

**Keep your heart
with all diligence**

**For out of it spring the issues of
life**

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Introduction

Our title is Proverbs 4 verse 23. It is one of the proverbs of Solomon concerning wisdom. The creative act of God in Genesis 1, where the earth is made ready for human life, is said to be by wisdom. From the very beginning the Lord God possessed wisdom even before creation. (Proverbs 3:19 and 8:22)

We can conclude that the proverbs contain the wisdom of God and are therefore of very great importance and significance when rightly divided. (Some proverbs refer to the Law and were wisdom applicable to Israel only)

This short study is about applying the advice of Solomon regarding wisdom and is of great value to us as we '*work out our salvation with fear and trembling*' (Philippians 2:12)

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Chapter 1

What is meant by 'heart'

For our purpose we will eliminate the physical 'blood pump' found in our chests and focus on the spiritual meaning of 'heart.' Just as the 'blood pump' is crucial to our life and well-being so the spiritual heart is absolutely vital.

The scholars of Israel considered the meaning of heart to be the innermost being, the seat of intellect, hence the mind, purpose, intention, understanding, insight, courage and spirit. We have no argument with any of that!

But seeking greater clarity let's see what we can discern from scripture.

'For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.'
Matthew 12:34

'Those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile a man.' Matthew 15:18

'From the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren these things ought not to be so.' James 3:10

Speaking of Israel and their lack of faithfulness to the Lord - *'their heart is divided.'* Hosea 10:2

'The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?' Jeremiah 17:9

Our hearts are divided and are capable of being desperately wicked – our hearts give words to our mouths both good and evil.

The scriptural ‘picture’ of our hearts is far from being flattering! We need to go deeper. Into....

Working out our salvation, - that is deliverance from danger.

Paul writing to the Philippians advises them, *‘work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.’* (2:12) He cannot be referring to our eternal salvation because that is the gift of God when we first believe, and is guaranteed.

‘Salvation’ (*soteria*) means deliverance from danger. Our eternal deliverance from danger is the rebirth of the human spirit which is then immediately indwelt by the Holy Spirit, causing John to say; *‘Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God.’* 1 John 3:9

Therefore the statement of Paul to the Philippians refers to working out the salvation, the deliverance from danger, of our souls and our physical bodies.

When scripture refers to the soul and the body together it uses the word flesh. Until we are born again there is no part of us that will inherit eternal life – body and soul, the flesh is in eternal danger. It may seem counter intelligent but our flesh is actually set against any concept of blessing from the Spirit:

There is an internal ‘war’ going on.

'For the flesh lusts (strong desires) against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another.'
Galatians 5:17

Our own body and soul are against us!

So we find scripture defining us as being made up of three parts - body, soul and spirit. Paul confirms this in his second letter to the Thessalonians, *'Now may the God of peace – Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.'* (5:23)

Now we can define the biblical meaning of 'heart.'

It is the innermost being made up of the human spirit and the human soul. The heart is made up of the spirit and the soul, and so it is referred to as being divided

Now we are ready to consider the meaning of Proverbs 4:23 *'Keep your heart with all diligence. For out of it spring the issues of life.'*

We can also answer a couple of questions:

James made the statement that from the same mouth come blessing and cursing as we saw above. He put that in the context of teaching about the tongue. *'With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who are made in the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren these things ought not to be.'*(James 3:9-10)

As the reborn human spirit is incapable of sin (1 John 3:9) the cursing must come from our soul. The good, the blessing comes from the reborn human spirit as we remember Jesus saying only God is good. So our bad words come from our soul and our intrinsically good words come from our born again spirit.

We hear some say, 'we must get this truth down into our spirit.' As our reborn human spirit is indwelt by the Holy Spirit this suggestion is seen to be inaccurate. The concept that somehow I can teach the Holy Spirit something or indeed anything or in any way add anything to Him is ludicrous.

So our heart is our human spirit and our soul together.

Chapter 1 Notes

Chapter 2

Proverbs 4:23 in context.

In order to extract the proper meaning of our verse we need to see and read it in context. The wider context is all about wisdom and not leaning on our own understanding.

The immediate context is here:

'My son, give attention to my words: incline your ear to my sayings. Do not let them depart from your eyes. Keep them in the midst of your heart: for they are life to those who find them, and health to all their flesh. Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life.' Proverbs 4:20-23

We are told that wisdom is the principal thing and to receive my sayings. **To give attention to my words.**

The words of the Lord are pure words. (Proverbs 30:5) It is up to us to accept and not to try to rationalise or deviate from them for our own purposes. The church is not the arbiter of truth - the Son of God and the word of God are THE truth. The church should, but often does not, fall into line with the wisdom of scripture.

Paul instructed Timothy accordingly:

'All scripture is given by inspiration of God (literally is God breathed), and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.' 2 Timothy 3:16-17

Today there are many, many people seeking to alter, to change the 'God breathed' scripture. By deciding that parts of the New Covenant do not apply today they make themselves greater in wisdom than God Himself. By changing elements of the truth they are saying I am wiser than God. By writing off the scripture as irrelevant, as many do, they deny the Almighty Lord who is judge of all - they have no deliverance from danger!

Regretfully it includes many who call themselves Christians.

The media is full of men's additions to scripture and subtractions therefrom and denials thereof - we need wisdom!

Proverbs is about wisdom so we will consider this key word.

Chapter 2 Notes

Chapter 3

Key word - wisdom

We all have a definition of wisdom. The Oxford English Dictionary has, 'the quality of being wise,' and 'the body of knowledge and experience that develops within a specified society or period.'

The problem with that or any other definition is that to one man wisdom will be one thing whilst that same wisdom, thing, will be folly to another.

We need a much better definition. We saw in Proverbs 8:22-23 speaking of wisdom, *'the Lord possessed me at the beginning of His way. I have been established from everlasting. From the beginning before there was ever an earth.'*

We can see that wisdom is inherently one of the features, one of the characteristics of God Himself. So our definition of wisdom is going to be: *'Wisdom is that which God considers to be right.'*

That stands in opposition to the concept that what we think is right is wisdom. So we are expected to subject ourselves to the truth as revealed in the scripture.

What do we think of scripture?

This brings us to a very important question, 'what do we think of scripture.' More pertinently, 'what do you think of scripture?'

Paul made it clear to Timothy that the scripture is good and to be applied in all we think and do.

Again in Proverbs we read, 'My son, if you receive my words and treasure my commands within you, so that you incline your ear to wisdom, and apply your heart to understanding: Yes if you cry out for discernment and lift up your voice for understanding. If you seek her as silver, and search for her as for hidden treasures; then you will understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God. For the Lord gives wisdom: from His mouth come knowledge and understanding. He stores up sound wisdom for the upright: He is a shield to those walk uprightly.' (2:1-7)

Here we have a call in both Old and New Testaments to put the word of God above all else. A call to take it as it is and not try to alter or adjust it to suit ourselves or to suit the ways of the world. (Of course there is the need to rightly divide the word, as Paul said to Timothy. That is a question of rightly understanding what applies in our 'New Covenant' relationship with Jesus, and what has passed away with the Law so far as we are concerned, now that we are 'dead to the Law.' Jesus tells us that His blood brings in a new covenant – *'this cup is the new covenant in My blood.'* 1 Corinthians 11:25.)

Seeking truth is a life long journey. We can cry out for more and more truth, more and more understanding of truth – the Lord God will give generously. This is wisdom. The more we receive from His hand and actually apply (unlike Solomon who although he was very wise, did not apply the wisdom to his own life) the more we will be working out the salvation of our souls.

Chapter 3 Notes

Chapter 4

Keeping our hearts.

'Keep your heart ...'

In the first chapter we defined the biblical use of 'heart' as referring to our innermost being - that is our human spirit and our soul together. (Of course, in various places each of the spirit and the soul are referred to individually.)

We understood that the human spirit is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Our human spirit cannot sin, and we cannot teach it anything. Scripture urges to live by the spirit - especially so in Romans 8 where we find the wonderful promise - *'There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the spirit.'* (verse 1)

When we walk according to the spirit we enjoy the full freedom of Christ. When we walk according to the flesh (and we all do some of the time) then we are likely to suffer all sorts of doubts and the feeling of condemnation.

The spirit is the source of all that is good.

Our soul, which we may consider to be the real me, is made up of our will, our mind, and our emotions. It is particularly here that we are urged to 'keep our heart.'

'Keep' (*nasar*) has the meaning of 'keep in a safe secret place, preserve, guard.' The safe place is the truth.

There is a war, a struggle on. Our own flesh, the world and our enemy will all try to draw us away from the truth. So to keep our heart safe we are urged to study the word. Let us remind ourselves of what the God-breathed scripture is good for from 2 Timothy 3:16 -

Doctrine. It is good for what we believe - nothing else will do!

Reproof. That, by which something is tested. Does what you want or want to believe or to think pass the test of being compared to the scripture - if not discard!

Correction. Literally meaning to put upright again. It puts us right when we go wrong.

Instruction in righteousness. The scripture teaches us what is right.

Result. *'that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.'* (Complete has the meaning of 'perfectly fitted,' like a ball and socket joint.)

To preserve our hearts it is essential to let the scripture be our tutor - ably assisted by the Holy Spirit who leads us into all truth. Far too often we find ourselves and the church ruling over scripture instead of being subject to it - resulting in much weakness, personal and corporate. It is not up to us to decide which scripture we will believe and which we will ignore - rather it is for us to more and more align ourselves with all righteousness.

Maturity is the immediate goal. Even in the very early days, when the Apostles were around, many were described as milk sops. Milk is not bad - it is good, by it we grow, but there is a time to move on to solid food.

'For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil'

Hebrews 5:13-14.

An amplified literal translation reads like this, *'But solid food belongs to those who are made complete, perfected, that is those who by habitual use have their organs of perception fully trained to make a judicial estimation both of good in its fullest sense and of the evil habits of the mind.'*

Keep your heart **with all diligence**

Diligence (*mismar*). According to Hebrew dictionaries *mismar* has the meaning of guarding in the way a prison guards its inmates. Hence diligence at a very high level.

The principal area of danger for us is the mind. By its nature it is the interface with the world. We cannot help our minds being bombarded by outside influences. But we can choose what we will accept and what we will discard.

Hence we find the Romans being urged, *'I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God.'*
(12:1-2)

And don't think that is easy!

'For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.' 2 Corinthians 10:2-5

There is a war on for our thinking!

Flesh

The biblical use of the word flesh refers to both the physical body and the soul as 'one thing.' Our physical bodies will have strong desires – which we recognise in our minds and must choose to follow or to deny bringing our will into line with righteousness. (i.e. someone crosses us and we anger, maybe even thinking of revenge. Reject that thought immediately and actively choose to forgive.)

James put it like this, *'Each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin when it is full-grown, brings forth death.'* (1:14-16)

So keeping our heart with all diligence means recognising good and evil in all of life and always choosing good and refusing evil. Hence the need to have moved on from milk onto solid food.

Keeping your heart with all diligence **for out of it spring the issues of life.**

Our verse is part of the wisdom of God expressed in the book of Proverbs. Here we will find the result.....

... the springing forth of the issues of life:

'Let your heart retain my words, keep my commands and live, Get wisdom. Get understanding. Do not forget or turn away from the words of my mouth. Do not forsake her, and she will preserve you; love her and she will keep you. Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom, get understanding. Exalt her and she will promote you. She will bring you honour, when you embrace her. She will place on your head an ornament of grace; a crown of glory she will deliver to you. Hear my son, and receive my sayings, and the years of your life will be many. I have taught you the way of wisdom; I have led you in right paths. When you walk your steps will not be hindered, and when you run you will not stumble. Take firm hold of instruction, do not let go; keep her for she is your life.'
Proverbs 4:13

The instruction is to *'Keep your heart with all diligence for out of it spring the issues of life.'*

Abundant grace and abundant life will be yours.

Chapter 4 Notes

Chapter 5

Practical application

There are a number of things given in scripture to help us keep our hearts with all diligence and hence to expect and receive benefit to our life experiences.

1 We have already discussed renewing the mind - that is taking captive 'like prisoners of war' every thought that does not pass the test of righteousness. *'Finally brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy - meditate on these things.'* Philippians 4:8

Renewing the mind is probably the most immediate and very important thing. For *'as a man thinks in his heart so is he.'* Proverbs 23:7 You become what you think!

2 Praying in tongues has the effect of edifying oneself - that is building oneself up. 1 Corinthians 14:4 Paul said he prayed in tongues more than anyone - we can follow his example. As the mind becomes unfruitful when we pray in tongues it is a way of stopping unhelpful thoughts.

3 Making melody in our hearts. Ephesians 5:19. Singing to ourselves the praise and worship of Jesus - and, of course, worshipping communally. Making melody helps develop joy which is our strength.

4 The verbal expression of love to Jesus and to the Father. Speaking out our love has a positive affirmative effect on ourselves. Matthew 22:37

5 Meeting together with other Christians including sharing meals together. Acts 1:46 And for mutual encouragement. Hebrews 10:25

6 Bible study - particularly the New Testament and the details of our covenant relationship with the Lord. Taking hold of such scriptures as Romans 8 verse 28 *'And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose,'* and James 1:17 *'Every good and every perfect gift is from above and comes down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.'*

There are many more verses, expressing the goodness of God towards us, that one could list - why not make your own list!

7 Practising the presence of God. *'Meditate within your heart on your bed and be still'* Psalm 4:4 Time dedicated to being with the Lord, being still before the Lord and chewing over His word is very valuable in building up our relationship with Him and strengthening us in our daily walk.

My list is not exhaustive - you may have other ways of maintaining your confidence in the Lord and keeping your heart with all diligence.

A word of warning - if we hold unforgiveness against anyone we will be unable to keep our hearts free as we are handed over to torment. Matthew 18:34-35.

Chapter 5 Notes

Other titles:

The ICCC – Transformed Working Life series:

Inherent Power

Work is a 1st class calling

No one can serve two masters

Hope - the certainty of future blessing

Faith or presumption

Hearing God speak

Working from rest

Renewing the mind

Be strong in the battle

Anointing

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Inspiration from word for the week -105-156

Other publications

Will the church be caught away?

Explaining the future.

Rightly dividing the word of truth.

So that's what it's all about (overview of the bible account)

*Daniel (introductory level)

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Can I lose my salvation?
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Love, 153 fish and seven signs
Paul's thorn in the flesh - its message for today
Deception and how to avoid it
Chosen and Choice
The end is not quite yet
Amazing numbers
Blood - the blood of the New Covenant
Building spiritual strength
Grace and judgement
The believer's authority
God's eternal purpose
And God spoke - hearing God speak today
Understanding Hebrews
Reigning in life
Inspiration from Word for the week
Jesus said Watch
Creation? Evolution? Difficult to choose.
Made in God's image - why and what does it mean
Grace and peace from the seven spirits

James and the meaning of faith
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