

A Tender Heart

by A.W. Pink

A tender heart is a heart that is responsive to the voice of God and is characterized by a deep sense of reverence and awe for Him, and it can be preserved and recovered through diligence, genuine contrition, and the exercise of faith.

Scripture: Psalm 51:1, Psalm 51:10, Proverbs 4:14-15, Proverbs 4:23, Jeremiah 3:22, Hosea 14:4, Matthew 26:41, 1 Corinthians 15:34, Hebrews 3:13, Revelation 2:4-5

Topics: "Spiritual Vigilance", "Tenderness of Heart"

Description

A.W. Pink emphasizes the significance of maintaining a tender heart, as highlighted in 2 Kings 22:19. He explains that while a tender heart is a divine gift, it requires diligent effort to preserve, particularly through vigilance against sin and cultivating a spirit of reverence for God. Pink warns that sin can harden the heart, and stresses the importance of prayer, the Word, and genuine contrition in recovering tenderness when it is lost. He encourages believers to reflect on their spiritual state and to actively seek God's love and mercy to restore their hearts. Ultimately, a tender heart is essential for a responsive relationship with God and for spiritual growth.

Transcript

"Because thine heart was tender" (2 Kings 22:19). We have already considered the circumstances and significance of these words last month. Let us now proffer a few remarks upon how a tender heart may be preserved. This is a matter of great importance, for though such a most desirable possession be obtained as a sovereign gift from God, yet it can only be retained by much diligence on our part. This should scarcely need any arguing, yet hyper-Calvinists are likely to demur, supposing that an insistence upon Christian responsibility is the same thing as crying up creature ability. But does not the natural shadow forth the spiritual here, too? Is it not a fact with which we are all familiar that the more "tender" any object or creature be, the more care and cultivation it requires?

"Keep thy heart with all diligence" (Prov. 4:23). This must put an end to all quibbling on the part of objectors: where God speaks there must be an end of all strife. And diligence, great and constant diligence, is required on our part if a tender heart is to be preserved. How? In what directions? First, by guarding against everything which is hostile to it. To be more specific: it is sin which hardens the heart. In exact proportion as sin obtains dominion over us, do we steal ourselves against God. And it is just here that our accountability comes in: "Awake to righteousness, and sin not" (1 Cor. 15:34). Thought we cannot impart a tender heart, we can certainly impair one. "Harden not your hearts" was the Lord's call to His

people of old, and to us also today; and if we are to comply therewith we must fear, hate, and resist sin.

Sin is insidious. Scripture speaks of "the deceitfulness of sin"(Heb. 3:13). If we are not on our guard, it will steal upon us unawares; unless we are wide awake and alert to the danger, sin will overcome us like the fumes of a deadly gas. That is why the Lord bids us "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation" (Matt. 26:41). Yes, watch as well as pray, and pray as well as watch. We all know what happened to Peter because he failed so to do, and his case is recorded as a solemn warning for us. "Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men. Avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away" (Prov. 4:14, 15). Notice carefully how the same prohibition is iterated and re-iterated again and again in these verses. It is the first approach of sin we most need to resist. It is by making conscience of its earliest stirrings within that a tender heart is preserved.

Every Christian will readily allow that sin is insidious, but it is one thing to recognize this in theory and quite another to be regulated by it in practice. All will agree that one of the most effective means of victory over sin is to steadfastly refuse its first advances; yet the fact remains that few do so. It is at this very point we must take our stand if a tender heart is to be retained. But how? By guarding against carnality. Things indifferent become a snare if they are not kept within due bounds. That which is lawful is not always expedient. An immoderate use of the creature will bind chains upon us which are not easily snapped. Inordinate affection for those nearest to us will sap true spirituality. Beware, then, of setting your love too much upon mere things or creatures.

Nothing will keep the heart tender so much as cultivating the spirit of filial awe. Alas that this is now so rarely insisted upon. "The fear of the LORD is to hate evil" (Prov. 8:13). Necessarily so, for God is ineffably holy, and where He is revered sin is loathed. "By the fear of the LORD men depart from evil" (Prov. 16:6), for two cannot walk together except they be agreed. The more concerned I am not to displease my Master, the more shall I eschew that which He forbids. "Be thou in the fear of the LORD all the day long" (Prov. 23:17), for "Happy is the man that feareth always" (Prov. 28:14). We must strive to be in the fear of God not only in the first hour of devotion, but throughout the day. The more we live in the conscious realization that the eyes of the Holy One are upon us, the more will our hearts be kept truly tender.

"Because thine heart was tender" (2 Kings 22:19). What a desirable thing is a tender heart. How earnestly we should aspire after one. And when such has been graciously bestowed upon us, what diligence we should exercise in seeking to preserve the same. The tenderness of Josiah's heart was precious in the sight of the Lord, and in consequence thereof his prayers were answered, as the remainder of our opening text declares. There is nothing like a tender heart, my reader, for obtaining the ear of the Lord. A tender heart is one which is responsive to the voice of God, and unless we possess this how can we expect Him to hear our calls? A tender heart is the only one which truly honours God, as it is the only one which ensures our growth in grace. How deeply important, then, is the question, Have you, have I, really a tender heart? May we be enabled to answer truthfully.

In the last two issues we pointed out some of the principal characteristics of a tender heart, and also sought to indicate those duties which must be performed if we are to retain this valuable possession. But it is probable that not a few of our readers would prefer for us to tell them how a tender heart may be recovered. They are already persuaded of the great excellence of this spiritual treasure, and they also perceive clearly what is necessary in order to retain it. What grieves them is that they are conscious of guilty failure in safeguarding this Divine gift. They are sensible that the fine gold has become dim, that little foxes have spoiled their vines, that their conscience is no longer so sensitive as it once was, that they do

not respond so readily to the motions of God's Spirit; that much hardness now resides in their hearts.

It is sadly true that a tender heart may be lost: not absolutely so, but relatively; not permanently, but temporarily. But sadder still is the fact that many who have suffered this deprivation are unconscious of it. It is with them as it was with Ephraim of old: "Strangers have devoured his strength, and he knoweth it not; yea, gray hairs are here and there upon him, yet he knoweth not" (Hosea 7:9). They may still attend the means of grace and perform their outward devotions, but their hearts are not in them. They may still be respected by their fellow-Christians and regarded as in a healthy spiritual state, while in reality they are backsliders. Sights from which they once shrank appall them no longer. Things which used to exercise their conscience do so no more. The standard at which they formerly aimed is now regarded as too strict and severe.

Said the Apostle to the Galatians, "Ye did run well, who (or "what") hath hindered you?" (5:7). What are the things which destroy tenderness of heart? Ungodly companions is one. Satan will tell the young Christian that he or she may keep old friends and suffer no loss, but God says, "Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners" (1 Cor. 15:33). Friendship with worldlings will soon have a paralyzing influence upon true spirituality. Prayerlessness is another thing which speedily affects the heart. Unless a close fellowship with God be maintained--and that is impossible if the Throne of Grace is neglected--coldness and hardness will soon steal upon us. Equally so will a neglect of the Word. This will not necessarily mean the omission of reading so many chapters each day, but the absence of actually communing with God therein. The spirit of hypocrisy, pretending to be what we are not, hardens--for guile and tenderness are incompatible.

Yes, a tender heart may be lost, as truly as first love may be left (Rev. 2:4). Can it be regained? Yes, though not as easily as it may be hardened. How? First, by warming afresh at the fire of God's love. This is ever the most effectual means of removing hardness of heart. What was it that melted and broke you down at your first conversion? Was it not a sense of the Divine grace and a sight of Christ's dying love? And nothing is so calculated to soften the backslider: it is "the goodness of God" which leads to repentance (Rom. 2:4). What was before David when he commenced his contrite confession? This: the Lord's "lovingkindness" and the "multitude of His tender mercies" (Psa. 51:1). When was it that Peter went out and wept bitterly? Was it not when the Saviour "turned and looked upon him" (Luke 22:61)?

Was it not the sorrow which Peter saw in that look--a sorrow which issued from love for him--which broke his heart?! The Lord had given him every proof that he was dear unto Him, and how had Peter requited that love? And has not the Lord given you, my brother, my sister, abundant evidence that you are precious in His sight? Did He deem any sacrifice too great to make atonement for your sins? Has He not favoured you above millions of your fellows in bringing you to a saving knowledge of the Truth? Has He not bestowed the Holy Spirit upon you? Has He not borne with your dullness with infinite patience? Can you dwell upon these things with unmoved heart? Surely not. Seek unto Him, then, and your coldness and hardness will indeed be thawed.

Second, by genuine contrition. As it is the allowance of sin which hardens the heart, so it is sorrow for sin which softens it. Hence, when the Lord admonishes the one who has left his first love, His word is, "Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works" (Rev. 2:5). First, "Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen," which looks back to the previous verse. Call to mind the happy fellowship you once enjoyed with the eternal Lover of your soul, when He found delight in you, and your own heart was satisfied. Consider "from whence thou art fallen"--no longer leaning on His

bosom, but having entered a course which both displeases and dishonours Him. Unless this produces godly sorrow in you, nothing else will, and it is godly sorrow which "worketh repentance" (2 Cor. 7:10). Take a leaf out of the copybook of the prodigal son: arise, forsake the far country, return to your Father, and pour out your griefs into His welcoming ear.

Third, by the exercise of faith. "And do the first works" (Rev. 2:5). What was the first work you did when you originally came to God in Christ as an empty-handed and contrite sinner? Was it not to cast yourself upon His mercy, to lay hold of His promises, to trust in the sufficiency of Christ's atoning blood? Well, the same remedy is available now. Did not David cry, "Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me" (Psa. 51:10)?--deal with me now as Thou did at the first! And was he not able to say, "He restoreth my soul" (Psa. 23:3)? Precious promises are recorded in the Word which exactly suit your case: "Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings" (Jer. 3:22). "I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely" (Hosea 14:4). Make these promises your own, plead them before God, and count upon Him making them good in your own case.

In conclusion, a word or two on some of the evidences of a tender heart. We mention one or two of these so that writer and reader may test himself by them. Is your heart affected by the present state of Christendom? Are you made to sigh and cry, "for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof" (Ezek. 9:4)? Is your experience, in some measure at least, that "Horror hath taken hold upon me because of the wicked that forsake Thy Law" (Psa. 119:53)? "Mine eye shall weep sore and run down with tears, because the Lord's flock is carried away captive" (Jer. 13:17)--is that how you feel? Again--"I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision" (Acts 26:19): do you respond to the motions of God's Spirit? Finally, do you mourn over your own hardness and grieve over your callousness? These are some of the manifestations of a tender heart.

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