

“Keep Your Heart With All Diligence”

17

From Glory to Glory



Character development is said to be the most important work ever entrusted to human beings. During the next hour, we will explore both our privilege and our responsibility to become Christ-like in character. Join us now for this powerful time of personal renewal as Pastor Stephen Wallace takes us "From Glory to Glory."

Good morning my dear friends, and happy Sabbath to you. What a special day it is out there, everything covered whiter than snow. That just inspires me to sing that song, *"Wash me and I shall be clean... Whiter than snow, yes, whiter than snow, Now wash me and I shall be whiter than snow."* I love that song. And you are indeed making me feel right at home with all of the snow.

We have a big day today and we have much that we need to cover. And I am eager to get started with you. We are pursuing our **in-depth study of the most important work ever entrusted to human beings, and that is character building...** Character building. {Ed 225.3} And we are looking at our cooperative role in the process of character development today. So far, primarily, we've been looking at what God has done to make it possible for His glory, or character, to be restored in us.

But now we're making a significant transition, and we are focusing on our cooperative role.

We cannot change ourselves, we must be changed even as by the Spirit of the Lord. Only the Holy Spirit can change us from glory to glory. But we must learn how to cooperate. We have an essential cooperative role. Though that verb "be changed" is passive, please don't let yourself think that we are passive in the process. We just sit back, relax, and let God do it all. No, we have an essential, active, cooperative role to play. And the balance of the seminar is really focusing on our cooperative role. And we're making that transition right now; this is kind of mid-stream.

And I have such a burden that today's studies, particularly, be clearly understood. All of them cling together, and I want to encourage you at the very onset here to make sure that you stay through all of today's studies. It's going to be a big day; there are four studies scheduled, four. We have two this morning and then after our fellowship dinner, we have another two this afternoon. And I strongly encourage you to stay because they're all very closely related. Now, it's a struggle and I'll just bare my heart a little here. It's a struggle for me to know just how to present such a deep and all-inclusive topic in a systematic fashion. And I am doing my very best - and my best falls far short, I certainly acknowledge - to take you step-by-step through a consideration of this ultimately important work. But the challenge is, of course, to not lose sight of the forest for the trees. And as we look at each step, it's particularly difficult at times to keep the broader picture in mind. And that is especially a challenge, when perhaps you are just joining us today, and you haven't been with us in our previous studies that are so essential to having a good and solid foundation underneath you. And if you don't hear certain balancing truths in a given presentation, please be gracious to us and recognize that perhaps we've already covered those. And we are assuming that you are keeping those things in mind, because time doesn't afford the opportunity to, in every particular study, keep the whole, wide-angled view in mind. We need to get out the telephoto lens every once in a while and look at specific issues, but please pray earnestly that the Holy Spirit will help me and help you that we be able to understand each step of this study in its broader context and see how all fits together. I have a real burden that you do that and, of course, that can only be done by you and by me as we have the help of the Holy Spirit. Do I hear an "amen"? {Amen} **Spiritual things are only spiritually discerned {1 Cor 2:14}**, my dear friends. And that's why before

we proceed with any of our studies we must make sure that we pause and invite God's Spirit to come into our hearts, amen? {Amen} Please join me for a few moments on your knees for silent prayer, and as you pray for yourself, please remember me. I'm standing in the need of prayer this morning.

My Father in Heaven, I thank you for a beautiful new Sabbath day. I thank you for the rest that the night has afforded us, and I thank you for spiritual and physical life and energy. We are beginning a big day, and we need extra strength of body, mind and spirit, if we are going to be able to be blessed through the study of Your Word today. So please pour out Your Spirit upon us. Quicken and energize our mental and spiritual faculties, and even our physical being. Quicken, yes, even these mortal bodies that we might be optimized and energized to benefit from a diligent study of Your Word today. Oh, Father, You know how desperately I need You. If I'm going to be able to rightly divide the Word of truth, if I'm going to be able to rightly present the truth as it is in Jesus, I must have the Spirit of Truth, I must. Please Father, possess me. I am Yours by creation, by redemption, and by my own choice. Therefore, take full possession of me and use me in spite of myself. Guide my thoughts and words. Let me speak truth and only truth in Your behalf. And what You manage to say through this poor earthen vessel, may it find receptive hearts and minds, that it might transform lives. And please help us all to be more like Jesus for having spent this day in the study of His Word, is my prayer in His name and for His sake. Amen.

Last night we had a very important study, and for those of you who weren't here, I wish you had been. It was Lesson 16, "**Written on Tablets of Flesh,**" {2 Cor 3:3} and we were looking at the work of the Holy Spirit. And I need to just recap that briefly because today's focus is on how we must cooperate with that work in our lives. And we came to recognize last night that we are to be living epistles - letters... Letters that are written, signed, sealed, that they might be eventually delivered to the New Jerusalem, amen? This you might think of as "*the gospel according to letter writing.*" What is the page upon which the letter is to be written? It's the fleshly table of our heart. What is the instrument, the tool, with which God proposes to write the letter? What's the engraving tool? It's the Holy Spirit. And what is it that the Holy Spirit is proposing to write, engrave upon the fleshly tablets of our hearts? It is the Word of God, particularly the principles of God's Word, which are really the law of love, in essence. He wants to write God's law upon the fleshly tables of our hearts. And my dear friends, the tables must be fleshly, so that they can what? Receive the impression. We naturally have stony hearts that are not at all impressionable. But praise God, He proposes to give us, what? Fleshly hearts: soft, receptive, impressionable hearts. And we are to receive what the Holy Spirit writes upon us by doing those three things, that we noted at the beginning of the seminar here.

We must grasp the truth with the intellect. We must embrace it with the affections. And most importantly, what is the third step? We must submit to it with the will. Do I hear an "amen"? {Amen}

We cooperate with the writing of this epistle, this letter upon the fleshly tablets of our hearts, by the Holy Spirit, by choosing to submit our wills to the authority of God's word. And choosing to bring our thoughts and feelings into harmony with the Spirit of the Law, which is love. And we said something very important there. You see, our cooperative role involves much more than just bringing our behavior, our words and our acts, into compliance with the letter of the law. If that's all we're doing, all we're succeeding in becoming is... dead letters, white-washed tombs. There's no life. We just have a "**form of godliness,**" but we deny the what? "**the power thereof.**" {2 Tim 3:5} Are you understanding this? But when we bring, for the love of Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit, our thoughts and feelings into harmony with the spirit of the law, then it is a living letter, and it transforms us by the renewing of our minds. It reprograms the way we think and feel. And it is our Spirit-empowered, love-motivated obedience to the spirit of the law that is our essential cooperative role.

And as we bring our thoughts and feelings into harmony with the spirit of the law, that impression made by the Holy Spirit is deepened, and deepened, and deepened until finally, praise God, it can be indelibly and irrevocably engraved upon our hearts. And that's what it means to be sealed. It means to be so settled into the truth, so habitually governed in the realm of our thoughts and feelings by the spirit of the law, that **we would actually rather what? Die than knowingly transgress God's law even in the realm of our thoughts.** {COL 160.2; 4T 299.2} Do you understand that? That's essentially what it means to be sealed.

Now, when we have that experience, when God sees, God the Father looks upon us, and sees that that letter is rewritten that reveals the character of Christ, then what does He do? He signs that letter with His own name. And that is really what the seal of God is as well. It's the final approval of God the Father upon what the Holy Spirit has done in our lives, and His confirmation that we are fit citizens for the Kingdom. And He signs His name... He signs His name.

Now there is a third dimension to the sealing, and that is the addressing of the letter. And that's done by the angels, right? Revelation speaks of that. {Rev 7} We are to be sealed where? In the forehead. Now, that is not some visible sign to human eyes, but it is visible to angelic eyes. And the most important eyes that need to be able to see that sign are the eyes of the destroying angels. Do I hear an "amen"? {Amen} Because you see, before the divine Postmaster, Jesus Christ Himself, comes to gather His letters to deliver them to the Father... Are you with me? The destroying angel comes to deliver all the other letters, to their author, which is who? Satan. Render unto Satan the things that are Satan's. **Render unto God the things are God's.** {Lk 20:25} And it is the mark or the seal that determines where the letter will be delivered. Are you following this? If we have the mark, the letter has been authored by who? Satan. And we, by our own choice, have insisted on being delivered to him. **"Satan, Lake of Fire"** is the address. {Mat 25:41} Oh, my dear friends, God forbid that anyone in this room should insist on being addressed in that fashion. Please don't. God grant that the address be: **"God, New Jerusalem."** **"God, New Jerusalem."** {Rev 21:2}

And I came across a statement that I just wanted to share with you. It's so fitting to share it here. It's found in **Manuscript Release, Volume 15, page 225.** It's not in your printout, but it's something that I just came across in studying yesterday. Quote: **"The seal given in the forehead is God, New Jerusalem."** And then she quotes **Revelation 3:12: "I will write upon him the name of God, and the name of the city of My God."** You see, that is what the angel finally does with all letters that reveal the character of Jesus Christ. The angel addresses those letters, and puts: **"God, New Jerusalem."** And the destroying angel doesn't deliver those letters to Satan. Those letters await for the Postmaster, Jesus Christ Himself, to come and be gathered together, and delivered to their destination. Do you understand that? And my dear friends, I am here to tell you that it is absolutely imperative that we cooperate with the Holy Spirit, that we might have a letter that God can sign and that the angel can seal, and a letter that Jesus can eventually deliver to the Father. Time is running out. It is imperative that we learn how to cooperate in becoming living epistles. Do I hear an "amen"? {Amen} And that is the focus of our study; that is the focus of our study.

Now, with that little recap of yesterday's studies, turn with me to page 37. We are now at Lesson 17, entitled: **"Keep Your Heart With All Diligence."** And I would suggest to you that this is probably one of the most succinct and precise definitions of our cooperative role in this re-engraving, rewriting process that we've just described, that the Holy Spirit is proposing to do in all the hearts that will allow Him to, and cooperate with Him. This is our cooperative role. We must learn to what? **"Keep the heart with all diligence."** In other words, we must learn to govern the activity of the mind. And what is the activity of the mind? ...the heart? It's our thoughts and our feelings. And what are thoughts and feelings combined? Our character. So absolutely essential then to Christian character development is to learn to

govern our thoughts and feelings by the spirit of the law that the Holy Spirit writes upon the fleshly tables of our hearts. Does that make sense?

Now, what I want to do in our first several studies, in our first three studies to be exact, is to underscore and explain our cooperative role and its absolute necessity. And then we will take a look at how we can fulfill that role. And here again it's a bit frustrating to me, because I will have this temptation to jump ahead and tell you how. But I want to explain to you WHAT our cooperative role is first, and then we will get into HOW. Are you following this? And again, this is the challenge that I have as I try to deal with broad truths in a systematic fashion.

"The essence of how:" Let me just give you this little foreshadowing of the "how." The essence of the "how" to keep the heart with all diligence is to keep the mind focused on Jesus Christ. Do I hear an "amen"? {Amen} To keep the mind focused on Jesus Christ, that's the essence. It's **looking unto Jesus {Heb 12:2}** that we can govern our thoughts and feelings by the spirit of the law, for the love of Christ, and in the strength of the Holy Spirit.

But what I want now to do is focus with you on what our cooperative role is, okay? What it is: It's to keep our hearts with all diligence. That phrase is taken from Proverbs 4:23. **Proverbs 4:23: "Keep your heart with all diligence."** Now, in the English we have actually a rather mild translation of the Hebrew. The Hebrew verb that is translated "keep" is the most emphatic form of the imperative that you can muster in the Hebrew language. Literally in the Hebrew language it says: **"Keep, keep,"** or, **"Keep with all keeping."** That's literally the way the Hebrew imperative translates. So, **"Keep your heart with all diligence,"** is the closest that the English translators could get to it. But the Hebrew is significant, **"Keep, keep."** In other words, **"set a double guard"** over the activity of your mind.

Why? Because it's difficult to do so and it's dangerous not to do so. Do I hear an "amen"? {Amen}

Set a double guard over the activity of your mind, for it's difficult to do so and it's extremely dangerous not to do so. **"Keep with all keeping the activity of your mind."** That is essentially our cooperative role. In the strength of the Holy Spirit and for the love of Christ, we are to govern the activity of our minds. Now, in spite of this explicit command here in the Old Testament, and there are several others, and in spite of explicit commands in the New Testament, and the one that comes to mind is found in **2 Corinthians 10:5**, and we'll address that later on in this study, where Paul tells us that we are to be bringing what? **"Every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ."** Wow! What is the extent to which we must govern the activity of the mind? We are to be bringing what? **"Every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ."** In spite of these explicit commands though, it is amazing to me, how many Christians fail to recognize their responsibility, their duty in this matter. So many are clueless that they are responsible before God for the governance of their minds.

Now, I don't think that there are any Christians that don't realize that, as Christians, they are responsible to govern their behavior. We all know that, right? We all know that, as Christians, there are certain things you mustn't do anymore. And there are other things that you need to do. But my dear friends, many, many Christians fail to recognize that, first and foremost, a Christian is to learn to govern his or her mind. Amen? Why? Because, **"As a man thinketh it in his heart, so is he."** {Pr 23:7} That which makes us Christians is not so much how we talk and act, it's how we what? Think and feel. It's what goes on up here between the right and left ear that makes you, that makes me, what we really are. Therefore if we are going to be Christians, we've got to be Christians in the privacy of our thought life, where only you and God know what's going on. Are we all together on this? But few realize this, few realize this, and I don't say such a thing on my authority.

Listen to this remarkable statement: **Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students, page 544: "Few realize that it is a duty to exercise control over the thoughts and imaginations." Few! Reading on: "It is difficult to keep the undisciplined mind fixed upon profitable subjects. But if the thoughts are not properly employed, religion cannot flourish in the soul. The mind must be preoccupied with sacred and eternal things, or it will cherish trifling and superficial thoughts. Both the intellect and the moral powers must be disciplined, and they will strengthen and improve by exercise."** Oh, take courage with that last phrase. They will what? Strengthen and improve by exercise. But bless your hearts, my dear friends, a whole lot of us have very flabby muscles when it comes to controlling our thoughts and our feelings. Are you willing to admit that with me? We haven't exercised any efforts to govern our thoughts and feelings. We've just tried to keep a lid on them, and keep them from expression externally. But they just go right on in the privacy of our minds. But my dear friends, if we manage to just keep a lid on the expression of them externally, all we are, really, is **whited sepulchers. {Mat 23:27}** Do I hear an "amen"? {Amen} Please, know that... That's all we are. And that's all the world does; it just tries to keep a lid on inappropriate behavior, so they don't mar their reputation or get thrown in jail or whatever.

But the Christian is not to fight that battle. The Christian is to fight for the governance of the mind, not just the control of the behavior. Are you with me? And by the way, when we learn, for the love of Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit, to govern the mind, we will, in the deal, get consistent control over the behavior. Amen? {Amen} Yes, that's the beautiful thing about it. And for the first time, when we learn to govern the mind, the behavior becomes a genuine expression of love, not just a phony facade, a show. We're no longer just playing church, we really are a part of the body of Christ... and we genuinely reveal the love of Christ. But it takes all diligence, my dear friends, to govern the mind. Why is it so difficult? Well, notice the next reference from the same page, **Counsels to Teachers, page 544: "In order to understand this matter aright, we must remember that our hearts are naturally,"** what? **"...depraved."** Pause: Remember when we were studying about the fall and its consequence on human nature? We pointed out that inspiration tells us that **the essence of depravity is selfishness. {ST Dec 25, 1901 par. 9}** What's the essence of depravity? Selfishness. So when **selfishness took the place of love {SC 17.1}**, which is what happened at the fall, human nature became naturally what? Depraved. And it is now governed by what law, naturally? The law of selfishness. This is why **it is at enmity with God and incapable of subjecting itself to the law of God. {Rom 8:7}** Because God is love, and His law is love. But we are naturally selfish, and the law that governs us is selfishness. Are you following this? And my dear friends, we can't even begin to govern our hearts until we get a new one.

And that's the last study of today, entitled: **"Create In Me A Clean Heart" {L20}** That's why you've got to stay with us throughout this day's studies. Please don't miss that last one especially. But even when we get a clean heart, a new heart, we still have within us these old inherited and cultivated tendencies that we must daily do battle with and overcome. And it is precisely because of these old habits, that it is no small challenge to govern the mind.

Back to our statement: **"In order to understand this matter aright, we must remember that our hearts are naturally depraved, and we are unable of ourselves to pursue a right course. It is only by the grace of God, combined with the most earnest effort on our part, that we can gain the victory."** Can we gain the victory? Amen and amen, brother, sister. We can overcome every inherited and cultivated tendency. And we can learn to govern our thoughts consistently in harmony with the Spirit of the law. I insist on it; God's grace is sufficient. But please know, what is the winning combination that will bring us victory? What is it? **"It is only by the grace of God combined with,"** what else? **"...most earnest effort on our part, that we can gain the victory."** What's the winning

combination? God's grace combined with what? Most earnest human effort. **Keep the heart with all what? ...diligence.**

Now, bless your hearts, some of you, particularly if you haven't been with us on previous studies, you might be getting a little uncomfortable now and saying uh-oh, this sounds like legalism to me... Human effort... Human effort. Oh, dear friends, that's why I wish you had been here throughout the whole week. Human effort is not categorically legalism. Do I hear an "amen" {Amen} What makes human effort legalism or not? It's the motive behind it. If I am putting forth human effort in order to earn my acceptance, that's what? Legalism, no question. But my dear friends, when we come to the foot of the cross, and recognize that Jesus Christ, at infinite cost to Himself, has earned for us acceptance, and that we, when we accept Him by faith, are **accepted in the Beloved {Mat 3:17}**, and we respond in appreciation and gratitude and love, by wanting to do and be all we can for Him, and we want to roll up our sleeves and go to work for Him, to please Him because we love Him, and we want to show Him how much we are grateful for what He's done for us... Is that legalism? A thousand times no. That's **faith that works by love {Gal 5:6}** and **purifies the soul {Acts 15:8-9, Num 19:20, 1MCP 35.4}**. Do I hear an "amen"? {Amen} It's the motive behind the effort that makes it legalism or not.

And we are not putting forth persevering human effort so that we can thereby gain our acceptance, oh, no. We are putting forth diligent human effort because we already are accepted. Amen? And we want to rightly represent Jesus Christ so that others can come to know His saving grace as well. And we want to be fit, morally suitable, to live with Him forever. And we hear Him say, "**Without holiness no man shall see God.**" {**Heb 12:14**} So we say: "*Lord make me holy; I want to be like You. You were holy, and I love You and I want to be like You. And I'm willing to work hard, to cooperate with You, so that I can become like You.*" But this has got nothing to do with legalism. Are you all with me? Do I hear an "amen"? {Amen} This has got everything to do with faith that works by love and purifies the soul. That's what it is. Now, back to our study.

Why is it our duty to keep the heart with all diligence? Why is our duty to exercise control over the thoughts and imaginations? Indeed, to come to the place where, for the love of Christ, we are bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. Why is this our duty? I insist that since few realize that it is our duty that it would be helpful and important for us to consider why it is our duty. Doesn't that make sense? I can't just assume that all of you here realize why it is your duty to govern your thoughts and feelings. So I want to consider with you four reasons, okay?... maybe five, that it is imperative, it is indeed our obligation, our duty to learn to govern our minds.

Reason number one: As the verse goes on to say, **Proverbs 4:23: "Keep your heart with all diligence, for" what? "...out of it are the issues of life." "...out of it are the," what? "...the issues of life."** Please understand what the wise man's telling us here. He's telling us that the heart is the spring or the fountain head from which issue all our words and actions. All of our behavior comes from where? The heart. As Scripture says, "**Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth," what? "...speaketh," {Mat 12:34}** for example. And out of the abundance of the heart, the body behaves. This is why, my dear friends, it's so crucial for us to learn to keep the heart. Because if that which issues forth in the realm of our behavior is to be genuinely pure and Christ-like that which is going on in the spring must be genuinely pure and Christ-like. Do I hear an "amen"? {Amen} It is the condition of the spring that directly determines that which issues forth.

Let me illustrate: Back in Montana, where we live, we have a spring, just close to our house, and the water that comes from it is a lot better than this stuff. It is really, really wonderful water. It is pure and it is cold and it is so refreshing. In fact my wife, bless her heart, is addicted to it. I can drink the water that comes out of our well, but she's got to have this spring water. And every time we drive by it, and we go right by it on our way home, she's always got these rattling, empty jugs, and we've got to stop

in and fill them up. And you bring them and put them in the car and they get all beaded with that cold condensation on the outside and it drips down, and it just makes you thirsty to look at it. You drink it and oh, it's sweet, it's good, it's pure, it's wonderful stuff.

Anyway, we were driving home one day, and we saw this big red stop sign that somebody had put right by the spring. And we put on the brakes and pulled over and there had been a notice tacked up underneath the red stop sign. It said, "*Warning, this water, upon testing, has been determined to contain E. coli bacteria; do not drink.*" My poor wife was just about in tears. That was her water. Fortunately, we had another spring, a little closer to the house that we resorted to. We asked around and it was rumored, and I don't know exactly what the causes were, but it was rumored that somebody, who owned the property above, had put in a septic system and eventually it had affected the water. My dear friends that's a parable.

What is it that determines that which issues forth? It is what is going on inside. But watch out. The water that issued forth from that stream from all appearances was pure, drinkable water. What does that tell us? Is it possible to put on a remarkably good show, as far as the behavior that issues forth, and have it contaminated with E. coli selfishness? Do I hear an "amen"? {Amen} Are you hearing what I'm trying to illustrate? My dear friends, white-wash can be made to look pretty good. Indeed, Jesus says, that **whited sepulchers are what? ...beautiful on the outside. {Mat 23:27}** But I assure you that white-wash is contaminated with the bacteria of selfishness... unless there has been a radical, supernatural change at the level of the fountain head, the spring, the heart. Do I hear an "amen"? {Amen} What goes on in the heart is so crucial to govern, if that which issues forth is going to be truly pure and Christ-like. That is the point that we must clearly establish.

Oh, my friends, **Testimonies, Volume 2, page 408: "Impure thoughts lead to," what? "...impure actions."** But put the qualifier, impure actions might not appear to be impure. They can look like obedience, but they have been defiled by the motive of what? Selfishness. Are you following? And note the converse. **Bible Commentary, Volume 2, page 997: "Purity of heart will lead to," what? "...purity of life."** Do you want a pure life? Then please recognize that by God's grace combined with diligent, persevering human effort you must have a pure heart, amen? **"Purity of heart will lead to purity of life."**

The same truth, the same basic concept, but illustrated in a different way, I like to put in this way. You see the mind is a garden. The mind is a what, class? A garden. And the fruit of that garden is our character. With that in mind, recognize that when you sow a thought, you will reap an action. When you sow an action, you will reap a habit. When you sow a habit, you will reap a character. And when you sow a character, you will reap a destiny. Please, please note that our actions, our habits, our character and even, yes, our destiny, all trace their origin back to what fundamental seed? Our thoughts... our thoughts. And my brother, my sister I'm here to tell you and warn you before God, **whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. {Gal 6,7}** Do I hear an "amen"? {Amen} Please don't fool yourself on this one. What you are sowing in the privacy of the garden of your mind is determining your character, which in turn will determine your destiny. And you and I will have absolutely no one to blame but ourselves as far as our eternal destiny is concerned.

Listen to what inspiration says in this regard. **Education, page 109: "The harvest of life is character, and it is this that determines destiny, both for this life and for the life to come. The harvest is a reproduction of the seed sown. Every seed yields fruit after its kind. {Gen 1:11} So it is with the traits of character we cherish. Selfishness, self-love, self-esteem, self-indulgence, reproduce themselves, and the end is wretchedness and ruin. 'He that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption,'" but there's an alternative, praise God, "'...but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap,'" what? "'...life everlasting.' Galatians 6:8. Love, sympathy, and**

kindness yield fruitage of blessing, a harvest that is imperishable." Oh my brother, my sister, please be careful what you sow in the privacy of your mind garden, in the realm of your thoughts, because you are determining your harvest, your destiny, your character.

Second reason we must keep the heart with all diligence, and we are under obligation to do so, is because it is what goes on in the heart that determines what we really are. Did you hear that? Why must we **keep the heart with all diligence**? Because it is what goes on in the heart that determines what we really are. And that truth of course is brought out in the text that we have noted several times, but let's note it again in this context. **Proverbs 23:7: "...for as he thinks in his heart, so is he."** But you know my dear friends, I find that we are oh, so prone to overlook this fundamental basic truth. We are oh, so prone to evaluate ourselves on the basis of our behavior rather than on the basis of what goes on between the right and the left ear. Isn't that right? Why is that the case? I've wrestled with that and I've come to the conclusion that the reason we tend to evaluate ourselves on the basis of our behavior is because we have been thus evaluated, all the way through, ourselves.

Example: you come running when mommy calls you. And mommy tells you you're a what? A good boy, a good girl, right? You behaved well. Or you don't come when mommy calls you; you're a naughty boy, a naughty girl - evaluated on the basis of what? Behavior. You get a little older; you go to school. You throw spit wads, you talk back to the teacher, you fail your test, you pull the girl's hair in front of you... revealing things here, aren't I? And you are a what? You're a bad boy. Or you get good grades and you're there on time, and you always treat others with respect, especially the teacher, sure you're a good boy, good girl - evaluated on the basis of behavior. You get a little older, you get a job. You're there on time; you go the extra mile. You're conscientious; you do good work. You get a raise, you're a good employee. Or the opposite, you get fired, right? Evaluated on the basis of what? Behavior.

So with this track record what do we, almost without exception, do when we evaluate ourselves? We use the same criteria. We evaluate ourselves on the basis of our what? Our behavior. Now, question, my dear friends: Is that a safe criteria to use when it comes to evaluating the genuineness of our Christian experience? Is it? Most emphatically, no. Why? Because of this scary, prevalent phenomena called hypocrisy; called **"having a form of godliness..." {2 Tim 3:5}** Called living in compliance with the letter of the law. You see, my dear friends, please know that you and I, with sufficient ego motivation, can do a remarkable job of bringing our behavior into consistent compliance with the letter of the law, and not even be converted! Did you hear what I just said? You can talk the talk, and yes you can even walk the walk and not be converted. That's what hypocrisy is all about. Beautiful on the outside, you've got your act together, everyone is impressed. They might have even elected you for a church office because you're such a morally upright and respectable citizen - and you may not even be converted. It's all a sham; it's all white-wash. Do you recognize the possibility of that?

You see, Saul of Tarsus, my dear friends, before his conversion, what could he say of himself? **By the deeds of the law, blameless. {Phil 3:6}** Wow, really? Yes, really. As far as *"letter of the law"* obedience is concerned, Saul of Tarsus was blameless. He had his act so incredibly together, but that's the problem, it was just an act. And you better believe that we have the capacity to put on the same kind of show today. Do you hear what I'm trying to tell you? This is precisely why it is never safe to evaluate our Christian experience on the basis of our behavior. You may be doing all the right things for all the wrong reasons.

And isn't it that exactly what lukewarm is? Remember? Hot, that's doing all the right things for all the right reasons. Cold, that's doing all the wrong things for all the wrong reasons. Lukewarm, what's that? Doing all the right things for all the wrong reasons... **"Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof." {2 Tim 3:5}** But it's precisely because we have such an impressive form of godliness, that we have ourselves fooled into thinking that we are **"rich, increased in goods, and have**

need of nothing." And we don't even know that we are what? "**Wretched, poor, blind, miserable, and naked.**" {Rev 3:17} And my dear friends, please don't resent me for challenging you with this possibility. It's evidently so prevalent a problem in Laodicea that it is our identifying characteristic. Could it be possible that just some of us here even today, might be in this self-deception? Could it be? And how do we get ourselves into this self-righteous, self-deception? By evaluating ourselves on the basis of a superficial criteria: our relatively good behavior. And because we have so much truth, and because we behave so much better than most others on account of it, we think that we're what? God's remnant people just ready and waiting for Jesus to come.

My dear friends, you may not be what you think you are... but you are what you think.

"As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he." {Pr 23:7} Please, will you do a little open heart surgery with me this morning? Are you willing to do that? Would you please, with the help of the Holy Spirit, do a test on yourself, look within? Now, this is not going to be comfortable, let me just warn you, this not going to be comfortable. When the Lord does open heart surgery, He doesn't always bother to use anesthesia and sometimes it hurts. But my dear friends, if the Master Physician inflicts any pain, it's for our healing. Do I hear an "amen"? {Amen} Please, I want to read a statement that I want you to take personally and let it probe to the depths of your being.

It's found in [Steps to Christ, page 58](#). Listen, I quote: "**It is true that there may be an outward correctness of deportment...**" Okay, pause. What are we talking about? What's an outward correctness of deportment? That's behavior that is in compliance with the letter of the law: morally respected, admirable. That's what an outward correctness of deportment is. "**It is true that may be an outward correctness of deportment without the renewing power of Christ.**" Did you hear that? You can have a life that is oh, so admirable, and not even be converted. Well, what would be the power then to pull that off? Listen, ego, listen: "**The love of influence and the desire for the esteem of others, may produce a well-ordered life.**" You know that. "**Self-respect may lead us to avoid the appearance of evil.**" You know that. "**A selfish heart...**" Listen to this; this is scary. Listen to this: "**A selfish heart may perform generous actions.**" Whoa! How could a selfish heart perform generous actions? Well, so that everyone would admire you for doing such a generous deed.

And my dear friends, I would suggest to you that this is what drives and causes to survive philanthropic organizations. Because, you see, if you're super wealthy, and you want the respect of others, you have to have some favorite charity upon which you bequeath large donations, which you're perfectly happy to do, as long as you get written up somewhere, and have your name engraved on some brass plaque. Are you hearing me? ...with a tax exemption thrown in. So it doesn't really cost you anything and you get a lot of mileage out of it. My brother, sister, I am worried frankly, I am worried about these brass plaques I run into every once in a while, even in our own institutions, which say, "*this was donated by so and so.*" I worry about that. What happened to, "**Let not your left hand know what your right hand's doing**"? {Mat 6:3} Are you hearing what I'm trying to get you to consider with me?

Now, I'm not suggesting that everyone who gave something wouldn't have given it, if there hadn't been the promise of a brass plaque, but I can't help but worry, because the brass plaque can't help but promote the wrong motives. And this promise to be written up in the Review and Herald, or in the whatever union paper that you're in. I worry about that, my dear friends. I also worry, quite frankly, what would happen to our tithes and offerings if they ceased to be tax deductible? Are you hearing me? I'm talking straight to you. My dear friends, why do we give generously? Is it really for the love of God, or there are some ulterior, selfish motives involved? **A selfish heart can perform** what? **Generous actions.** And by the way, I don't care how benevolent those actions might appear to be, if they're motivated by selfishness they are not all that attractive to the ones to whom they are done. And they don't have a very winsome influence upon their hearts, do they? Because, though they look good, they

reek of selfishness. And that's precisely why white-washed tombs don't make good soul winners. Did you hear what I just said? I don't care how well they behave, I don't care how many good deeds they do for others, if it's the dead old man behind it, that selfish nature, it has a stench to it, it reeks of selfishness, and people aren't drawn to Christ on account of such *"good deeds."* Do I hear an "amen"? {Amen}

And we've perhaps put our finger on the very reason why some of our community outreach projects aren't as successful in winning souls as we'd like them to be. Sorry to have to even say those kinds of things, but my dear friends, we've got to do some heart searching in these areas. Do I hear an "amen"? {Amen} **"A selfish heart can perform generous actions."** Now, in light of what we just read, do you see how reasonable it is to ask this next question?

Back to our statement, **Steps to Christ, page 58: "By what means, then, shall we determine whose side we are on?"** Can you safely determine who you belong to whose side you're on, on the basis of your behavior? No, because you can be doing all the right things, even attractive, admirable, generous things, for selfish reasons. So, by what means, then, do we determine whose side we are on? The following questions answer that question. And these are the test questions that I want you to do; bless your hearts, this is the open-heart surgery part especially. What are the questions, the test questions, the true determinative test questions to evaluate ourselves by?

Number one: **"Who has the heart?"** What is it? **"Who has the heart?"** Who do we love supremely, in other words? What do we love supremely? How can we know that? Next question: **"With whom are our thoughts?"** You see, what we love the most is what we inevitably think about the most. Are you following this? So if you want to know what you love the most, ask yourself what you think about the most. And what helps you understand what you think about the most?

Next question: **"Of whom do we love to converse?"** Why is that so helpful? **"Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth,"** what? **"...speaketh."** {**Mat 12:34**} Do you want to know what you think about more than anything else? Inevitably it's which you talk about more than anything else. Do I hear an "amen"? {Amen} And do you know what most of us talk about more than anything else? Come on now... ourselves. Whoa! We've got an idol, don't we? You see, what you worship is what you talk about the most. **"Of whom do we love to converse?"**

Next question: **"Who has our warmest affections and our best energies? If we are Christ's, our thoughts are with Him, and our sweetest thoughts are of Him. All we have and are is consecrated to Him. We long to bear His image, breathe His spirit, do His will and please Him in all things."** My dear friends, that is a genuine Christian's experience.

My question is, is it yours? Oh, brother, sister, if it isn't then you must, you must flee to the cross, and cry out with David: **"Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me."** {**Ps 51:10**} Shall we stand for prayer?

Father in Heaven, we've been looking at our essential cooperative role. If we are to be changed from glory to glory, we must obey, for the love of Christ, the law of love that the Holy Spirit is engraving upon our hearts. But Father, we are oh, so prone to get into a nominal, counterfeit obedience, an outward, letter-of-the-law compliance. And it has us fooled into thinking we're something we're not because we have such beautifully decorated, white-washed sepulchers. Such a remarkable form of godliness, we think that we're "rich and increased in goods and have need of nothing." Please Lord, help us to see what's behind it all. Help us to be honest with ourselves. Anoint our eyes with eye salve and help us to see the motive. Maybe it's not genuine love, maybe it's selfishness. And Father, if we discover that, help us to know that You have a solution. It's a new heart. Continue to be with us, as we study further our cooperative role, is our prayer in Jesus' name. Amen.