

The following sermon by Joseph Caldwell, D.D. (1773-1835), who was the President of the University of North Carolina (1804-12; 1816-35) as well as a director of Princeton Seminary (1819-29), has been transcribed from pages 49-64 of, *The Southern Preacher: A Collection of Sermons. From the Manuscripts of Several Eminent Ministers of the Gospel, Residing in the Southern States* ...[etc.], as published by the editor, Colin McIver, in Philadelphia in 1824. NOTE: The bracketed and underlined numbers refer to the page numbers in the original. The text has been typed maintaining the punctuation, spelling and grammar of the original except in a very few cases of obvious error. The block quote on page 58, which was originally marked by quotation marks in the text, was formatted this way to avoid confusion. The several Scripture quotations given by Dr. Caldwell did not have the Scripture references in the original.

[49]

SERMON III.

ON KEEPING THE HEART

PROVERBS IV. 23,

“Keep thy Heart with all diligence, for out of it are the Issues of Life.”

BY the heart, in the language of the sacred Scriptures, is very commonly to be understood not only the affections, according to the sense of the term, as it is usually received with us, but the whole mind, with all its faculties, its thoughts, emotions, inclinations, and desires. When it is said of the Gentiles, “They became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened,” the import evidently is, that their understanding was obscured and misguided. They used their reason amiss, wandered from the truth, and became involved in ignorance and error. When we read in the epistle to the Hebrews, “Wherefore, as the Holy Ghost saith, to-day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the Wilderness,” it is manifest that St. Paul speaks not with immediate reference, as before, to the understanding, but to the frowardness of the will, prompting the Israelites to disobedience. Yet the Apostle, who well understood the language of the Spirit, and of the people also to whom he wrote, presently afterwards uses the same term with a view to their reason and their knowledge perversely misapplied. “Wherefore I was grieved with that generation, and said, They do always err in their heart; and [50] they have not known my ways.” The same word is used by St. John, speaking of the conscience. “For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things.” With reference to the memory it is said by Luke, “He went down with them and came to Nazareth. But his mother kept all these sayings in her heart.” Nor will it probably

fail to occur, that this sense is still retained in an idiom of our own, when to signify that our remembrance of sentences is so perfect that we can repeat them without hesitation, it is said that we have them by heart.

When it is enjoined upon us then in the text, to keep the heart with all diligence, because out of it are the issues of life, the usage of the Scriptures teaches us to have reference, not only to the affections and emotions, in all their variety, and in regard to their objects and degrees of intenseness, but to the whole mind as the source of thought and conduct. The understanding, imagination, conscience, memory, will, the influence of the mind and body upon one another, are at once set before our view in the comprehension of the heart. When we reflect upon this complication of our nature; when we consider that upon its present state in respect to all these, depends our true character in the sight of God, and of our fellow men too; in short all our prospects of prosperity here, and of happiness hereafter; the precept of the wise man must appear worthy of our regard.

It is almost unnecessary to remark to Christians, that a proper virtue of character must commence within us. In every individual the mind is the fountain of good and evil. “Either make the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt and his fruit corrupt.” This is the first and distinguishing precept of Christ, and it is explanatory of the effect produced upon his hearers, marked by the Evangelist when he tells us, that “He [51] taught them as one having authority, and not as the Scribes.” It was in the same spirit, derived from him, that John the Baptist tells the Jews, that “Now the axe is laid at the root of the trees.” Others it is true, have admitted and even strenuously asserted that virtue and a claim to its rewards in every one, must commence within, and must depend for success in subduing himself to correct principles. But how shall a man be able to obtain a conquest over himself? If his pride be conquered, he will frankly acknowledge that it is impossible. This is a perfection in truth and moral goodness, which the wisdom of this world never thoroughly taught. He who discovers this, and who abides continually in the result of his discovery, must either sink into despair, or he must find his hope in God alone, and in his communication of spiritual strength, renewing grace, and pardoning mercy. Men may persevere in avoiding the outward exhibition of their failure, but this prevents not the failure from being real and continual within.

I mention this now, that while we are engaged in the prosecution of the discourse, should a difficulty occur from the perfection of the precepts in its import and application, we may see the mercy in Christ which provides for our necessities. If we cannot fulfill the precept in its perfection, through the corruption or the infirmity of our fallen nature, the remedy is not in God’s surrender or abatement of the command, but in the provision which himself in his mercy has made at an infinite expense in favour of our repentance and faith, and our improvement of the light and strength which he graciously bestows.

Let us consider in what the keeping of the heart consists, what are its obligations and advantages, and what are the means of success: first when ourselves are alone, or principally concerned; and secondly, when we are connected with others; and then conclude the discourse. [52]

First—I am to consider the nature, the importance, and the means of keeping the heart, where ourselves are alone or principally concerned.

To be ever in possession of complacent and placid feelings, has been generally praised under the head of contentment. I speak not of a stagnation of the faculties, but of that exertion of them, which is free from disorder or excess. There is a state of the affections and emotions, which fits them for all the purposes of true enjoyment, and for the successful exercise of good

sense with alacrity. The mind in such a state, is not blinded or misled by feelings wrought up into passion, nor does it fall short of its greatest efficacy, for want of a sufficient interest exciting it into action.

We know what is meant, when a person is described to us as forever suffering under the uneasiness, perhaps the miseries of some agitating passion, or discontent. Though it is true, that he is apt to become an annoyance to others, through sudden outward exhibitions of an unregulated temper, yet were the truth considered, he is properly an object of commiseration, rather than of resentment, for that want of discretion and inward virtue, which inflicts sufferings upon himself, far greater than those which it produces in others, Some fear of imagined evil perhaps disturbs and renders him unhappy; or possibly, some wish for enjoyments and privileges beyond his present condition. Some apprehension may be stirred up, of an injury received, or of a treatment which may be supposed by others intended for injury, and which may make him appear tame and contemptible, because he scarcely perceived it at the moment, and failed to meet it with a just resentment. It may be that some mistake has been committed by him, in his intercourse with society, or in the exposition of an opinion; and this preys upon his peace, as though the estimation of his [53] skill, his address, his feelings, or his understanding must be depreciated by it, below their proper merits. And what shall we say of those, who permit malice or envy to intrude into their bosoms, not only to lurk for a moment, and then to be ejected, but to be retained as permanent inmates. But I forbear to enlarge on the numerous and various passions which may corrupt the heart; and spread clouds of darkness and distraction over the mind. To enlarge on such a subject, might expose the weakness, the sins, and the miseries of our fallen nature; and did we yield to the evidence, without an attempt to palliate or evade its force, it would show us our need of some mighty remedies for these moral diseases.

I have spoken of such minds as, on account of the magnitude and variety of their disorders, may possibly be supposed to furnish no standard of judgment for ourselves. If there be opportunity of comparison in our own favour, how prone are we to imagine, that the evils which reign conspicuously in other men's bosoms, are so far from furnishing a proof of our own, or of the common depravity of our nature, that we convert them to a different use, and rather exult in their indications in favour of our own excellence, and superiority in virtue. The religion of the Gospel teaches us, that if sin and its miseries be exhibited to us prominently in a fellow creature, though we may differ in degree, we are of one species, and that it is only an arrogant claim, which would assert a total exemption from the sinfulness, which in some of our fellow mortals, may seem to have already driven all goodness and happiness out of the heart. Unenlightened by the Gospel, our pride is nourished and sustained by the conspicuous vices, and follies, and self-inflicted sufferings of our fellow men. But when we throw open our hearts to the reception of the truth, and consent to look steadily on all that is within ourselves, [54] by the light of that heavenly torch which she holds in her hand, the disclosures are painful to the eye of the transgressor, but with conviction and humiliation he acknowledges the delusions, which have prevented him from estimating and practicing, the only means by which he may rationally hope for a conquest, over those inward enemies of his virtue and his peace.

It is thus that we may learn what is meant by the precept, "Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life." If there be hours, or even moments, when wealth rises up to our view, captivating our imagination, and filing the highest value upon that which promises its most easy, and certain, and infallible attainment, we are in danger of setting our hearts upon an object, which is unworthy of them, except as it may be the means of justice, of a reasonable competency in our provisions and our prospects, of benevolence, and of usefulness.

Let us ask what it is which renders property valuable? Is it that we may display a splendour and equipage before the world? There is something more solid than this, which if brought into comparison with it, we must feel and admit to be infinitely superior. It consists in those qualifications for business and utility, which place competency, nay even abundance within our power. Of this the certainty is so complete, that aside from any special difficulty which may instantly press upon us, the anxiety that is indulged in regard to the precariousness of the future, may be confidently pronounced to be so much gratuitous suffering. To an instant perplexity we may become liable; but the circumstances of every embarrassment, will ever suggest to our diligence and integrity, the course which we may adopt to disengage ourselves consistently with its urgency and its restrictions. Set not thy affections, then, upon wealth; as though every thing was to be estimated and [55] chosen by its instrumentality for securing this. Let the occupation assigned to us by Providence, be prosecuted with uprightness, and with fidelity to the correct principles which God approves, and which he has taught us in his work; and we have the utmost assurance, that our prosperity will at once by the most extensive, and continue the most unshaken. It is this which is to be understood when our Saviour tells us, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you." It scarcely needs the faith of a Christian to be convinced of this. But if we believe and distinctly understand the principles and laws which the Scriptures give us for our direction; if we have a settled confidence in the providential presence of God our Heavenly Father, controlling all events for the protection of his children, and for their improvement in wisdom, and happiness, and a stable prosperity, we are prepared to see the pernicious consequences, of permitting the world to engross our affections, to actuate us as the primary object which we shall ever immediately consult, and as determining the value of human life.

Would we shun the temptations which may put our virtue to trials ever perilous; sometimes too severe to be sustained? Would we deprecate the consequence which so often befalls those who are in love with riches, seen in the diminution of confidence, and the character of a sordid mind? Would we prefer the happiness that springs from the love of goodness and of pure affection, above all that the earth can give? Would we secure peace of mind in a sense of integrity, of utility, of honourable abundance, of God's approbation, of human confidence, and of treasures laid up in the Heavens, let all these be made habitually the fruit and most valued objects of our pursuit, and let us keep our hearts with all diligence from that love of gain, by which the eager and ever [56] anxious world pierce themselves through with many sorrows.

Another point on which it is material to be explicit on the subject of guarding our hearts, occurs in the indolence of mind or body, which blights the enjoyments, the virtues, and the prospects of multitudes. There are some of whom it is to be said with truth, that to be idle is to be unhappy. But there are others with whom exertion is ever renewed with reluctance, and continued with a sense of oppression. How shall this distinction be understood, or upon what principles does it exist? Most of the difficulties we encounter, or of the distresses we sustain, were they faithfully and intelligently examined, would doubtless be found to have their origin from our selves. It is not to be denied that events may not unfrequently occur, attended with inconvenience or disaster; which no skill, and no adherence to our duty, may be able to prevent. But their number will be greatly reduced, when we reflect that most of the occurrences of life, though they may appear to proceed from instant circumstance, are in reality the result of a series of causes, which have long been concurring for the evolution of the present difficulty. There is perhaps nothing on which our exemption from misfortune, and our uninterrupted success more essentially depend, than a proper degree of interest, and vigilance, and perseverance in business.

Remissness in the seasonable application of our time and diligence, to that which properly belong to them, may easily entail upon us consequences, which it will be impossible to prevent, by the utmost efforts of industry or diversity of resource. It is this species of embarrassment which becomes a source of trouble, and danger and perplexity to those who contend not sufficiently against the temptations of indolence. The maxims which have been embodied by the experimental wisdom [57] of those who have gone before us, it might seem almost trivial to repeat, enforcing the improvement of the present hour, if we would not expose ourselves to bitter repentance, for neglected opportunity.

Time in advance, behind him hides his wings,
And seems to creep decrepit with his age.
Behold him when past by! What then is seen,
But his broad pinions swifter than the winds:
And all mankind in contradiction strong,
Rueful, aghast, cry out on his career.

What is suggested by all this, but that we yield to the importance of habitual industry? If we can look back upon past periods, when by listening to every incidental plea for the relaxation of our exertions, hours, and days, and weeks not to be counted, have been surrendered almost without a struggle, perhaps even with an opinion that we were redeeming so much happiness from tyrant industry; let us open our eyes to the misconceptions, which prompted us thus to fix reproach upon that, on which all true happiness and prosperity must depend.

It is in the heart that the motives are to be found, from which the evil springs. If we have authorities in the example of others, whom we have esteemed; if we have been captivated by the apparent enjoyment of life, in those who appeared to be happy, while their days passed in a habitual, or at least a frequent unconcern, about the business of their profession whatever it might be; if the possession of property has suggested, that it is unnecessary for us to give up the enjoyment of leisure and ease, to oppress ourselves with the toils of the mind or the body; if the obstructions and difficulties we meet in the renewal of our exertions, have a deterring effect upon our fainting purpose; these are the occasions, and these the moments, when the inward movements of the heart must be watched with a jealous eye, and when its pleas [58] for indulgence, must be rejected without a compromise. Must it be, that we are to fail in the conflict with these propensities to relaxation and imaginary pleasure? Then let us remember that our conclusion must be, to give up all that is efficient and valuable in life; that for the prospect of ease, we consign ourselves to a perpetual conflict between emergency and the love of pastime, between the agitation of conscious guilt and weakness in the years that are running to waste, and the aversion that sinks and desponds, and dwindles into contempt, through the dread of exertion. Such a spirit as this, is no less fatal to the prospects of the future, than of the present life. Let us remember, Christian hearers, the awful import of the parable respecting the talents. It leaves no hope for the encouragement of that indolence, which puts on the appearance of modesty, from an ostensible plea of inability, in him who is ruined by it. Every one may find it easy to extract excuses from his peculiar circumstances, for a lie of indolence and neglect. He to whom five talents were entrusted might have said,

Lord I knew thee that thou wast good, not looking for toil when there is no necessity and regarding with complacency and delight, the enjoyments of thy

servants in the abundance thou dost bestow. I therefore applied it to the purposes of that happiness, for which I seemed to be intended, both by the dispositions and appetites of my nature, and by the liberality of thy provisions. I have nothing, it is true, to return. All is gone, and I have nothing to show. But thy riches are so great, that by the little that has disappeared, thou canst not be impoverished.

Behold the delusions with which we mortals impose upon ourselves, while God warns us in his providence, by our own consciences, by his Spirit, and his word, "Keep thy heart with all diligence." Open not thine ears to the solicitations of ease. Suppress [59] the rising disposition that would tempt thee to procrastinate the business of the present hour. Let thy mind fix itself upon that which instantly calls thee to occupation. Thus shall we convert that which instantly calls thee to occupation. Thus shall we convert that which is now perhaps a terror, into a source of satisfactions and rewards. Above all, let us commence with wisdom, let us dig deep, and lay the foundation of our house upon a rock. Let the materials we employ, and the labour with which we use them, be ever consistent with such a beginning, and we shall assuredly find that the fabric shall remain unshaken.

To keep our minds habitually free from passions that are ever threatening to corrupt, and degrade, and mislead us; to maintain in our bosoms submission under a sense of the Divine Providence; to contend against the fears, the jealousies, the transports, and the resentments which may suddenly kindle in the heart; to act towards all men on the principles of an unfailing charity, meekness, gentleness, sustained by an intelligent consistency, and a constancy that shuns offence, while it utterly refuses to retain resentments, much more to cherish hatred or revenge; this it is to keep the heart with a view to our own purity, inward peace, and our greatest perfection and happiness. And when we have taken these views of the inward exercises of our minds, do they not terminate with the force of a complete evidence upon the truth, that out of a heart thus enlightened with practical wisdom, and regulated by its principles, are the issues of our life? It is thus that through the aids of God's Holy Spirit, the sinfulness of our nature will be subdued; our views of its aggravation, and of the means of greater success, will be enlightened, and grow into superior perfection, and we shall advance to higher attainments in that love and peace, and joy and hope, which shall qualify us to be ranked and associated with the spirits of the just, in the Heavenly state. [60]

I have spoken of these virtues, as they have a bearing upon our own improvement and essential happiness. Let us, in the *second* place, consider the precept more directly, as it may relate to our connexions and intercourse with our fellow men. The subject is a copious one, but I shall treat it with brevity.

It is doubtless impossible, that any one can ever practice with perfection, the precept which forbids anger towards others. Perfection in the fulfillment of any duty belongs not to any of our sinful race. But how amiable is that constancy in charity and forgiveness, which with a presence of mind ever alive to the inestimable value of these virtues, can overlook provocation, and continue to feel with kindness towards the unreflecting offender. I speak not now of the difficulty of doing this. Let us waive for a moment this consideration, while we ask whether the gentle virtues of the Gospel successfully maintained in the heart, promise not to make him who practices them with discrimination and good sense, the object of our confidence and love? Could we really feel and act with kindness towards others, and a predominant disposition to think favourably in respect to them; could we truly succeed in withdrawing from their injustice, or their violence, with an enlightened and virtuous determination, that our hearts should not be

prevented from maintaining their equable flow of benevolent and just feeling in our social intercourse; could we do this with the settled conviction that, though in yielding to the irritations of passion and asperity, we might come to enjoy a temporary pleasure in the sufferings we might inflict, yet that the happiness alone can be durable and substantial, which results from the affections of kindness, generosity, forbearance, and charity, persevering in an unbroken tenor in our bosoms, can we doubt that our conduct would be marked with the highest wisdom, that [61] our virtues would be of the richest quality, and that our enjoyments would be attended with a confidence and permanency, infinitely superior in value to all the gratifications of tumultuous feeling. We may be ready to say, and perhaps it may be our belief, that all this is impossible, and that inasmuch as a profession to act upon the principles of a virtue so perfect, would expose us to the reproach of affectations, and insincerity, we ought to prefer the open exhibition of the passion that agitates our breasts. In such a statement there might be some weight, my brethren, were it not true, that the heart is capable of improvement, that to indulge the passions is to augment their force, and that to control and suppress them in outward action, with a determined purpose, as far as we shall be enabled to prosper in it by the assistance of Almighty God, is to advance with the greatest speed to a conquest and extermination of the greatest evils we have to dread, the enemies that have a lodgement in our own breasts. Surely we mistake, when we imagine that our most dangerous adversaries, are our fellow beings around us. With reference to the heart it may be eminently said, that a man's foes are they of his own household. And shall we be prevented from contending with them by the only means which can gain us the victory, through fear of a charge, that we are not acting out all the iniquity that is within us?

Let us rather be watchful of the emotions that have the appearance of involving us in anger, in heated controversy, in severity of opinion, resentful treatment, or even intemperate expressions of the tongue towards our fellow men. Let us be assured that whatever advantages we propose to gain over them, or whatever pleasures to enjoy in the possession of these advantages, when they shall be afterwards weighed against the losses to our peace, our virtue, and the superior satisfactions which [62] would have been secured by a successful mastery over ourselves, the preponderancy of evil will be unequivocally against us.

If these remarks be just and of avail to show, that it is our true wisdom to prevent the stirring of angry passions in our bosoms, even when we become objects of attack without provocation on our own part, much more will they plead with us, to guard against such motives and excitements, as would impel us to be guilty of offending others in word or deed, while their conduct towards us is that of gentleness, forbearance, and equity.

On this subject of charitable feeling in our intercourse with others, and its uninterrupted maintenance in circumstance calculated to put it to trial, we shall essentially misapprehend the nature of the precept, if we imagine it to be satisfied, provided we merely prevent the outward expression of a violence, which is permitted to rage within. To preserve the external conduct unchanged, when passion has already gained ascendancy, is but the first step in the great duty which we have to accomplish. If we content ourselves with this, it is not the virtue which the Scriptures command that we are attempting to practice, for their precept is directed upon the heart. This is the fountain from which are the issues of our life; on the purity of which depends all that is exterior, all our hopes of reality in goodness, and all our prospects of that approbation, which shall be the security of a complete and lasting success.

The control of angry passions, in our intercourse with others, is the subject to which I have specially directed your attention, but is one which is exceedingly comprehensive. It relates to all the variety of evil and untempered feelings, that occur under the names of provocation,

resentment, suspicion, irritability, jealousy, hatred, malice, revenge, contempt, petulance, and contrariety of [63] temper. Alas, my hearers, what a host of enemies stand prepared to assail the virtue of the mind, and through this, the rich satisfactions of confidential intercourse among relations and associates, neighbours and communities, societies and unconnected individuals, and the peaceful commerce of states and nations. When we behold so much misery and distraction, spread through the world, by uncharitable violence, shall we not utterly refuse to lend ourselves to the propagation of the evil, and reject the solicitations that would entangle us in its snares?

Your time will not permit me to enlarge on the mischiefs proceeding from the passions that are engendered in the heart. Our attention might be specially turned upon each of these in its peculiarity, to show the necessity of guarding ourselves against the intrusions of evil. It was the more important to speak in a special manner upon those which have chiefly employed our attention, because the direct tendency of them all, is to produce warfare among men. "From within," saith the Saviour, "out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness."

Must not the very enumeration of these various modes in which our nature is liable to become depraved, and to fall into condemnation, impress on us the unspeakable importance of diligently keeping the heart from their corruptions, and from the guilt, degradation, and suffering, which are their instant concomitants, and which constitute the ruin in which they finally conclude?

"Whatsoever things are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, of good report, if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things." If we acknowledge the principles of a true virtue, they must be found, not in outward action first, but in the interior of the heart. [64]

We would profess to disregard, nay to despise the goodness, which was only an outward exhibition, not having its proper origin in the pure principles of the mind. And have we fully considered, my hearers, what is implied in this, and how we are affected by it? The perfections of internal virtue are worthy of the highest valuation we can put upon them. They are worthy of our secret meditation, and of our most assiduous efforts to attain them. They will infallibly raise us to the highest estimation in the sight of men, and of God. Let us set our eyes upon them with indissoluble attachment. Let every failure and every disappointment in the essential practice of them, only renew our determination never to remit, till through Divine Grace we have secured the establishment of them within ourselves, and an assurance of those riches of excellence and happiness, which God will bestow upon all those who have attained to the purity of the heart, according to the promises which he has revealed.