for thus keeping the heart is manifest. Even though our hearts are loyal to the Lord, yet we are surrounded by adverse conditions. The world, the flesh and the Devil are assailing our hearts, which need, therefore, to be watched continually. As the Apostle says, "We have this treasure in earthen vessels." (2 Cor. 4:7.) We have these adverse tendencies, or conditions, to deal with.

God is not judging His people merely in respect to their flesh, in respect to the deeds of life. These are more or less imperfect. He has so fixed the matter that the result of that which springs from the heart, for which the heart is responsible, is life or death. If the issues are right, the result will be life eternal. If the issues are wrong, the result will be death, unworthiness of life. It is not merely the issues of our *conduct* that determine the everlasting result, life or death, but the issues of our *hearts*. They not only affect the present life, in the cleansing or polluting of those with whom we come in contact, but they determine or settle the matter as to whether or not we shall have life.

Thus the issues of the heart constitute the decisive test. The statement does not say that the antithesis of life is death; but the question is, Shall *we* have *life*? We have already been in death. We can have life only through the appointed Channel, the Redeemer. If we accept the issue of life and receive God's favor of life everlasting, we avoid the other issue, death everlasting. Not only is *this* question decided by the issue of our hearts, but it is also true that those who attain the condition of life during this Age will attain either the glory of the divine nature or membership in the "great company." They will be either of the Royal Priesthood or the servants of this priesthood. Hence, a great deal depends upon the issues of the heart. Therefore, we should desire the things approved, the things of God. We should seek to have the very best achievable issue, or result, to attain to the prize of our calling in Christ Jesus!

MUST ROOT OUT OF OUR HEARTS ALL LOVE OF SIN

It is not sufficient that we acknowledge sin in its various forms to be evil, and that we resolve that we will strive against it because it is under the Lord's ban; in addition to this we are to root out of our hearts every longing, every desire for everything not thoroughly approved by the Lord. Oh, what a cleansing this would mean in the hearts and lives, and especially in the thoughts of many who have named the name of Christ! Many who fail to note this point find themselves continually beset with temptations because, while *outwardly* avoiding gross immoralities, they *secretly harbor sympathies for things condemned*, desiring that they might have them, if only they were not forbidden.

The more attention we give to this subject the more we will be convinced from our own personal experiences of the truth of the Scriptural declarations respecting the beginnings of sin as *secret faults in the mind, the heart*; and the more we will appreciate the statement of our text, "Keep thy heart [mind, affections] with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life."

We are not to wonder that God has so constituted us as to permit temptations to come to our minds, nor are we to pray that we may have no temptations; for *if there were no such presentations*, no such temptations, *there could be no victories on our part*, no overcoming of sin and of the Wicked One. We know that for this very reason we are now in the School of Christ; not that we shall there be *shielded from all temptation*, but *that we may learn of the great Teacher how to meet the Tempter*, and by our Master's grace and help come off conquerors, victors in the strife against sin. The degree of our success in this conflict will depend largely upon the keenness of our faith and trust in the great Teacher. If we have confidence in His wisdom, we will follow closely His instructions and keep our hearts, minds, with all diligence. Faith in the Lord's wisdom and in His help in every time of need is necessary to us in order that we may be thoroughly obedient to Him; and hence it is written, "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our *faith*"; that is, it will be by the *exercise of faith* and the *obedience which flows therefrom* that we will be enabled to come off conquerors and "*more than conquerors*" through Him that loved us and gave Himself for us. – I John 5:4; Rom. 8:37.

We are not to seek Divine aid far in advance; as, for instance, to ask to be kept throughout the year to come, or month to come, or week to come; rather we ought to know that if we have made a covenant with the Lord and are His, He is near us at all times, in every trial, in every temptation; and that His assistance is ready to our use, if we will but *accept it and act accordingly*. Hence our prayers should be for help *in the time of need*, as well as general prayers for the Lord's blessing and care for each day.

The difficulty with many is that they are looking for some great battles instead of *averting the great battles* and keeping their minds cleansed from secret faults. The little battles, which are much more numerous, are principally the ones in which we gain the victories, with their ultimate rewards. "Greater is he that ruleth his own spirit [mind, will] than he that taketh a city." – Prov. 16:32.

Finally, the grand results of obedience to this counsel [R4904 : page 397] of the Lord, the grand attainment of those who have faithfully kept their hearts with diligence, is expressed in the words of the Psalmist, and may well be the repeated, earnest prayer of all the sanctified in Christ Jesus: "Cleanse Thou me from secret faults....Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in Thy sight, O Lord, my Strength and my Redeemer." – Psa. 19:13,14.

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