

# THE HUMAN HEART—Self-control

*"Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life." (4:23)*

**INTRODUCTION**—The emphasis on the inward man is the key point which separates Christianity from all other religions. The control of the inner man is the secret to a righteous life. Free-spirited, spontaneous living is irresponsible and destructive. The book of Proverbs encourages us to exercise self-control, because disciplined living refines and strengthens character.

Proper living is developed and controlled at the source of one's actions—the impulses of his heart (4:23; 23:7). This may be man's most difficult challenge, but it will be his greatest victory!!

## I. NECESSITY OF SELF-CONTROL

- A. Because the Heart Controls the Man (4:23; 23:7; 27:19). Actually, the heart **is** the man. It is his control center. *"The soul of man is the fountainhead of life, and when it is contaminated, so is life. For when the heart is corrupted, the streams of life are polluted, since all of life stems from this one spring."* (Maurice Meredith, *Studies In Proverbs*, p. 39). See also Matthew 12:33-35; Mark 7:14-23.
- B. Because Of Man's Inadequacy.
  - 1. Man Cannot Deliver Himself. The only standard he knows is his own judgment (12:15; 14:12,14; 16:2; 21:2). His greatest traitor can be his own heart, if it is ignorant of God's will (28:26). The standard of right and wrong must be somewhere besides our own hearts. Therefore, we must gain control of ourselves, then subject our will to God's will.
  - 2. Man Must Give His Heart to God (23:26; 3:5-8; 19:21).

## II. ACHIEVING SELF-CONTROL

- A. Through Discipline and Instruction (10:8; 15:5,31-32; 23:12). He receives both without arrogantly scorning them. The wise man **profits** by advice and discipline he receives:
  - 1. From God (3:11; 10:17; 16:9; 17:3; 19:3).
  - 2. From Parents (2:1-2; 6:20-22; 7:1-3; 13:1). Once we become adults, we are not given liberty to scorn and refuse our parents' discipline and instruction but to wisely apply it.
  - 3. From Others (12:1; cf. 9:7-9; 15:10,32; 29:1). Man's ability to improve depends on his willingness to heed advice and reproof. The wise man humbly accepts advice, not viewing it as unkind or an attempt to undermine him (27:5-6).
- B. Through Self-Restraint (16:32; 25:28). The man who restrains himself is the mightiest man alive!
  - 1. Resists and Flees Temptation (4:14-17,20-27; 23:1-7,17; 24:1).
  - 2. Responsible Behavior (20:5; 23:19). He thinks before acting or reacting, then guides his heart in the right way. He does not engage his mouth before his mind is in gear (13:3; 15:28; 16:23; 21:23).

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS—

- 1) *Why does the Bible emphasize the heart of the inner man so much?*

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- 2) *With so many passionate and conflicting emotions prompting men to action, what is our responsibility to those actions?*
- 3) *Does the man under control think or act first (20:5; 23:19)?*
- 4) *Is a disciplined life really as boring as the “free-spirits” make it out to be? Why?*
- 5) *What is the greatest human display of strength (16:32; 25:28)?*
- 6) *Is the wise man one who never makes mistakes or one who profits from his mistakes?*
- 7) *What quality does the wise man possess which enables him to listen and profit from advice and reproof (15:31-33)?*
- 8) *Do those who **give** the most advice generally **heed** the advice of others? Are **you** an advice-giver or an advice-receiver?*
- 9) *How can man achieve self-control?*
- 10) *In what areas are **you** out of control? Where will you find your solutions?*