

# The Benefits of Maintaining One's Heart

## (Part 2)

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- III. The Benefits of Maintaining One's New Heart (Various Passages)
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John Flavel:

5. The improvement of our graces depends on the keeping of our hearts. I never knew grace to thrive in a careless soul. The habits and roots of grace are planted in the heart; and the deeper they are rooted there, the more flourishing grace is. In Ephesians 3:17, we read of being rooted in grace; grace in the heart is the root of every gracious work in the mouth, and of every holy work in the hand. It is true, Christ is the root of a Christian, but Christ is the originating root, and grace a root originated, planted, and influenced by Christ; accordingly, as this thrives under divine influences, the acts of grace are more or less fruitful or vigorous. Now in a heart not kept with care and diligence, these fructifying influences are stopped and cut off - multitudes of vanities break in upon it, and devour its strength; the heart is, as it were, the inclosure, in which multitudes of thoughts are fed every day; a gracious heart, diligently kept, feeds many precious thoughts of God in a day. 'How precious are thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand: when I awake, I am still with thee' *\*(Ps. 139:17-18)*. And as the gracious heart nourishes them, so they refresh and feast the heart. 'My soul is filled as with marrow and fatness while I think upon thee . . . *\*(Ps. 63:5)*.

But in the disregarded heart, multitudes of vain and foolish thoughts are perpetually working, and drive out those spiritual thoughts of God by which the soul should be refreshed. Besides, the careless heart profits nothing by any duty or ordinance it performs or attends upon, and yet these are the conduits of heaven, whence grace is watered and made fruitful. A man may go with a heedless spirit from ordinance to ordinance, abide all his days under the choicest teaching, and yet never be improved by them; for heart-neglect is a leak in the bottom - no heavenly influences,

however rich, abide in that soul. When the seed falls upon the heart that lies open and common, like the highway, free for all passengers, the fowls come and devour it. Alas! it is not enough to hear, unless we take heed how we hear; a man may pray, and never be the better, unless he watch unto prayer. In a word, all means are blessed to the improvement of grace, according to the care and strictness in keeping our hearts in them (pgs. 32-33).

\* Parentheses added for clarity.

The impact of the practice of spiritual disciplines on the Christian's life assumes that person's previous efforts of keeping their own heart.

"I never knew grace to thrive in a careless soul."

So, the heart is both the source and the object of these spiritual disciplines.

"grace in the heart is the root of every gracious work in the mouth, and of every holy work in the hand."

However, God's grace is also experienced in our hearts and Christ uses that grace to work out His intentions. He works through these habits of grace, these disciplines. May I put it this way. The acts of grace carried out by the believer have the impact they are intended to have because Christ works them in the believer through grace to their intended end.

You may be diligently putting water in the bucket, attending Bible Study, being involved in worship, praying, and so on, but the bucket will never serve its purpose of retaining water, since it empties out as quickly as you put it in. Your spiritual disciplines have no staying power, because you are careless in your heart.

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"A man may go with a heedless spirit from ordinance to ordinance, abide all his days under the choicest teaching, and yet never be improved by them; for heart-neglect is a leak in the bottom - no heavenly influences, however rich, abide in that soul."

Hugh Martin:

"1) watch the dangers of your special callings – your companionships – your particular connections with the world – your objects of personal attachment; 2) watch very specially the sources and causes of past unfaithfulness and failure. Watch the enemy's approaches – his methods of trying you. He goeth about like a roaring lion. He changes himself into an angel of light. Watch, that you be not ignorant of his devices; 3) watch your graces – what state they are in, what strength they are in, what danger they are in. Watch especially your repentance and your faith. Oh! Keep them for ever fresh."