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“GIVE ME THY HEART.”

BY REV. DANIEL DANA, D. D.

MY SON, GIVE ME THY HEART.—PROV. 23: 26.

SOLOMON, the wise and magnificent king of Israel, arrayed in royal robes, and dispensing justice from the throne, is an interesting object of attention. Nor does he appear less engaging, or less venerable, when, descending from the throne, and losing the monarch in the man, he exercises the office of a spiritual instructor and guide. Are not our reverence and affection even increased, when we see him become the monitor of children and youth, and vent the fulness of a father's heart in exhorting them to be wise, and to be happy?

But *behold, a greater than Solomon is here!* It is not merely an affectionate *human* parent, claiming the love and obedience of a dear son. Solomon speaks, not so much in his own name, as in the name of the King of kings—the glorious JEHOVAH. It is HE, the king and venerable Father of the great family of man, who here addresses every individual of his rational human offspring, in language such as this: “Ye creatures of my power; ye children of my family; objects of my constant care and compassion; remember your Creator, your Father, and your God. Expand your souls to the Supreme Good. Let your best and

purest affections be mine. Choose me as your portion. Love me as your Friend. Delight in me as your happiness. Reverence my authority; adore my wisdom; trust my grace; lean upon my arm; resign yourselves, your all, to my service and disposal. And you especially, the younger members of my family, just rising into existence, *give me your hearts*. To your kind Parent, and your guardian God, devote the flower and prime of your affections, and your earliest obedience. In the fair morning of life choose my service as your business, and the enjoyment of me as your bliss." Such is the tender and gracious exhortation of the blessed God: an exhortation which most powerfully addresses the reason, the conscience, and the sensibilities of every human being.

But the present design is, to bring it home, if possible, to the bosoms of the young. Let us then, after stating a few arguments which illustrate the *general* obligation of giving the heart to God, subjoin some considerations which press the duty with peculiar force on youth.

The obligations which bind every human being to give the heart to God, are numerous and infinitely strong. Among the variety of arguments which the subject presents, let the following receive a serious attention.

1. The Being who requires of us all, that we give him our supreme affections, is in himself infinitely *worthy* of them. If power and majesty fill us with reverence; if purity, justice, and truth, engage our esteem and admiration; if goodness and compassion attract our love; has not the glorious JEHOVAH, who possesses all these attributes in perfection, the strongest possible claims that we should revere and adore him, that we should admire and love him,

with our whole heart? And does it not betray an awful perversity of taste and feeling, that we should often be so strongly attracted by some faint shadows of excellence in creatures, and at the same time be so cold and dead to the real and transcendent loveliness of the Creator? This leads us to observe,

2. The relation in which God stands to us as our *Creator*, presents us an obvious and commanding motive to give him our hearts. At his command, we rose from our primitive nothing to existence. He has given us bodies, curiously and wonderfully made; admirably furnished with various limbs and organs, all adapted to some important use. He has given us souls of still more curious and admirable construction; souls, which are capable of knowing, loving, and enjoying their Creator; souls, which shall survive their frail tenements; yea, which shall survive the wrecks of time and the dissolution of nature, and run parallel, in duration, with the everlasting God himself.

3. The blessed God is also our most gracious *Preserver* and *Benefactor*; and, on this account, he most justly claims our warmest and best affections. He has supported and protected us ever since we have been in existence. He constantly follows us with more than a father's tenderness and compassion. He feeds and clothes us; he guides and guards us. He saves us from innumerable dangers, seen and unseen; and when the shafts of death are constantly flying around us, his all-gracious hand turns them aside from our bosoms. Who of us can name the day, the hour, the moment, in which he has not been sustained by the arm of God, shielded by his providence, and fostered by his bounty?

His mercies are far more numerous than our moments.

They are greater even than our sins. For oh, what amazing obstacles of disobedience and rebellion have been triumphed over in their display! And can we withhold our hearts from such a Preserver and Benefactor as this? Shall the numberless and constantly repeated blessings, which he showers down upon us, leave us still unpenetrated, unmelted, insensible, unthankful? Shall our lives, spared by his patience and comforted by his love, be filled with nothing but disobedience, neglect, and rebellion against him? Bear witness, heaven and earth, what horrid, what unnatural ingratitude is this! But,

4. The catalogue of mercy is not yet closed. Its crowning act is yet untold. Think of the glorious Jehovah as looking down upon a guilty and rebellious race, with the tenderest benevolence and pity. Think of him as not sparing his OWN SON, his ONLY-BEGOTTEN SON, that he *might* spare, and bless, and save lost, perishing, hell-deserving sinners. Think, oh, think of the love of Jesus! "Should all the love," says one, "of all the men that ever were, or shall be on the earth, and all the love of the angels in heaven, be united in one heart, it would be but a *cold* heart, to that which was pierced with a soldier's spear." Think of that crucified Redeemer, with all the inestimable blessings which his blood has purchased, as freely offered to you. Think of him as kindly knocking at the door of your hearts; as tenderly pleading for admission; as presenting before you pardon, peace with God, and life immortal, upon the easiest possible terms. Yea, think of him as earnestly inviting and entreating you, by all his humiliations, toils, and sufferings, by all his tears and blood, that you would open your hearts to him, and be his, and be happy forever.

Can you remain unaffected by such astonishing consider-

ations as these? Do these mysteries of mercy, which fill angelic minds with wonder; which resound, and will forever resound, through the celestial arches, awaken no lively sentiments in your breasts? Can you trifle with the condescensions of God, and with the dying agonies of Jesus? While viewing his cross, do you not feel your inmost hearts melted with godly sorrow, and fired with humble, grateful love? Are you not irresistibly constrained to yield up your bodies and spirits, all you have, and all you are, to your redeeming God? Then stand astonished at your own depravity and hardness. Never, never more lay claim to gratitude, to sensibility, to any of the tender or generous emotions of the human soul.

5. God is *the only adequate object* of our affections; and therefore we are under obligations to devote them entirely to him. How poor and sordid are all the objects and enjoyments of the world! How incapable of satisfying the vast desires of an immortal mind! Say, ye who wear away your lives in pursuing the wealth, the pleasures, or the distinctions of the world, and are often flushed with the hope of finding happiness in these things, are you not as often disappointed? Do you not find, amid them all, a void in your breasts, which they are wholly incompetent to fill? Does not something within you continually whisper that happiness is not to be found here? Even amid your short intervals of delusive enjoyment, are you not often haunted by the reflection, that you must soon bid an eternal adieu to these objects of your idolatry? Does not the idea that you must shortly be separated from all which your hearts hold dear, and come into the presence of your Judge, frequently gnaw, like a worm, at the root of all your happiness?

Even the pleasures of *friendship*, which are among the

sweetest and noblest of the present life, are in many respects unsatisfying. We are apt to expect in a friend a perfection of which human nature is, in its present state, incapable. Hence ensues bitter disappointment, whenever the pleasing illusion vanishes. Often are our just and reasonable expectations concerning a friend cruelly defeated. We find, to our inexpressible mortification, that our affections have been fixed on an unworthy object. Or if the object of our attachment is all we wish, how short the period of enjoyment. Soon, perhaps in an unexpected hour, will the messenger of death, impartial and inexorable, snatch them from our pained bosoms, or us from theirs. O, how strongly do all these considerations urge us to give our hearts to that condescending and glorious FRIEND, of whom we cannot possibly form too high an idea; who will never disappoint, but far exceed our most exalted apprehensions; who, as our acquaintance with him increases, will constantly manifest new beauties of character, new tokens of kindness; a Friend from whom (O, delightful thought!) we can never be separated; and who, at the hour of death, will receive us to an intimacy unspeakably more endearing and blissful than we have ever known before.

6. The heart is what God *requires* and will *accept*. His language to every son and daughter of the human family is this: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God *with all thy heart*." This is his first, his chief, his indispensable command. Outward homage, the mere *form* of obedience, however fair, cannot please the God of heaven. He requires the *heart*—the *whole* heart. He will be satisfied with nothing less. And he has repeatedly assured us that the sincere and humble homage of the heart is pleasing and acceptable in his sight. What an animating consideration!

Will the all-glorious Jehovah, the supreme Lord of earth and heaven, take a gracious notice of worms of the dust? Will He, whom myriads of spotless seraphs profoundly and unceasingly adore, condescend to look from his celestial throne, and invite the children of the fallen human family to give him their hearts? Will he deign to assure them that this will be an acceptable tribute; that he will think himself honored by it; and still more, that he will graciously reward them with a share in his kindest friendship and love? The condescension is wonderful indeed! Where, in the whole compass of human thought, can there be found considerations more calculated to operate upon every ingenuous mind? What arguments can possibly be conceived more powerful to persuade us, as rational beings, to give our hearts to God?

But we are to consider this great and comprehensive duty in its peculiar reference to the young. The tender appellation, "My son," which introduces the inspired passage at the head of this address, and which occurs so often in the Proverbs of Solomon, clearly intimates that the writer had a very particular regard to youth. He was anxious that they, more especially, should, without a moment's delay, give their hearts to God, and enjoy the blessedness of religion. Doubtless he had a lively view of the snares, temptations, and perils, so peculiarly incident to their period of life, and so pressingly urging them to take shelter under the Almighty wing. Perhaps, too, the tenderness and susceptibility of their age inspired a pleasing hope, that the counsels and exhortations which might be lost on those more advanced in life, might, with *them*, meet with attention, and with success.

Come, then, beloved youth, listen to an affectionate and inspired Monitor. Attend to the counsels of heavenly wisdom, and heavenly love. Seriously ponder some of those numberless arguments, which invite and urge you to give your hearts to God.

1. Consider, that God himself enjoins this on *you, very particularly and expressly*. He enjoins it with all the authority of a Sovereign, and all the tenderness of a Father. How solemn and affectionate the command, "Remember now thy Creator, in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, in which thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them." "Come, ye children," says David, speaking in the name, and by the authority of God, "hearken unto me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord." And what a melting exhortation does the Holy Spirit put into the mouth of the same venerable man, when, bowing under the weight of years, he was just about to resign his throne and crown! "And thou, Solomon, my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve him with a perfect heart, and with a willing mind. If thou seek him, he will be found of thee; but if thou forsake him, he will cast thee off for ever." Similar exhortations are found scattered, in great numbers, throughout the whole Scripture. Since, then, God has been pleased so frequently and expressly to enjoin it on the young to devote themselves to his fear and service without delay, their obligations to do this must be peculiar; and peculiar their guilt, if they refuse. If they would not treat infinite excellence with disregard, and infinite authority with contempt, they must devote to their God their first years; the fresh, unwasted vigor of their faculties and their affections.

2. God has frequently signified, in his word, that youth-

ful religion is *peculiarly pleasing and acceptable to him*. “I love them that love me,” says the divine Redeemer; “and those that seek me early shall find me.” What a gracious notice did he take, in the days of his flesh, even of young children, when he said, “Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of God.” How kindly did he receive to his arms those little ones which were brought to him, and lay his hands on them, and bless them!

These, and other passages of similar aspect, show that the blessed God takes a peculiar pleasure in the religion of youth, and of children; that he smiles, with singular complacency, on their early dedication to him; and that he is ready to assist, with his gracious influence, their first serious attempts in his service. Surely, these are animating and inspiring thoughts. Has the glorious God condescended to give such a kind encouragement to the young to seek him without delay—to give him their hearts without reserve? Their language then should be, “Thy face, Lord, will we seek. To thee will we unreservedly devote our hearts, ourselves, our all.” They should earnestly implore the Father of mercies, that he would take entire possession of their hearts, form them by his grace, and fill them with his love.

3. God is infinitely *deserving of our earliest affection and obedience*. Since he is a Being transcendently glorious and amiable, he indispensably claims our supreme, our earliest, and our constant regard. There is no moment of our existence, in which we are not bound by the strongest obligations to love him with all our hearts. Why then should the payment of that tribute, which is every moment due, be for a single moment delayed? What can be more natural, than

for the child to fly to the arms of his parent, and repose on his bosom all his tenderest thoughts and affections? And should not the offspring of the God of heaven, every moment watched by his care, and nourished by his bounty, devote to their heavenly Parent and Benefactor the fair morning of their existence—their earliest love, and earliest obedience? His adorable perfections, and the relations which they bear to him, render him infinitely worthy of this tribute. And every moment they withhold it, they rob the supreme Jehovah of his due. They practically deny that he has any property in them—any sovereignty over them.

4. In youth, the *affections are warm and tender*. The mind is peculiarly susceptible of impressions; and the heart is powerfully attracted to those objects which appear sublime, beautiful, and lovely. How melancholy, that at this golden period it should entertain no lively sense of the excellence of the blessed God; that it should feel no ardent desires and aspirations after the SUPREME BEAUTY, and the SUPREME GOOD! O, my young friends! can you be content to pursue the objects and enjoyments of the world with such a lively relish; and yet have no warm and vigorous affections to give to your God? Can you feel yourselves captivated by human, fading charms; and yet be insensible to the transcendent excellence of the Being of beings? Shall the kindness of an earthly friend attract and rivet your gratitude; and can you treat the bleeding love of JESUS with thankless indifference? Cold and insensible indeed is that heart, which is a stranger to religion. It is lost to the best feelings, the sweetest and the noblest sensibilities, which can possess the human bosom.

5. It is much to be feared that those who pass over the season of youth without religion, will be *strangers to it for*

ever. We would not limit the grace of heaven. Nor would we drive the aged sinner to despair. He is in the hand of God; and with God, nothing is impossible. Yet the melancholy apprehension just suggested, is but too well confirmed by the ordinary course of the divine dealings with mankind. Indeed, it perfectly corresponds with the nature of the case. The period of youth is most exempt from worldly cares, anxieties, and engagements. It affords, of course, the best opportunities for giving a vigorous and undistracted attention to the things of religion, and for devoting all the ardor and energy of the soul to the love and service of God. But when persons have once plunged into the solitudes and employments of the world, they have ordinarily little time or thought to bestow upon the *one thing needful*. And too often is it the case, that if it have been neglected till this anxious and busy period, it is neglected to the last.

Besides, the longer persons have lived destitute of serious religion, the more disagreeable and difficult it becomes of course. In youth, the conscience is comparatively tender, and alive to the discharge of its office. The heart is then more susceptible of serious impressions. And there is reason to believe that the monitions of the Holy Spirit are ordinarily more frequent and powerful. But a long continuance in sin naturally hardens the heart. It stupefies the conscience, and renders its reproofs and remonstrances more feeble, and more unfrequent. God has said, "My Spirit shall not always strive with man:"—an awfully alarming declaration! Woe to the man, the woman, the child, from whom the Spirit of God, long resisted and provoked, has finally withdrawn! Hence ensues, in a fearful degree, that hardness of heart, that blindness of mind, and insensibility

of conscience, which are but the too certain indications of approaching destruction.

6. All opportunities for attending to religion, besides the present, are *totally uncertain*. Nothing is more common than procrastination in this great concern; yet nothing is more dangerous; nothing more frequently fatal. That "convenient season" never present, yet ever in imagination near, has lured thousands on to their eternal ruin. The young are but too generally prone to expect a long life, and to flatter themselves that they will have sufficient opportunity to secure religion hereafter, though the present should be neglected. Vain flatteries! Delusive expectations, often! For how often has the giddy, unprepared youth been summoned into eternity, just as he was laying the deepest plans, and indulging the fondest expectations of worldly happiness! O, the unutterable folly, guilt, and wretchedness of such a case! Be warned, then, ye careless youth, who have hitherto neglected religion, and neglect it no longer. As you value your immortal souls, as you would not pluck down ruin on your heads, procrastinate no farther the all-important business.

"Youth is not rich in time; it may be poor.
Part with it as with money; sparing, pay
No moment, but in purchase of its worth;
And what its worth, ask *death-beds*—they can tell."

7. Let the infinite, indescribable *blessedness* of religion, recommend it to your immediate choice. Think what it is to come to God as a Friend and a Father; to receive his blessing; to be admitted to a place in his family, and in his heart. Think what is *his* happiness, whose sins are pardoned; whose conscience is at peace: who possesses

“What nothing earthly gives, or can destroy,
The soul’s calm sunshine, and the heart-felt joy.”

Think of that sublime communion with heaven, which is the privilege of every real Christian—a communion in which he finds, not merely a pledge, but a prelibation of immortal glory. Think what sources of consolation are his, who has Omnipotence for his guard, infinite wisdom for his guide, boundless mercy for his support, and the unfailing inheritance of heaven for his portion. In a word, think of that hour at which nature recoils, and which so often appalls the heart of the stoutest and most abandoned sinner; and think what it is to enjoy, in that hour, a sweet peace, a holy calm and fortitude of soul; perhaps a humble joy and triumph. Surely such, and such alone, are truly blessed. It is here that real happiness is found; and not in those wretched and transitory objects for which the multitude sigh. And will you shrink from this happiness? Will you thrust it from you, when offered, and mercifully pressed on your acceptance? Can you bear the thought of continuing uninterested in such blessings for a single moment? Above all, can you bear to hazard for a single moment their *everlasting* loss?

8. Remember, my dear youth, that it is not your own happiness alone which is concerned, but the happiness of *many around you*; perhaps of thousands and millions yet unborn.

Need you be reminded of the tender anxieties of your parents on your behalf? Need you be told how much, how very much of their comfort depends on you? Probably you may be instrumental, either to impart joy to their dying pillow, or to bring down their gray hairs with sorrow to the

grave. But look into a wider sphere. Should you rise into life destitute of the fear of God, you will be incumbrances on society, and too probably its pests and corrupters. Your evil example may ruin others. You may be the unhappy instruments of leading thousands down, with yourselves, to the regions of endless despair. The thought is full of insupportable horror.

Think, on the other hand, how great must be your honor and happiness, to rise up, and be blessings to all around you; ornaments to society; pillars in the Church of God; instruments of preserving and perpetuating, in a thankless world, the name and religion of Jesus; of diffusing the saving light of his Gospel among thousands and millions whom you will never see. Do not these sublime objects penetrate and rouse your inmost souls? Do not your youthful bosoms burn with a generous ambition thus to approve yourselves the friends of God and man—the benefactors of the present, and of future ages?

And now, beloved youth, suffer me to ask you one serious, all-interesting question. Have you ever *given your hearts to the blessed God*? Have you ever devoted to that Being, who is transcendently glorious in himself, and who has been to you the best of fathers and of friends, your tenderest and most exalted affections? If you have not; if, to this moment, you have never felt one sentiment of genuine love to the God who made you; if, in refusing him your hearts, you have refused him every thing which he will accept; if your lives, which have been so crowded with the evidences of his compassion and care, have been spent in a series of disobedience and rebellion against him; O, how shall I address you? Must not your own hearts condemn you? Must not the very thought of such unnat-

ural, aggravated guilt, fill you with horror? Say, is not that Being worthy of your best affections whom all the angels in heaven adore—the Being who called you into existence, and holds you in life; the Being from whose kind hand comes every blessing you have, or hope for—the Being who, notwithstanding all your ingratitude and disobedience, bears with you with astonishing patience, permits you to walk his earth, and breathe his air?—nay, more, who incessantly guards you by night and day, and visits you every moment with numberless blessings?—nay, more than *this*, the Being who has given his own beloved SON to die for rebel men; and who, through him, offers pardon, peace, life, and immortal glory, to the very chief of sinners? O, think how unnatural, how monstrous it is, to treat with disregard and neglect such a being as this!

Think, too, how wretched must be your condition, while you continue in this state of mind. Such a temper must pollute and poison every source of enjoyment. And how miserable must you be in the season of affliction, if you have no refuge in God—no heart to come like children, and pour out your sorrows at the throne of grace. And, alas! what preparation have you to die? Where, if this hateful disposition remains unsubdued, must you spend your eternity? Where, but in the company of those rebellious and miserable spirits in whose guilt you have participated?

Reflect, at the same time, on the infinite and innumerable obligations which bind you to make an immediate, an entire, and everlasting surrender of yourselves to the ever-blessed Jehovah. Stand astonished at that long-suffering mercy of his, which waits, even now, to receive, to bless, to save you for ever. Let that mercy melt your hard hearts, and irresistibly reclaim you from all your guilty wanderings.

Return, ye prodigals, to your Father's house. His arms are open, his heart is open to receive you. Are you guilty? He will pardon you. Are you naked? He will clothe you. Are you polluted? He will cleanse you. He will bless you in time; he will sustain you in death; and in the regions above, he will give you to inherit joys, large as your desires, and immortal as your souls.

Among the deepest shades of night
Can there be one who sees my way?
Yes; God is like a shining light,
That turns the darkness into day.

When every eye around me sleeps,
May I not sin without control?
No; for a constant watch he keeps
On every thought of every soul.

If I could find some cave unknown,
Where human feet have never trod,
Yet there I could not be alone;
On every side there would be God.

He smiles in heaven; he frowns in hell;
He fills the air, the earth, the sea:
I *must* within his presence dwell;
I *cannot* from his anger flee.

Yet I may flee—He shows me where;
Tells me to Jesus Christ to fly:
And while he sees me weeping there,
There's only mercy in his eye.