

Prov 4.20-27—Keeping Watch Over Yourself

An urgent call to listen, vv. 20-22

- I. Solomon issues an urgent call to his son—and to us—to *listen*.
 - A. Twice in v.20 he calls us to pay attention. He tells us not only to listen, but to listen only to him—so important are his instructions.
 - B. But mere listening isn't enough. His words must get into the heart, v.21. It's only when truth's in the heart that it can affect the life.
- II. The importance of his words are confirmed in v.22. They bring life and healing to the whole man.

A call to a careful and diligent watchfulness, vv.23-27

- I. In these five verses, Solomon gives us some of the best rules in all of Scripture for safeguarding every part of our walk.
- II. The first and most important directive is to keep watch over our heart with all diligence, v.23.
 - A. The heart is the fortress of man, the haven of our dearest treasure. Keep this and all else *can* be kept; but let this go and all else *will* be lost, Mk 7.21f.
 - B. Shouldn't such a "storehouse" be especially guarded? What hope could we have of changing the way we speak and what we think about if we never changed our hearts? Can we possibly change our lives without a change of heart?
 - C. The heart must be kept before the mouth, the eyes, the feet, or anything else can be kept, Mk 7.20-23.
 - D. The heart must be kept above all else because Satan targets it above all else. If he can get his poison into the heart, the whole life will suffer for it.
 - E. What does it mean to keep the heart?
 - 1. It means to keep it pure and clean before God, Ps 51.10; 1Tim 1.5; Pss 15.1-2; 24.3-6. But who has such a heart?
 - a) We can't have absolute purity but we're to strive for Christian purity, which is: *the hatred of all impurity and the love of all purity*. If we have this, God will accept it, for Christ's sake, for absolute purity.
 - 2. It means to keep the heart loyal to God, Rom 6.17; Eph 6.6. A loyal heart is *a heart committed to all of God's commandments all of the time and set against all sins all of the time*.
- III. We must keep watch over our mouth, v.24.

- A. The mouth is a terrible outlet for sin, Js 3.6. How often do we use our speech in a sinful manner?
- B. But why must the heart be kept before the mouth? Because words offer the first and readiest outlet for the heart's evil and can't be effectively kept without the heart, Mt 15.18.
- C. But how do we keep the mouth?
 - 1. Remember that God is listening to everything you say and writing it down in a book of reckoning, Mt 12.36.
 - 2. How much fewer and purer our words would be if we poured them thru this strainer!
 - 3. If we name the Lord as our Saviour from sin, then His redemption of us will sanctify our speech.
- IV. We must keep watch over our eyes, v.25.
 - A. We're to keep our eyes looking straight in front of us: straight on in the way of God's Commandments and straight on in the way of our duties.
 - B. How much sin do we get ourselves into by looking to the left and to the right with covetous side-glances (Gen 19.17, 26; Gen 3.6; Josh 7.19-21; 2Sam 11.1-4)?
 - C. The pleasures of sin and the seductions of a tempting world don't lie in the road, but in the by-paths and ditches to the side. God's people have no business in the ditches of sin.
- V. We're to keep our feet, vv.26-27.
 - A. If sins lie in the ditches to either side of us, then snares lie in the road itself. Every step must be carefully weighed by its conformity to the will of God. Resolve not to advance a single step without the blessing of God's Word on it.
 - B. Never forget that the best time to ponder a path's rightness is not at the end or in the middle but at the *beginning*.
 - C. In sum, the man of God must only have one standard for all he thinks, says, and does, namely, the Word of God.
- VI. Three comforts to encourage your sincere heart-work:
 - A. Your lamenting and mourning before the Lord over a corrupt, backward, and cold heart is a sign of its purity and loyalty to God.
 - B. Rest assured that if you keep crying to God for a better heart and He hasn't yet answered, then He has good reason. He's sanctifying you. Trust Him and press on in the work.
 - C. Take comfort in the fact that your days are quickly drawing to a close and the pure and loyal heart you long to have will soon be forever yours and the sins you long to be rid of you will never see again. —Until then, keep yourself close to God in prayer and under the rule of God in His Word.