

The Importance of Hedge Building – Malachi 2:15-16

I. Introduction:

- A. The priests of Israel, like children, had been mouthing off at God in self-righteousness and pride.
1. They had been giving the Lord their back-talk, which is worse than simply talking back.
 2. With a sort of whine in their voices they expressed their unbelief and disrespect for the Almighty God.
 - a. *“Wherein hast thou loved us?” “Wherein have we despised thy name?”*
 - b. *“Wherein have we polluted thee?”*
 3. When Malachi says, *“Ye have wearied the Lord with your words,”* they reply with the same whiny attitude: *“Wherein have we wearied him?”*
 4. It wasn’t that they really wanted to know; it was a statement of denial and rebellion.
 5. At that point, like a frustrated parent, the prophet’s response was: *“Listen here, young man, if you don’t stop this and change your tone, you will really regret it.”*
- B. Twice in **verses 15** and **16**, the Lord says, ***“take heed to your spirit.”***
1. It implies a need for repentance: *“You had better clean up your act, starting with your heart and soul.”*
 2. But then it went on to suggest, *“Protect yourselves now, before the wolves come in to devour you.”*
- C. Briefly this evening, let’s dissect the thought ***“take heed to your spirit,”*** before putting it back together again.
1. Let’s be like that young man who wants become a watch repair expert.
 2. He takes apart a perfectly good watch in order to put it back together again, learning what all the parts contribute to the whole.
 3. I’ll try to follow this outline: ***Do what? To what? For what?***
 4. I thought about putting a little rebellion in my voice for that outline. *“You want me to do what?”*

II. What does the Lord want us to do? ***“Take heed.”***

- A. As I thought about this, I asked myself, *“When was the last time I used those words in ordinary conversation?”*
1. I couldn’t come up with an answer. I can’t remember the last time.
 2. This is one of those Biblical statements, which we generally understand, but rarely use when not speaking about the Bible.
 3. The ESV, the English Standard Version of the Bible, doesn’t use the same words here as your Bible does.
 4. Without any background information or previous instruction, doesn’t *“take heed,”* mean *“pay attention?”*
 5. That brings us close to Malachi’s message, but it’s not *“spot on.”*
- B. The Hebrew word is used about five hundred times in the Bible, so it is pretty common.
1. It is translated *“take heed,” “observe,”* and *“mark”* about a hundred times.
 2. But it’s first and foremost translation is *“keep”* in the sense of *“guard”* or *“to preserve.”*
 3. *“Guard your heart, that ye deal not treacherously.”*
- C. The word is used about a dozen times in the ***Book of Nehemiah*** – the last book we studied in depth.
1. In some of those references we read, *“Moreover the porters... **KEPT** the gates...”*
 2. *Mattaniah, and Bakbukiah, Obadiah, Meshullam, Talmon, Akkub, were porters **KEEPING** the ward at the thresholds of the gates.”*
 3. *“And both the singers and the porters **KEPT** the ward of their God, and the ward of the purification...”*
 4. *And I commanded the Levites that they should cleanse themselves, and that they should come and **KEEP** the gates, to sanctify the sabbath day.*
- D. What did the Lord want Malachi’s priests to do? What does He want us to do?
1. To **guard**; to **keep** our hearts, because they are under constant attack by the world, the devil and even by our own flesh.
 2. James Strong says: the root of the word implies building a ***hedge***; put a ***thorny hedge*** around your heart.

3. There are spiritual wolves, hyenas and lions out there which enjoy feasting on tender spirits.
 - a. Does **love** reside in your heart today? Guard your heart, because you can easily lose that love.
 - b. Are you **content** with what God has given you? Are you at **peace**?
 - c. You can become discontent and worrisome almost instantly, if you don't guard your heart and spirit.
4. Yes, we are to trust the Lord to protect us, but if we are not diligent in building walls and hedges, we have no right to expect the Lord to step between us and the enemy.
5. Take heed, guard, keep your heart, because it is vulnerable.
6. In and of itself your spirit has nothing to give it protection; you must do it.

III. We are to build a hedge, but around what? *"Take heed to your spirit."*

- A. *"Spirit."* That is a complicated word if we bear down on its mere mechanics.
 1. The Hebrew word is most often translated *"spirit,"* but its next most often rendition is *"wind."*
 2. It is also translated *"breath," "mind"* and half a dozen other words.
 3. It is a complicated word, but usually the context reveals what is meant.
- B. And our text is a good example.
 1. **Verse 14:** *"the LORD hath been witness between thee and the wife of thy youth, against whom thou hast dealt treacherously: yet is she thy companion, and the wife of thy covenant.*
 - a. **THEREFORE take heed to your spirit,** and let none deal treacherously against the wife of his youth.
 - b. *For the LORD, the God of Israel, saith that he hateth putting away... THEREFORE take heed to your spirit, that ye deal not treacherously."*
 2. Some of the men of Israel were treasonously divorcing their wives.
 3. They were putting away their wives for unscriptural and frivolous reasons in order to marry the daughters of the local idolaters.
 4. Sometimes, they had their eyes & hearts on potential new wives even before their divorces were finalized.
 5. And in some cases they were bringing new wives into their marriages without divorce, creating polygamous relationships.
 6. All of that could have been easily avoided, if those men had guarded their hearts.
 7. In this case, the word *"spirit"* might be better understood *"heart."*
- C. I believe that we are **tricotomous** creatures: we are **body, soul** and **spirit**.
 1. Paul prayed at the conclusion of I Thessalonians, *"The very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit & soul & body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.*
 2. The body is something we basically understand; it is physical.
 - a. It has arms, legs, eyes and internal organs.
 - b. It also has blood and nerves; it feels pain and it can bleed.
 - c. We know very easily when the body is hurt.
 3. The soul and spirit on the other hand are both immaterial, and their wounds are different.
 4. At places in the Bible, we find that the words *"soul"* & *"spirit"* are interchangeable, confusing us.
 5. But at other times, there is a clear distinction.
 6. We don't need to dig into these things any further at this point.
 7. Again, the context suggests that in this case, the word *"spirit"* is referring to the **hearts** of these people.
 8. John Gill says that these people needed to put a hedge around their *"affections."*
- D. Think about this: knowing the weaknesses of our bodies, aren't we usually diligent in protecting them?
 1. We wear shoes in work places with lots of nails and broken glass on the floor.
 2. We wear jackets when the weather gets cold.
 3. But aren't we a little less diligent to go out of our way to protect our thoughts?
 4. When it comes to our minds, we sometimes guard our thought life, but it's not as much a priority for most people.

5. I hope you avoid movies and programs which glorify nakedness, homosexuality and other sins.
 6. *“Think on **THESE** things... whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.”*
- E. Most of us, most Christians, protect our bodies, and to a lesser degree, we guard our minds.
1. But we don't ordinarily think about the protection of our hearts our spirits. We leave that up the Lord.
 2. We don't think about the predators out there which would rather devour our hearts than our bodies.
 3. Satanic temptation may try to reach through our flesh, but the ultimate goal is the soul or spirit.
 4. When our spirit falls, it doesn't matter how strong the will or the body might be, we are going to fall.
 5. Malachi tells us that failure to guard the spirit was the reason those people were living in adultery & idolatry.

IV. *“Take heed to your spirit;” for what reason?*

- A. *“Therefore take heed to your spirit, that ye deal not treacherously.”*
1. By nature we have a propensity – a proclivity – for evil; for sin.
 - a. Because of Adam's fall, we have a sin nature, and that nature always leans toward wickedness.
 - b. So when confronted with good and evil, without special help, we will ordinarily choose the worst.
 2. Yes, we may have been raised to resist some temptations, but that resistance appears to be becoming more and more uncommon in our society.
 3. We may choose abstinence, because our minds have considered the consequences.
 4. So we tell that drug dealer that we will not buy his tobacco or his beer.
 5. Christians have the presence of the Spirit convincing us of sin, righteousness and of judgment.
 6. Through Him we not only are enabled to **know** what is best, but we also have the ability to **do** what is best.
 7. And yet, like the alcoholic, there is still a constant struggle,.
- B. But if we choose not to guard our spirit, we forfeit the Lord's ministry of the Holy Spirit in that aspect of our personal lives.
1. We must to *“take heed to our spirit, that we deal not treacherously.”*
 2. *“Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life.”*
 3. **Matthew 15:19:** *“For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies.”*
 4. Our hearts are a place within us where the embers of sin constantly smolder.
 5. If we are not constantly pouring the water of life onto it, it is sure to ignite at some point.
 6. *“The heart is deceitful and desperately, who can know it?”*
 7. When we don't keep our spirits, we lose the ability to distinguish between right and wrong, and disaster is sure to follow.
- C. But then on the positive side...
1. When we take heed to our spirit, we are better fit to do those things which glorify the Saviour.
 2. Why don't we pray as much or as seriously as we should?
 - a. Isn't it because we don't keep our hearts as well as we should?
 - b. We let our eyes wander to the world or to our problems, rather than beholding the face of our God.
 - c. And when we don't keep our hearts, the flame of love and the desire for divine fellowship drops.
 3. **Matthew 12:35:** *“A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things.”*
- D. There is a message in the fact that Malachi tells us, **not once** but **twice**: *“take heed to your spirit.”*
1. It is doubly important and necessary.
 2. The heart, or spirit, is something very vulnerable.
 3. And it is an area of our lives which often goes unconsidered and unprotected.
 4. When it is kept protected and kept strong, it becomes the source of those things which should make us good and useful servants of the Lord.