

The Way of the Wise in Proverbs

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The Sin Trap

These proverbs are all parables or illustrations about life. How do you regard this book? Do you see it as a random assortment of lazy sayings? Well, it is actually an educational course in the life of wisdom. Chapters 1-9 are evangelistic telling us how we can find the Christ so clearly revealed in the New Testament. The central portion is for young believers and the final portion is for more mature believers.

Solomon explains his purpose in writing in chapter 1:2-7. He tells us how to attain wisdom and discipline and understanding. Do we need wisdom? Yes we do! Wisdom is a major theme in this book. This wisdom has been described as a rainbow of colours, they all merge into one another; any one of these can be used to represent them all. What are these colours? In chapter 1:2, we have just two of them, they are wisdom and understanding. Wisdom means spiritual shrewdness and it suggests this wisdom will be hard won. It is a quality of character as much as of the mind. So it is not just about knowledge and insight, it is about lifestyle; it is about the fashioning of a godly character; it is about head knowledge becoming heart knowledge.

This wisdom is only for true disciples, those who come to trust in Christ for themselves. It is wisdom and discipline. Proverbs is not for armchair Christians; it is about real life in the real world, and it is a very practical book. We should add a word of warning. In studying the book of Proverbs, we have to say this: "This book could seriously change your life".

Verse 2 also speaks about understanding or insight. Solomon once prayed, "That I may discern between good and evil", so here is another colour in the wisdom rainbow. We need to pray for discernment, and we need to pray for spiritual understanding. Verse 3 describes the lifestyle of the believer. It is to be a disciplined and prudent life, doing what is right and just and fair, that is the Christian life.

We see from verse 4 there is something for the simple. It doesn't sound very flattering, but simple here means the naïve, the uninitiated, those who have not yet entered into the life that God offers. It has got nothing to do with intelligence; this is a spiritual condition. People today are generally ignorant of God; ignorant of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ; ignorant of God's word. They do not know who God is. It is in this sense that they are simple. But please note that the book of Proverbs is a very warm, sympathetic, affectionate book. It is the glorious gospel of Christ presented in the Old Testament. Remember the Old Testament is actually full of Christ; we meet him everywhere we look. Jesus said on one occasion, "*Search the scriptures for these are they which testify of me*" (John 5:39).

In verse 4 we find there is something for the young person. There is knowledge and discretion for those young in years and young in the faith. Proverbs teaches us knowledge and discretion. Here is an element of cunning in a good sense; in other words cleverness means to know the ropes, to be able to plan your life in accordance with God's wisdom.

Verse 5 has something to say to the mature believer, "*Let the wise listen and add to their learning, and let the discerning get guidance.*"

Verse 7 describes the first steps to conversion. Solomon says, *“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline.”* To fear the Lord is to reverence Him and enter into a relationship with Him, to really know Him. In the Old Testament, wisdom is a picture of Christ, and this wisdom is for those who are humble and eager to know God. It is only through Christ that we can truly know God and true wisdom.

In verse 8 Solomon addresses his son: *“Listen, my son, to your father’s instruction and do not forsake your mother’s teaching.”* His son was Rehoboam who became the King of Judah. The picture is this: here is the father at home on the smallholding; each member of the family has a task and a trade. Solomon is referring to the foundation of family life here. It is practical wisdom. The father’s instruction is important for the building of a wise life. The mother’s teaching, as it is called, speaks of the simplest basic things, in other words those things that are taught at a mother’s knee.

Verse 9 describes how such wise teaching, if taken heed of, will make a life beautiful. Solomon says that it will be like a garland to grace the head and a chain to adorn the neck. So too, for the Christian believer, the application of the true wisdom found in the Bible and the imitation of Christ, will make a life that glorifies God. I well remember as a young person, before I was converted, being very challenged by the lives and the very faces of Christian young people when I realised that they had something that I didn’t have. The teaching of the Bible had enriched and beautified their lives.

Then in verse 10 is a word of warning: *“My son if sinners entice you do not give into them”.* In other words, listen to what God is saying to you, don’t listen to the alternatives.

Now in verses 11 to 14 certain characters are introduced to us. First, we meet the local gang leaders; then, later on in the book, we will meet a young bride, then the local prostitute and then the slick salesman. After these we will be introduced to a very remarkable window.

In verse 11 we have the local criminal gang. You can imagine one of them saying to this young person, *“I need to have a word with you, there’s a way to get easy money; you don’t need to work on the farm day after day.”* It almost reminds us of the prodigal son in the New Testament who was tempted away from that which was good to that which was dangerous and tragic. Well, this young person has a very attractive plan put before him. They say, *“Come along with us, let’s lie in wait for some one and kill them; let’s waylay some harmless soul. If you join in with us we will share the money.”* It sounds very attractive, because sin can be very appealing.

In verse 14 we have an accurate picture of the pressure of teenage years in particular: *“Throw in your lot with us, come and be part of the crowd”*, they say. It can be a very powerful pressure indeed, and we can all experience something of it. We don’t want to miss out on being part of the group that we belong to. It is so tempting to just go along with the crowd. We find that the sin trap is very subtle. These men plan to lie in wait to trap others, but they waylay only themselves. Sin affects and infects the life; sin is very, very destructive. Verse 19 tells us this. It takes away the lives of those who get involved with it. Sin is like fire it burns; sin is powerful it destroys; sin is the greatest problem of all humanity. Someone has well said, *“The heart of the problem is the problem of the heart.”*

Then in verse 15 we have this very tender, affectionate, caring warning of Solomon to his son, *“My son do not go along with them, do not set foot on their paths.”* There is a better

way than the way of the group or the crowd. Jesus reminds us that there are two roads through life and only two. He said there are many who are on the broad road that leads to destruction and there are few on the narrow road which leads to life. Which road are you on?

For Further Study

Proverbs 1: 1-9 deal with temptation.

1. Who is it that tempts us (Genesis 3: 1-4; Matthew 4: 1-11; Acts 5: 1-4; James 1: 13)?
2. How can we overcome temptation (Proverbs 1: 10, 15; James 3: 7-8)?

Discover Some Precious Things

In Proverbs 2:1-4 we read the word “if” three times. *“My son, if you accept my words and store up my commands within you, turning your ear to wisdom and applying your heart to understanding, then if you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding, and if you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure, then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God.”*

These statements call for a response.

There are four precious things in this chapter. The first is, “The longing of the heart.” Solomon speaks about calling out for insight and crying aloud for understanding. This is more than just to hear or to have a little taste of something; it is deeper than this. Sometimes when we go to our local food shops there are little things on offer for us to taste - a little bit of biscuit and cheese or something similar. It is just a little taste. It is very nice, but if you are really hungry, it is not much use, you need much more than that. May I ask; is there a hunger in your heart for reality; is there a hunger for the living God? Do you long to know more about Christ? Or is just a little taste sufficient for you? Verse 1 says, *“My son, if you accept my words”*, and then goes on to say, *“If you store up my commands.”* This indicates a real desire for God and for his Word.

Then in Verse 2, *“If you turn your ear”*, that requires a bit more effort. Then he says, *“If you apply your heart”*, that requires even more effort. In Verse 3 he talks about calling out or crying aloud. This is a bit like Bartimaeus crying out to Jesus to heal him and help him. Verse 4 speaks of a great deal of effort. It says, *“Look for insight and understanding”*; look for them in effect as you would look for silver, and search for them as for hidden treasure. There is a steadily increasing hunger here. So here is a precious thing from Proverbs chapter 2, “The longing of the heart” for the wisdom that comes from God.

Secondly there is “The protection of the life.” We have this in verses 5-8. We have a promise in verse 5, it says that *“if you accept my words and seek me with all your heart, then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God.”* The fear of the Lord occurs fourteen times in Proverbs. Fear here speaks of a sense of the awe of God, and knowledge of God speaks of intimacy. So we have a sense of awe as to who God really is, a mighty holy God, and then we have that wonderful sense of intimacy as we can come to know Him personally. What you find is what God gives. The Bible tells us that those who seek Him with all their heart, with sincerity and earnestness, will find Him.

In verse 6 we read, *“For the Lord gives wisdom, and from his mouth come knowledge and understanding.”* This section of the book shows that to know the living God is also to know how to live. As we trust in the Lord something happens; we begin to love the Scriptures, where God has revealed Himself, and in them we find the Lord Jesus Christ. The Bible is the believer’s road map for the journey of life. It is full of practical and spiritual wisdom and understanding.

Verse 7 tells us that the Lord *“holds victory in store for the upright, He is a shield to those whose walk is blameless.”* As Christians we need not be defeated by sin and temptation. Those who seek to walk with the Lord in obedience have the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit to help them to overcome. *“This is the victory”*, says the apostle John, *“that overcomes the world, even our faith”* (1 John 5:4). The apostle Paul speaks in Ephesians about taking the shield of faith so as to deflect the fiery darts of the devil.

Verse 8 tells us that the Lord will watch over us, for *“He guards the course of the just and protects the way of his faithful ones.”* You are a sheep in Bible terms, and you need a shepherd. So we have seen, *“The longing of the heart”*, and *“The protection of the life”*.

The third precious thing is *“The understanding of the mind”*, in verses 9-11. Verse 9, *“Then you will understand what is right and just and fair - every good path.”* When you trust in Christ with all your heart, and He forgives all your sins, wonderful changes take place; your conscience becomes much sharper and you want every good path; you will want to live as Christ lived. Verse 10 reminds us that you gain new insights, wisdom and knowledge, and it calls them pleasant: *“For wisdom will enter your heart, and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul.”* They are pleasant things, they are good things promised to the Christian. Verse 11 tells us, *“Discretion will protect you and understanding will guard you.”* All these come to us as the Holy Spirit teaches us from God’s Word and as we are transformed by the renewing of the mind and come to know God’s good, pleasing and perfect will (Romans 12: 2).

The fourth precious thing that we have in Christ and in his word is: *“The deliverance of the tempted.”* Verse 12, *“Wisdom will save you from the ways of wicked man, from men whose ways are perverse...”* Believers are protected and guarded. When you are converted to Jesus Christ you will be tempted. We face the world, we face the flesh and we face the devil. We enter a great spiritual battle, but the wonderful thing is we are on the winning side. Jesus has already defeated everything that is against us. When He died on Calvary’s cross He defeated all our enemies.

Then verses 12-15 remind us again about certain people whose lives are full of evil. It says, *“Wisdom will save you from the ways of wicked men.”* These are people whose words are perverse, who leave the straight paths to walk in dark ways, and who delight in doing wrong and rejoice in the perverseness of evil, whose paths are crooked and they are devious in their ways. We have all met these people, their ways are wicked and their words are perverse, seeking to mislead and deceive. So, wisdom, in other words, the Lord Jesus Christ, will save you from all of that.

We read these Old Testament books with New Testament eyes; we see the sin trap for what it really is. Sin is so cruel, so callous, so greedy and there is such utter disregard for God and for his people, but there is victory for the believer in Christ. So here then in Proverbs chapter 2, is: *“The heart that longs to know God”*; *“The protection of the life of those who do know God”*; *“The understanding that comes from the word of God”*; and *“The deliverance from temptation for those whose faith is in Christ.”*

For Further Study

Look-up some more precious things in Peter’s Letters and see how they apply to you (1 Peter 1: 18-21; 1 Peter 2: 4-10; 2 Peter 1: 1-4)

The Secret of Spiritual Blessing

Here is an Old Testament picture of a New Testament experience. Here is a picture of a life that is ruled and blessed by the Lord Jesus Christ, for in this book wisdom is a picture of Him. Here is a life of fellowship and communion with Him.

We find in this third chapter of Proverbs three keys to the secret of spiritual blessing:

In Verses 1-4 we look at Christ's word.

In verses 5-12 we look at Christ's ways.

In verses 13-18 we see Christ's wealth.

First of all, His word in verses 1-4: *"My son", he says, "do not forget my teaching, but keep my commands in your heart."* Do you ever have "senior moments", as we call them? Do you forget things, forget names or people? Well, you may forget many things, but God says don't forget my teaching. He has given us his precious word. The secret of spiritual blessing is found in his book, the Bible. For true Christians it is his word that must rule and govern our lives. It is a book to be taken very seriously; it is a book to be obeyed.

Here the word 'teaching' or 'Torah' means direction. Middle age is a time when so many lives are aimless, empty and futile. In this society littered with broken relationships and aching hearts, God offers real direction and purpose and meaning to people who are sinful, but who can be set free. Look at the lives of those who belong to the Lord Jesus Christ, especially older Christians. You see years of fruitfulness and usefulness and spiritual prosperity. In fact in verse 2 he says to keep these commands, this teaching, will prolong life many years and bring prosperity. Some walk in spiritual darkness all their lives, and it is tragic; some walk in the light of Christ, and it is wonderful.

No one is more loving or more faithful than our Saviour. Verse 3, *"Let love and faithfulness never leave you."* To know Christ's love is to know life; to know his faithfulness is to live life to the full. Here is a picture of being governed and guided by the word of God. Here is the secret of spiritual blessing. It speaks here of the glory of God's Word, of meditating on his word, acting on his word, writing his word upon our hearts. What is written on your heart? Is it his word? David could say, *"I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you"* (Psalm 119:11). When you are ruled and governed by the word of God you will be known as a godly person. Verse 4 says, *"Then you will win favour and a good name in the sight of God and man."* What is the secret of spiritual blessing? You will certainly find it in God's word.

Secondly you will find it in God's ways. We look now at verses 5-12. Here is the Gospel in the Old Testament: *"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him and he will make your paths straight."* Here is the life transforming, soul saving message of God. Trust in the Lord with all your heart. Did you know that the original idea of the word 'trust' in the Hebrew contains the idea of lying helplessly, face downwards; that is total dependence?

Have you ever been touched and affected by what happened at Calvary's cross? There the Lord Jesus was hanging on that cross alone and in agony, while bearing the punishment for your sins. He was taking your sins upon himself. He was being punished on your behalf. This is the One in whom you are invited, urged, to place your absolute trust. You are invited to lean on him for your forgiveness and salvation first of all. Then to lean means to rely upon Him, to submit entirely to Him, and to acknowledge Him in every part of your life. Yes, in all our ways: the happy days, the hard days, the days of sorrow and temptation, stormy days when everything seems against you, knowing

that *"As for God his way is perfect"* (Psalm 18:30). We have, in this verse, the promise of guidance in all our ways. Acknowledge Him and He will make your paths straight. He will not fail us for God guides his people. We are to walk humbly before Him all our days.

Verse 7 says, *"Do not be wise in your own eyes. Fear the Lord and shun evil."* What is there for us to be proud about? Absolutely nothing! We are to have nothing to do with every subtle form of evil that there is. So many films that people watch are full of foul language and blasphemy and immorality. Christians must have nothing to do with these, and be prepared to humbly acknowledge God in all their ways and live lives that are pleasing to Him in every way. This is wholesome, healthy, spiritual living. As verse 8 says, *"This will bring health to your body and nourishment to your bones."*

In verses 9 and 10 we have evidences of conversion, of being born again by the Spirit of God. We have a dedicated life and a dedicated income. *"Honour the Lord with your wealth, with the first fruits of all your crops; then your barns will be filled to overflowing."* The Christian's aim in life should be to honour the Lord, to give Him first place in everything. This will include giving to the Lord gladly, for the Lord loves a cheerful giver. Give to him not from the top of your purse but from the bottom of your heart. Now, this is not a health, wealth and prosperity Gospel, this is the faithfulness of God. If we give to the Lord, He will be faithful. He will be good to us in so many ways for He is no man's debtor. So what is the secret of spiritual blessing? First, obedience to God's word and the application of it to our lives; second, walking in God's ways, under his guidance, and third, a right view and use of his material blessings - his wealth.

Then verse 11 tells us that we are not to despise or reject or resent God's discipline in our lives. He deals with us graciously, and verse 12 reminds us that the Lord disciplines his children because He loves us - just as a father disciplines the son he delights in, for his good and welfare. God disciplines us not to make us bitter but to make us better.

In verses 13-20 we have a wonderful description of wisdom. Remember that we see in this Old Testament picture of wisdom a portrait of the Lord Jesus Christ. This description of true wisdom portrays it as profitable, precious, and incomparable. In Verse 13 we read: *"Blessed is the man who finds wisdom and the man who gains understanding."* That which will bless us most is to know Christ in all his fullness, and to understand God's purposes in Him. To the Christian Christ is indeed precious. He is our all in all. The Lord Jesus is also beyond compare. He is unique. He is the Son of God and there is none like Him.

Verse 17 speaks about pleasant ways and paths of peace. It is a lovely picture; it is very pleasant; it is very delightful to live for Christ. It is a pathway of contentment and peace and joy, despite many of the circumstances of life. The essential message, then, of Proverbs Chapter 3 is to embrace Christ, to trust Him and to follow Him, and in so doing you will find real blessing.

For Further Study

Read Proverbs 3: 5-12 and see what these verses teach you about submitting to God's way for your life and the blessings this brings.

Read 2 Timothy 3:16 and consider the ways in which the Scriptures are a blessing in your life.

Hold on to, or Take Firm Hold

This time we are looking at chapter 4 of Proverbs. Verse 13 is our key verse, and this is what it says: *“Hold on to instruction, do not let it go, guard it well for it is your life.”* We are going to have a brief introduction, and then three questions about what it means to take hold of Christ.

The major theme in Proverbs is wisdom as opposed to folly, and we have been looking at this wisdom as a picture of the Lord Jesus Christ. All that is said of wisdom is found in Christ, for as God, He is the source of all true wisdom and knowledge. In verse 7, wisdom is described as supreme, and tells us that it is worth sacrificing everything to gain it. So too, the Lord Jesus Christ is higher than any other; and to know Him is more important than anything else in life. He is to be greatly desired. Verse 8 speaks of loyalty to Christ; of holding Him in esteem, that is giving Him his rightful place and honour. We are not to be ashamed of Him and we are not to bring shame to his Gospel. Those who give Christ his rightful place will be honoured by God, for He honours those who honour Him.

Verse 9 speaks of the riches of Christ’s grace: *“Wisdom will set a garland of grace on your head and present you with a crown of splendour.”* This speaks of how Christ enriches those who trust in Him and how He beautifies the life of the humble Christian. Verses 11 and 12 speak of a safe path: *“I guide you in the way of wisdom and lead you along straight paths. When you walk your steps will not be hampered; when you run you will not stumble.”* Before we came to Christ we walked in the darkness, but by trusting in Him we are now walking in the light.

So we come to verse 13, the key verse for our study. *“Hold on to instruction, do not let it go, guard it well for it is your life.”* *“Hold on”* here means *“take firm hold.”* In other words take firm hold of God’s word, of God’s promises. And take firm hold of Christ who is our wisdom. How firm is your grasp? How strong is your faith? Ask yourself, is my Christian faith half hearted? Is my conversion to Christ thorough? Does it affect my thinking, my living, my giving and my forgiving? In this age of unbelief and spiritual ignorance; in this age of worldliness; this selfish greedy age; this age of novelty when Satan tempts us to doubt, God says ‘take firm hold of my word and of Christ.’ Christians who take firm hold on these are the backbone of the Church and of society.

So we come to the three questions. They are: *“How do I take hold of Christ?”*; *“What are the obstacles in the way?”*, and *“What are the benefits?”*

The first question: *“How do I take hold of Christ?”* The answer is by becoming serious about eternal things. Some, by their very temperament, are wholehearted, fervent, and enthusiastic believers. It is true that great sinners often become great saints. There are no half measures. We see this in the conversion and life of the Apostle Paul. How do I take hold of Christ? By coming to Him with a sense of desperation. Remember the dying thief crying out from his cross, *“Jesus remember me when you come into your Kingdom”* (Luke 23:42). Have you seen the state of your own heart? Have you thought about the evil of sin and what sin does to humanity; about how we are under God’s judgement, and that God is too holy to tolerate sin? It is just as the Bible says: *“All we like sheep have gone astray, but the Lord has laid on him, upon Christ, the iniquity of us all”* (Isaiah 52:6). Come to Christ with a humble heart, a longing heart, a beleaguered heart, be serious, be wholehearted, be desperate. Take hold of Christ by faith right now.

Secondly, *“What are the obstacles in the way?”* Well, the basic facts are: either sin will keep you from Christ, or Christ will keep you from sin. Some people say that they have an intellectual problem with the Gospel. It is probably pride that is the problem. In Psalm 14:1 we read, *“The fool has said in his heart there is no God.”* There are three voices that will tell you not to trust in Jesus Christ, they are the voices of the world the flesh and the devil. The world lies under the sway of the devil, the

spirit of this world is anti-Christian, it always was. Friendship with this world, in other words its spirit and its mentality, is to be at war with God. The flesh, sinful human nature, will hinder you; the flesh is full of unbelief; the flesh says, 'I love my sins; I love my lifestyle, if I turn to Christ it will all have to go.' The Devil does not want you to turn to Christ; his is the kingdom of darkness. The Bible says he is a deceiver, a liar and a murderer. He doesn't mind you being merely religious or agnostic. The Apostle Paul speaks of those who need to escape from the trap of the Devil who has taken them captive to do his will. These are the great obstacles to faith in Jesus Christ.

But thirdly, "What are the benefits of taking hold of Christ?" Well, here are just three of them: first, we can have the assurance of salvation. Think of what it means to be eternally saved. Jesus said, *"I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life, and will not be condemned. He has crossed over from death to life"* (John 5:24). Before he raised Lazarus from the dead, Jesus declared, *"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live even though he dies, and whoever lives and believes in me will never die"* (John 11:25, 26).

Secondly, there is real joy in the heart. This world offers superficial merriment and pleasure, what some people call a fix. The Lord Jesus Christ offers true, deep lasting joy. The world offers many counterfeits. It offers false gospels, false cults and false promises. It believes in star signs and horoscopes; it believes in superstition; it believes in luck and fortune and fate, it offers false hope, it offers false peace. The Lord Jesus Christ says, *"Until now you have not asked for anything in my name ask and you will receive and your joy will be complete"* (John 16:24). In praying to the Father Jesus says, *"I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them"* (John 17:13).

The third great benefit of taking firm hold of Christ is that we can have a living relationship with Him. John said our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. When you do take firm hold of Christ, you realise something wonderful: He has actually taken firm hold of you and will never let you go. It is a relationship that is far deeper than that of any human relationship. He is a friend who sticks closer than the most loving brother. He is one who shares in our every experience, good or bad. He will never leave or forsake his own, and you can turn to Him to find grace to help in every circumstance of life. Have you taken hold of Christ as your Saviour and Lord? Seek Him today while He may be found, call upon Him today while He is near.

For Further Study

See Proverbs 4:13. This lesson is about taking hold of Christ.

Read Philippians 3: 7-14 and consider what Paul says about "taking hold" (Note verse 12).

Lesson 5

Guard Duty

The key verse for our study this time is Proverbs 4:23 which says, *“Above all else guard your heart because it is the well spring of life.”* So I have called this talk, *“Guard your heart.”* We are going to think today about *“guard duty”* and ask three questions:

1. *“What is guard duty?”*
2. *“How do I do it?”*
3. *“Why should I do guard duty?”*

So first, what is it this guard duty? It is a command that we guard our hearts. It is something we must do, and it must not be neglected. It is the clear instruction of Scripture that we are to guard our heart above all else. To keep or to guard is the Hebrew word *“Natzar”*. It has various meanings, but the main one is to keep something in safe custody. Sometimes we guard a criminal to protect society from him. Sometimes we may protect valuables by putting them into the safe custody or keeping of a Bank. But what exactly is it that we are to guard so carefully? It is our heart, and the word heart here includes a great deal. It includes the understanding, and it includes the will and the affections.

Jesus answered the question of a lawyer-teacher, *“Which is the great commandment in the law,”* by saying, *“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind”* (Matthew 22:36). The heart also includes the conscience and it includes the mind and the memory. David said in the Psalms, *“I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you”* (Psalm 119:11).

Solomon here in Proverbs chapter 4 warns us not to do evil. In verses 14 and 15 he says *“Do not set foot on the path of the wicked or walk in the way of evil men. Avoid it do not travel on it, turn from it and go on your way”*. Do you remember God’s words to Israel, *“And now Israel what does the Lord your God require of you but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him with all your heart and with all your soul?”* (Deuteronomy 10:12). Then there is that lovely invitation in Proverbs 23:26, *“My son give me your heart and let your eyes observe my ways”*. Clearly the word *“heart”* has a wealth of meaning, but essentially here *“heart”* means the real you, your whole soul with all its powers and abilities and understanding and potential, the real you that will never ever die.

What is the context of this instruction to guard the heart? The context is that of a journey - the path of life. There are two paths through life. Verses 18 and 19 describe them as the paths of light and darkness: *“The path of the righteous is like the first gleam of dawn, shining ever brighter till the full light of day. But the way of the wicked is like deep darkness; they do not know what makes them stumble.”* Jesus said of Himself, *“I am the light of the world”* (John 8:12), and the entrance of his word into believing hearts gives light. The Apostle Paul said, *“For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness who has shone into our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ”* (2 Corinthians 4:6). Paul also said in writing to Christian believers, *“You were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord”* (Ephesians 5:8). The word of God brought us life, and we need the word of God for a spiritually healthy heart. It is by the application of God’s word that we guard our hearts.

So we come to our second question: *“How am I to guard my heart?”* Verse 19 speaks about a pathway of darkness which is the way of the wicked. It is spiritual darkness that describes the tragic condition of those without Christ. To guard your heart you must be sure that you are on the right pathway and that you have been guided by the light of God’s word. Verse 20 tells us to receive his word, to pay attention to it and to listen closely to it. Verse 21 tells us keep it within our heart. Our

delight and our duty is to retain the word of God in our minds.

We are also to guard our words, according to Verse 24, avoiding troublesome and corrupt talk. We are to guard our eyes, according to Verse 25, taking care not to look at things that will turn us away from the path of the righteous. Then we are to guard our feet, considering carefully our path through life, according to Verses 26 and 27. But the most important, *"Above all else"*, says Solomon, *"guard your heart."* Guard it like a guard in a top security prison. Don't allow sin or defilement in. Guard it like those who watch in time of war. It is war spiritually to fight the good fight of faith. Guard it like the Levites guarding the sanctuary of God, for we are temples of the Holy Spirit as a Christians guard your heart as man guards his life. Guard your heart as people guard their treasures. Guard your heart as people keep their gardens neat and tidy allowing no weeds or slugs and snails or any such things.

And finally, "Why should I guard my heart?" Solomon gives the answer in the rest of this verse, *"because it is the well spring of life."* As a man thinks in his heart, that is what he is really like. It is out of the heart that all our affections, actions and ambitions spring, and so Paul writes to the Colossian Christians in chapter 3 of his letter: *"Since then you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God"* (Colossians 3:1-3).

Where is your heart set? What occupies your mind more than anything else? The Lord Jesus said that where a man's treasure is, there his heart will be. Treasure speaks of value and wealth, of something that is very precious to us. Is your heart set on Christ or on the passing things of this life? Is your chief ambition to live for Him and so bring glory to Him? Guard your heart, then, more carefully than any earthly treasure for it is the real you, and the real you is eternally precious.

For Further Study

See Proverbs 4:23 which speaks about guarding the heart, then look up the following verses and think about the importance of our emotions and our motives (i.e.) our heart.: Psalm 51: 17, Colossians 3: 16, Matthew 11: 29, Hebrews 4: 12, Psalm 27: 14, 2 Chronicles 29: 31, 1 Corinthians 4: 5, Ephesians 6: 5-6, 1 Peter 1: 22.

The Fixed Gaze

Proverbs 4:25 says, *“Let your eyes look straight ahead, fix your gaze directly before you.”* That is the theme of Proverbs Chapter 4. It is essential to be watchful; we need to be careful; we need to be on our guard. We are to guard our heart and our mouth and our feet. But verse 25 is all about the eyes. The eyes take in darkness and light. The eyes look out on many things; things such as darkness, sin and folly. They also see the light, good things and true things.

The Bible teaches us that people who do not know the Lord Jesus Christ are spiritually blind. They see things around them, but they don't see the unseen spiritual realities. They are in the darkness of sin. The darkness of sin is a great darkness. This has nothing to do with the intellect, it is a spiritual condition. How many people do you know who have never found real purpose in life or a real meaning for their existence. A great British preacher called Spurgeon once said, *“Time is but the doorstep of eternity.”* So here is a wise message for the aimless, for the spiritually lost, for those who are not looking where they should be looking. Here is the Bible's way, the right way, the true way, the best way for life.

In Britain there are certain roads that are called a 'clear way'. You are not allowed to park your car on a 'clear way'. It is not a side road; it is not a dead end and it is not a little winding lane. It is a good road and it is going somewhere definite. God's planned way for life is a clear way that leads somewhere. The way of the godless and of those who do not place their faith in Christ is a hard way that leads to eternal loss. It is a very confused way, and its end is not good. It is a very tragic road. It is often the way of superstition and false hope. God's way is best; it is the way He has made for us. Jesus said *“I am the way”* (John 14:6). The way to God is through Him and with Him. The way of eternal life is in Him and only in Him.

Proverbs 4:25 tells us to *“fix your gaze directly before you”*. In other words do not be distracted, but fix your attention on what really matters in life. In the New Testament Book of Hebrews, and chapter 12 we are told to look to Christ alone who is the author and the perfecter of faith. He is the wisdom of God and He alone can lead us in the right path.

So there are four things that we should be determined to do and they all relate to a gaze fixed on the Lord Jesus Christ. The first one is be determined to seek Christ. If your life has no direction, no hope, then you need Him above all else. Maybe you don't realise just how much you need Him. You need to accept Him and to trust Him and to believe in Him.

You may say to me, *“I wish I had your faith”*. But my faith is no use to you; you need my Saviour for yourself. The faith to believe is a gift from God Himself to all who will ask Him. This is how the apostle Paul puts it in his letter to the Ephesians: *“For it is by God's grace you have been saved, through faith (in Christ) - and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works so no one can boast”* (Ephesians 2:8). If you would just look and gaze at the crucified, risen Lord Jesus Christ, think about His invitation to you, His promises, His assurances, His personal guarantees, you will begin to understand. When you trust Christ as your Saviour, your spiritual eyes will be opened. So be determined to seek Christ; to fix your eyes on Him and no one else for your salvation. If you know that you are not a Christian you need to obey the Gospel. God calls us all to repent thoroughly. An old writer once said *“till sin be bitter, Christ will not be sweet”*. We need to see sin for what it really is - an offence against God. Christ calls you to come to Him in simple faith for everlasting forgiveness.

Secondly be determined to know Christ; this should be the whole essence of your life when you become a Christian believer. Fixing your gaze on the way ahead means that you have a goal to aim

at. The Apostle Paul said *“that I may know Him”* (Philippians 3:10) - that is the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul had been a Christian convert for many years, and he is speaking of the love of God that surpasses knowledge. He wants to know more of this love, more of this wonderful Saviour for whom he has gladly suffered the loss of everything. His eyes look straight ahead, his gaze is fixed before him. Christian friend, how much do you really know of Christ? Do you diligently study his word? Do you wait humbly upon Him in prayer every day? Other people have their pursuits and their passions, this should be ours. We need a fixed gaze, a determination to seek Christ for salvation first of all; then a determination to know Christ better day by day.

Then the third thing we need is a determination to obey Christ. Is there something He has commanded you to do? The Lord Jesus said to his disciples *“If you love me, keep my commandments”* (John 14:15). To keep your eyes fixed on the way ahead you must know the way to go. To ensure that you are not distracted by the world around you must keep your eyes fixed on Jesus. This is why we have the Scriptures to guide us and to teach us about our Saviour. Fourthly, we must be determined to glorify Christ. Yes, what you do is important, but what you are is more important. Sometimes we see beautiful flowers, but they turn out to be artificial, they are not real. God wants us to be real; He wants us to be holy; He wants us to be Christ-like. He who wept for lost souls wants us to have very compassionate hearts. You and I preach a sermon every day by the way we live. We don't know who is watching and we don't always know who is listening, but our lives speak powerfully. Do you have a fixed gaze? Are you determined to seek Christ, to know Christ, to obey Him and to glorify Him?

For Further Study

See Proverbs 4: 25

Consider Hebrews 12: 1-3 and what it means to fix our eyes on Jesus and why we should think about Him and all that He has suffered for us.

Pay Attention

We come this time to Proverbs chapter 5 and we are looking at verses 1 and 2 which say: *“My son, pay attention to my wisdom, listen well to my words of insight, that you may maintain discretion, and your lips may preserve knowledge.”* This chapter of Proverbs provokes four life and death questions. The questions are these:

“Why should I listen?”; “What should I know?”; “What should I do?”; and “What should I remember?”

First then, “Why should I listen?” When King Solomon says, *“My son pay attention to my wisdom, listen well to my words of insight, that you may maintain discretion, and your lips may preserve knowledge”*, he sounds more like a schoolteacher than a king. “Pay attention and listen”, he says; familiar words for school children! But this is God’s word; it is not just a word of advice, but a message of the highest authority, so why should I listen? I must listen because God is warning me about something. He is warning me through these words of Solomon to his son because He cares about me. Solomon warns his son about an adulteress and immorality, but it is much more than that; it is essentially a parable, a picture of the temptation to sin.

He speaks in verse 2 about lips preserving knowledge; why our lips? Well, if your heart is right with God what you say will be true and sound. You will say the right things at the right time because you have listened to God. Someone is perhaps trying to persuade you and entice you to sin. But if you love the Lord, you will know how to reply; you will know how to respond with wise godly words.

Why should I listen to what God is saying to me? Because, as we are about to discover, it is a matter of life and death. Secondly then, “What should I know?” We find this in Proverbs 5:3-14. If you don’t have a Bible to hand just now, don’t worry because I will be quoting from some of these verses as we discover just what it is we should know. Have you noticed sometimes, when you least expect it, temptation comes to you? It can happen after a time of great personal blessing. Do not ever think that you are immune from it. Do not ever think you are so strong you will never go under. In 1 Corinthians 10, Paul describes a very privileged people. They are the people of Israel, God’s people. They have been delivered from Egypt and God has miraculously provided them with water and food in the desert. Paul says that these people are examples to us all. What happened to them? Well, he tells us that in spite of God’s goodness to them, they were drawn into pagan practices and into immorality. They were drawn into grumbling and complaining against Moses and against the Lord. Twice over Paul says these people are examples or warnings to us.

We all have areas of potential weakness and vulnerability, and here, Proverbs 5:3, temptation comes in a very powerful form. A man is flattered by an attractive woman. Here is forbidden fruit; he feels it is exciting; he thinks no one will know. Here is a sin trap, and of course it is deadly. Here is something we should know: there is a terrible price to pay for sin, and that is what we are told in Verse 4. We are told, *“In the end she is bitter as gall”*, the honey has become bitter; this woman is like a very sharp sword. There is always an afterwards, a consequence, but nobody sees it at the time, and the wounds are deep. It won’t affect me, you say. Oh yes it will, and this woman who represents the temptation to sin, is a death merchant. We are told in verse 5, *“Her feet go down to death; her steps lead straight to hell.”*

Did you know that Jesus spoke more about hell than He did about heaven? Hell is a place of eternal loss, a place of tears, of anguish and punishment, a dreadful place. If there is no hell why did Jesus need to become our substitute on that terrible cross at Calvary? Verse 5 is a serious verse, it is a

warning that we cannot afford to ignore. We cannot trifle with sin and temptation and expect to avoid the consequences either now or in the future.

In verse 6 this sinful woman is seen as someone rushing through life with no thought or knowledge about where she is headed. Her paths are crooked but she doesn't know it. Her way of life is careless and sinful. It is a way that ends in judgement. The true way of life is found in Christ, but sadly, to many it is regarded as irrelevant. They keep serious thoughts at bay and live only for the pleasures of the moment. In Verse 7 we hear a second time, *"Listen to me"*. Here is the tender, caring voice of the Lord and his word. He is very clear and gentle. He is warning us in love not to turn aside from Him.

So here is this very powerful temptation; what am I to do about it? The word of God is very practical and verse 8 is very helpful when it comes to dealing with temptation. It says keep to a path far from her do not go near the door of her house. Just keep away, just say no to all ungodliness. Do not go to places where you know you will be tempted. Do not read or watch things that give the tempter a foothold. Do not go with people who will lead you astray.

The third question is: "What should I know?" This is found in Verses 18 to 20. "Be faithful and be content", that is the message we discover in these verses. Here is a picture of happiness and contentment in marriage. There is a delightful gospel picture in which marriage speaks of the relationship between The Lord Jesus Christ and his Church. This passage in Proverbs 5 describes the intimacy, the joy, the delight, the satisfaction, and the mutual affection between a man and his wife as they live faithfully together. The Christian church and her precious Saviour are united in a mysterious and wonderful relationship of which the union of a man and a woman in marriage is a beautiful picture. It is a relationship of mutual love and union. It is a situation of true fulfilment.

The fourth question is this: "What should I remember?" We have this in verses 21 to 23. We should remember that no one escapes the gaze of God. Verse 21 tells us, *"A man's ways are in full view of the Lord and He examines all his paths."* No one escapes the gaze of God for He knows all that we do and say. Then in verses 22 and 23 we have an awful warning. There are those who choose the way of sin and reject Christ; they will face the certain, just judgement of God. We are told in these verses that they will die from lack of discipline, led astray by their own great folly. But in all this we should remember that there is a Saviour from all sin; a living Saviour, a loving Saviour, a faithful Saviour, a welcoming Saviour, one who says 'Come to me all you who are weary and heavy laden by sin and temptation, and I will give you rest.' Have you come to Him?

For Further Study

See Proverbs 5: 1-2

Read James 1: 19-27 and James 2: 1-12 and consider what they say about hearing and doing, and about the tongue.

Things God Hates

We are looking this time at Proverbs 6:16-19 where we read: *“There are six things the Lord hates, seven things that are detestable to Him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that are quick to rush into evil, a false witness who pours out lies, and a man who stirs up dissension among brothers.”*

This time we are going to consider different kinds of people who might come to your church. Now, if there are seven hateful, detestable things in God’s sight, we need to identify them carefully and consider them seriously. They are seven things that affect the eyes, the tongue, the hands, the heart and the feet, and they can be placed under four headings. So here are four people who might come to your church, and perhaps, like me, you will be saying very shortly ‘I have met them all.’

The first is the proud person. He is “Mr Haughty Eyes”. He is educated and intelligent, but he is very contemptuous of other people; he looks down upon them. He thinks that none are as holy as he is. He doesn’t really understand Romans 12:10 which says, *“Be devoted to one another in brotherly love, honour one another above yourselves.”* This man is very correct in his knowledge of theology and doctrine, but he is very abrasive, there is no tenderness, no compassion, no time to listen to people; often no sense of humour and no joy. This person has a tendency to talk at people, not to them.

“Mr Haughty Eyes” doesn’t really understand what it means to be gentle and humble, although Jesus says, *“Take my yoke upon you and learn of me for I am gentle and humble”* (Matthew 11:29). “Mr Haughty Eyes” wants position; he feels that he has great gifts. He thinks he should be recognised and revered and given a position of leadership and authority. He is, after all, a very important person, and often gets angry when other people don’t seem realise it. He has no understanding of humble, faithful service for Christ, he just wants to be seen. It grieves him that he doesn’t have a more exalted position. He doesn’t understand John the Baptist who said about Christ, *“He must become greater. I must become less”* (John 3:30).

He is so unlike the Lord Jesus who humbled Himself and made Himself nothing. “Mr Haughty Eyes” has no vision for evangelism; his head is full, but his heart is empty. This man actually loves to criticise the methods of those who are reaching the lost with the Gospel. Perhaps it is because he is conscious of his own shortcomings in witnessing in love to others. So beware of “Mr. Haughty Eyes”, but seek to reach out to him with true Christian grace and love.

Then, someone else is coming to church, so watch out. He is the liar, we find him in verses 17 and 19. He exaggerates to impress; he can be flippant and glib. He is always saying the Lord told me this, and the Lord told me that, often over very minor things. He uses a lot of pious jargon that just trips of the tongue. The liar is often a smiling assassin, he will be very pleasant and courteous to you, but he is really full of gossip and slander. He is always tale bearing and back biting. He is very dangerous to have around in the church because lies and false witness are very destructive. This man uses unrealistic flattery which can be very harmful to people, and there is a deceit mentality which can become a way of life. Half-truths seem to come very easily to him, but white lies are still lies. There is the man or woman who promises to do something but they are unreliable and they don’t do it. As Christian believers we follow the One who is the truth, not the father of lies who is Satan. Paul says we are to *“speak the truth in love”* (Ephesians 4:15). Again, people like this need to be disciplined in love by the elders of the church. We must be on our guard against them.

Who else may come to your church? We find this person at the end of verse 17 which speaks about *“hands that shed innocent blood.”* These are people that hurt and destroy the fellowship of God’s

people. We see in the world around us: hatred, the neglect or abuse or humiliation of children or aged parents. There are those who treat their husbands or their wives very poorly and even cruelly? But what about being resentful and wanting to get even with people? What if there is no appreciation, no respect, no tenderness, no thoughtfulness? This murdering spirit comes in many forms and can even be found in our churches. Paul in writing to the Corinthians said, *“For I am afraid when I come I may not find you as I want you to be, and you may not find me as you want me to be. I fear that there may be quarrelling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, factions, slander, gossip, arrogance and disorder”* (2 Corinthians 12:20). What a sorry picture that is, and yet Paul recognised that there was a very real danger of these things happening if they were not watchful.

What about those who won't speak to other Christians and avoid them? You and I have a murder weapon in our mouth, which is our tongue. There is such a sin as spiritual murder when the fruit of the Spirit is not evident in the life. Yes, such people might come to your church: the proud person, the liar, even the murderer. Let us be on our guard that such a person is not allowed to ruin our church, and let us be sure that we do not exhibit any of these destructive characteristics ourselves.

The fourth person who may come to the church is the schemer. We find him in verse 18 and at the end of verse 19. Here we see *“the heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that are quick to rush into evil...and a man who stirs up dissension among brothers.”* “Mr Schemer” has wrong motives; maybe he wants power, or money, or recognition, or even revenge. He may want to lead the church in a very different direction; he may have his own agenda; he may have a very strong personality. “Mr Schemer” is never content. He lets his negative feelings smoulder and he complains to other church members. He never thinks things through. What he is doing is stirring up dissension; he is devising schemes that are wrong. What is the heart of the problem? “Mr. Schemer” has a covetous spirit. His focus is all wrong, it affects his thinking. His ambition absorbs his time and his energy; it diminishes him; it affects his usefulness and his objectives have become distorted. This attitude can become infectious. He can carry other people along with him. The problem is that he is not living close to the Lord Jesus Christ. It is his will that is uppermost in his mind, not the Lord's will for the church fellowship of which he is a member.

So these are the things that Proverbs chapter 6 tells us that God hates; that are detestable to Him: pride, falsehood, a murderous spirit, wicked schemes, feet that are quick to do evil, false witness and those who stir up dissension among brothers; all of which can creep in our churches and cause harm and distress.

What must we do, then, to be on our guard against these things that the Lord hates? The first is to keep close to the Lord and to his Word. The second is to truly love one another with sincere hearts. The third is to be on our guard against the whiles of the devil who is always seeking to destroy the testimony of the church. And the fourth is to deal quickly in loving discipline with those who come in with wrong motives or wrong teaching.

For Further Study

See Proverbs 6: 16-19

Look-up the following verses which speak about the child of God and things that are hated: Psalm 97: 10, Psalm 119: 104 and 163, Proverbs 13: 5 and 15: 27, Matthew 5: 43, Luke 6: 27.

What do You Know About the World?

There are three things you need to know about this world. The first one we find in Proverbs chapter 6:1-5, and it is: "Its plausibility". In other words, what it says sounds believable and even attractive, but it will lead you into trouble.

Think of this illustration: Your neighbour wants to have a chat with you; she's having some work done on her house; she's having all sorts of extensions; she's redoing the kitchen, and she tells you that she is waiting for an insurance policy to mature, probably next week, but she has to pay the builders now. She knows you have just been left a large sum of money and she is awfully sorry to have to ask you, and she is embarrassed about it, but could you possibly lend her a few thousand pounds. It's only for a few days, there's no problem. You agree and you commit yourself to it, but actually it is a trap, she is lying, there is no money coming to her.

This is a little picture of what Solomon is saying in these verses. It is a parable, a spiritual picture of the world. The world here is not creation, or our relationships, or families, or our employment; the world here is the mind, the outlook of mankind that ignores God and doesn't recognise Him. This world is very plausible, but it is full of snares and traps. Christians need to treat all the high sounding, often attractive propositions of the world around with great caution. Solomon tells his son what he should do if he should find himself trapped in this way. If he has entered unwisely into an agreement with his neighbour and it has placed him in difficulty, then the only course of action is, as we read in verse 3, *"Go and humble yourself, press your plea with your neighbour!"* He says the situation must be treated as a matter of urgency: *"Allow no sleep to your eyes, no slumber to your eyelids."* Do your utmost to release yourself from this entanglement. So too, if we realise we have been taken in by the world in some way we must admit our mistake and humble ourselves, and get away from the situation as soon as we can. How much better to remember that "To be a friend of the world is to be an enemy of God" (James 4:4), and have nothing to do with its plausible words and attractions. The world leaves God out of its arrangements. The believer puts God's will first and is careful not to be taken-in by the snares of the world and of the devil.

What else do you need to know about this world? The second thing is "its pre-occupation", which we find this in verses 6-11. Verse 6 talks about going to look at that marvellous insect the ant, and to consider its ways and be wise. Now this is clearly a powerful message for the sluggard, or the lazy person. What do we learn from the tiny ant? This is actually the harvester ant which is common in Palestine, and they are depicted as very wise little creatures. They have something of great value to teach us. They don't need to be reminded of what they need to do. They don't need to be prodded and challenged. They busy themselves with their tasks. The ant is doing all the sensible things, seeing that winter is coming and summer doesn't last for ever, and gathering its food at harvest time.

The sluggard can depict the person who is full of excuses for not trusting in Christ. This person has no concern for his precious soul, no thought of eternity, no sense of urgent need of Christ, his days just drift by he does what pleases him, he does what amuses him or entertains him. He lives for holidays, he lives for sport; he lives for himself. He is pre-occupied with himself, it is a kind of slumber, a spiritual slumber; it is the slumber of spiritual death. This life is brief and days of opportunity for seeking the living God go quickly by. There is the great Gospel question in Verse 9: *"How long will you lie there you sluggard, when will you get up from your sleep?"* It comes to our generation; it comes to you, this question, "how long will you sleep?" Christ is calling you; will you awake from sleep and respond to Him?

Verses 10 and 11 take this picture of laziness and sleeping a little further: *"A little sleep a little*

slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest - and poverty will come upon you like a bandit and scarcity like an armed man." To those in spiritual darkness and deadness, the Gospel of Christ is all so irrelevant. They say, "Where's the harm? I'll carry on in my life, a little more sleep just a little more." As one commentator has said, "But a little sleep proves an everlasting sleep". All of life has its consequences. The principle of sowing and reaping is inescapable. As poverty will strike the lazy man, so tragedy will strike the spiritually sleeping. Is there a worse thing in the universe than to live and die in your sins without God, without Christ and without hope? All because you were too lazy to act, too preoccupied to stop and consider.

So here is a picture of this world in its plausibility, in its pre-occupation and now thirdly, in "its propaganda." We find this in verses 12-15. You must have met the man spoken about here. He is a slick salesman; he is fast talking; he has got a lot to say; he is brash; he is showy; he has conned a lot of people; he drives a very expensive car; he has a very opulent lifestyle. Here is another Gospel parable; this man doesn't care about people, he is essentially selfish, greedy, godless and cruel. He reflects the mind of this godless world. This scoundrel and villain, as he is called in verse 12 is, according to verse 15 heading nowhere fast. His days are numbered. If we listen to the propaganda of this world we are very foolish. The world says 'live for today and get all you can. Eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die.' But see what verse 15 says: *"Therefore disaster will overtake him in an instant, h will suddenly be destroyed without remedy."* Do you see this world for what it really is; do you see its plausibility? Its whole mentality is to live without God. Do you see its pre-occupation, how those who love this present world sleep the very sleep of death? Do you see its propaganda? The world has much to say, much to offer, but nothing of lasting, eternal value.

In John 3:16, we read *"for God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son. Whoever believes him shall not perish but have ever lasting life."* Christians are those who live in the world, but are not of the world. Christ has overcome the world, and you and I can live a life of peace and joy and victory and blessing in the midst of a sad, lost, needy world.

For Further Study

Consider the Christian's relationship to the world in the following verses: John 15: 19 and 17: 14,16; Romans 12: 2-3; Galatians 6: 14; James 1: 27; 1 Peter 2: 11; 1 John 2: 15-16 and 5: 4-5.

The Word, the Woman and the Window

This time we are going to discover the lessons to be found in Proverbs 6:20-24, and in chapter 7. We are going to think about three “W’s”: “The Word”, “The Woman” and “The Window”.

First of all the word. In Proverbs 6:20 Solomon says, *“My son keep your father’s commands, do not forsake your mother’s teaching”*. Over and over again we see in this book the priority and the preciousness of these words. The word referred to in these passages as “my words”, “the voice of wisdom”, “understanding”, “my teaching”, “my commands”, “father’s instruction”, “my wisdom”, “my words of insight”, “your father’s commands,” “your mother’s teaching”, and so on, are to be understood as God’s word. This is God’s book, it is God revealed. All of these expressions refer to the word of God.

The writer is actually warning us about very powerful temptations. The book of Proverbs is a very practical book. There are pitfalls and there are dangers facing Christians every day. The Devil is not asleep, and the book of Proverbs tells it as it is. So before the warnings regarding temptation and sin and its costs, we have some detailed exhortations. What is God saying to us in these verses? His word is to be taken very seriously indeed, it is no light thing. Here is the handbook for life; here are words of spiritual wisdom; here are words of serious warning. An old writer, called John Flavell, said “The scriptures teach us the best way of living, the noblest way of suffering and the most comfortable way of dying.” Another old writer, Thomas Watson, said “Read the scripture not only as history, but as a love letter sent to you from God.” And it was Martin Luther who said, “I am bound by the scripture, and my conscience has been taken captive by the word of God.”

We find in Proverbs 6:20 that God’s words are loving words; the words of a parent to a child. God’s word is seen in the context of a father’s commands and a mother’s teaching. We are told to bind God’s word upon our hearts forever; to fasten them around our neck. We are told *“When you walk they will guide you, when you sleep they will watch over you, when you awake they will speak to you.”* We are to keep God’s word as a living word, and his words are words of guidance without which we will go astray.

The people of Israel in the Old Testament were led and guided by the Lord Himself; they had that pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night to watch over them. We too are able to shelter under the promises of God and be led by Him. If we are believers in Christ his word is an enlightening word. These commands that we read are a lamp and his teaching is a light. God’s word speaks to us, it addresses all of life’s circumstances and situations; it is a lamp for our feet and a light for our path. Yes, it corrects us, it reproves us, it convicts us, but it also shows us how to do better. We should be glad of correction; it is for our good, for our happiness and for our salvation. What a different world it would be if people would really take God’s word to heart. His word is loving, living, guiding, and enlightening. This emphasis on the word of God is all by way of preparing us to face the powerful temptations that will come our way. The word of God is the Sword of the Spirit to enable us to recognise and defeat the enemy of our souls, Satan.

We have looked at the “Word”, now secondly we look at the “Woman” in this passage of scripture. This whole passage is a very clear warning against all immorality. It is a message that our generation needs to hear. It’s a message for every church, every man and woman, every parent, every young person. As you look into God’s word, you can never say that nobody warned you, nobody told you. In the Old Testament, Job called immorality *“a fire that burns to destruction”* (Job 31:12). In verses 24 and 25 we are faced with what we could almost call a charm offensive. Here is something of the subtlety of Satan. The woman spoken of here, this immoral woman, is described as having a smooth tongue and she is like a wayward wife. Here is a picture of sin coming to us as something very

attractive, very desirable. It would seem to satisfy our deepest longings and meet our deepest needs, but of course it's not true, Satan is a deceiver.

The prodigal son believed that money and freedom and immorality would bring him fulfilment, but it was all so superficial, it was so false, it was so empty and tragic, it was so loveless and pointless and so very lifeless. This woman, we read in verse 26, reduces the one she ensnares *"to a loaf of bread."* They are just a "meal ticket", and she prays upon their very life. The lives of those who fall victim to her are ruined. There follows this warning passage in verses 27-29 where Solomon asks, *"Can a man scoop fire into his lap without his clothes being burnt, can he walk on hot coals without his feet being scorched? So is he who sleeps with another man's wife, no one who touches her will go unpunished."* Yes, he's talking about immorality, but he is also in the larger picture referring to all sin. Sin is sin of whatever kind.

He goes on to say that people might possibly understand where a starving thief is coming from. It is wrong to steal, but we could understand why a starving man might steal to eat, but there is still a price to pay. But with regard to immorality this man didn't even need to commit this sin, this man has no judgement, he is foolish, he is self destructive, he is worthy of punishment and everlasting shame. He has caused pain to others and of course he has grieved the heart of God. There is a vertical and horizontal dimension to all of our sins, we hurt other people and we hurt ourselves and we grieve the heart of God. As Christians we are to avoid even the very appearance of evil and live pure lives before God and man.

Solomon continues his severe warnings about the temptation to immorality in chapter 7. We see very briefly that there is a "Window". We have looked at the "Word" and we have looked at the "Woman", what about this window? Well this window is clearly no ordinary window; this is God's window. This window, according to chapter 7:9, sees in the dark, it sees round corners, it sees a foolish young man, it sees the immoral woman, it sees her dark intentions. God's window sees everything. He sees your ambitions and your desires and He sees the temptations to which you and I are prey. But He has promised to provide for us a way of escape because He will not permit us to be tempted beyond what we are able to bear. The way of escape is to submit to God and to resist the devil and he will flee away. The believer has the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit to make this possible. But here we see a foolish youth caught in the sin trap, led astray by persuasive words.

Here is the situation of those who ignore the Word of God, they are naïve and unconcerned about this world and its snares and its unreliability. This young man is spiritually aimless, he is very vulnerable, he is at a loose end; he has no purpose in life and temptation comes to him, and the woman is as hard as nails, she is not genuine; she is a professional and she is very enticing to him and it is just a typical picture of the world.

The passage concludes with a very tragic scene, a heartbreaking picture of those lost in sin. He follows this woman, little knowing it will cost him his life. He is like an animal going to the slaughter or being hunted or trapped. What a solemn Gospel warning this is. May the Lord help us to faithfully obey his word, to say no to all temptation and ungodliness and to realise that God's window, God's eye, is always upon us and we cannot escape his gaze.

For further Study

Read Psalm 119: 11 and consider how this works in practice.

What situations can lead us into sin? Look-up: 1 Timothy 6:9-10; James 1: 14-15; 1 John 2: 15-17.

Six Things About God

This time we are looking at Proverbs chapter 8:1-21 and at six things you should know about God. We have discovered in our previous talks that this is a book about wisdom and about the word of God. Proverbs is a book that is full of very practical teaching about living in this sinful world. But it is also a book that points us to God and ultimately to the Lord Jesus Christ.

God speaks to us from this ancient book in many ways. So the first thing to know is: "How does God speak to us?" Certain things have been revealed to us and they are easy to understand. We know that God has given us the great visual display of his power in creation. The Psalmist reminds us that *"The heavens declare the glory of God, the skies proclaim the work of his hands"* (Psalm 19:1). Everybody who has got eyes to see can see this wonderful visual aid. In Romans 1:20 the apostle Paul writes: *"For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities - his eternal power and divine nature - have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that mankind is without excuse."* The voice of God is heard in the wonder of creation even though men do their best to deny it or explain it away.

Then secondly, God speaks to us through our conscience. Most of us know when we are doing something wrong because that inner voice convicts us and causes us discomfort. Sometimes conscience whispers to us and sometimes it shouts to us. This is a voice from God implanted in all of us to warn us that we have gone wrong and need to repent and turn to Him for forgiveness. But so often the voice of conscience is ignored or suppressed. Sadly, in some, it has become dead through constant sinning. This is a very dangerous and sad state to be in when conscience is deadened and there is no appreciation of what is right and what is wrong.

Thirdly, we read in Proverbs 8:1, *"Does not wisdom call out, does not understanding raise her voice?"* Wisdom calls out when the word of God is read and preached and taught. Jesus was sent by the Father to speak to us the truth. He is the living Word of God and He is God's last word to this lost world. He went everywhere preaching the Gospel and teaching from the Scriptures. How does God speak to us? He speaks to us in his word, The Bible. He speaks to us everywhere in this word, in every part, in both the Old and New Testaments, and He speaks to us only in this word as it is faithfully preached and prayerfully read.

The second thing we should know is, "Where does God speak?" Well, in Proverbs 8:2 it says, *"On the heights, along the way, where the paths meet, understanding takes her stand beside the gates into the city, at the entrances she cries aloud."* This could speak in our day of the open air, the shopping centre or the market. Wherever God's word is proclaimed, God is speaking. He speaks in churches and wherever the Bible is read. He speaks wherever the seed has been sown in a heart or mind. When anyone hears the word of God they know it is God speaking to them. In their heart of hearts they know that the Gospel is true, even though Satan and their own prejudices will try to persuade them differently.

The third thing we should know about God is: "To whom does God speak?" Verse 4 says, *"To you, O men, I call out; I raise my voice to all mankind."* How wonderful that God cares about all people; people like you and me. It is not just to a few so called important or religious people that God speaks; not just intellectual people. He calls all men, everywhere to repent and turn to Christ for salvation. To his disciples Jesus said, *"Go and make disciples of all the nations"* (Matthew 28:19). According to verse 5 this gospel is for the simple and it is also for the foolish. It is a message for all people of whatever status or ability or belief.

At this point we need to ask our fourth question: "How can we be sure about all this?" Proverbs 8:6-9 says this: *"Listen for I have worthy things to say; I open my lips to speak what is right. My mouth speaks what is true...all the words of my mouth are just...to the discerning all of them are right, they are faultless to those who have knowledge."* What things are referred to here? They are the things concerning an eternal God, things concerning an immortal soul, an everlasting state, a salvation or a condemnation. The eternal, living God is the only one who speaks what is true. He is the God who cannot lie. Jesus, who is Himself God, said, *"I am the truth"* (John 14:6). God the Holy Spirit is called *"The Spirit of truth"* (John 14:17). God's Word can be trusted when it comes to knowing about Him and about ourselves and about the way back to Him from our sinful ways. Through his Word God opens peoples eyes, he gives sight to the spiritually blind. We can be sure of these things because God's Word is trustworthy. Those who place their faith in what God says find that what He says is true. The world says, "Seeing is believing", but the Christian says, "Believing is seeing".

In verse 12 we read, *"I wisdom dwell together with prudence; I possess knowledge and discretion."* In the New Testament we read that *"in Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge"* (Colossians 2:3). So look at God's word, look at the Lord Jesus Christ, look at the cross of Calvary and see him dying for sinners; look at the transforming power of the Gospel in so many lives. Oh yes, you can be sure that this is true.

Then, verses 10 and 11 remind us that we have a choice, *"Choose my instruction instead of silver, knowledge rather than choice gold, for wisdom is more precious than rubies and nothing you desire can compare with her."* All the wealth of this world does not compare to knowing God, and cannot satisfy the soul. Jesus said, *"What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?"* (Mark 8:36). Of course, wealth is not evil in itself, but it can keep people from heaven, it can take hold and get a grip upon the life. Wealth can make people self sufficient and proud and self important. Paul was right when he said that the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. Wealth can distort our perception of true values, never satisfy the true needs and longings of the soul, and it is a poor substitute for knowing God through Jesus Christ our Saviour. So you have a choice to either listen to and act upon what God says, or to refuse to listen and go your own way.

So, how does God speak, where does He speak, to whom does he speak, now, fifthly: "What does God say?" We find that in Proverbs 8:13: *"To fear the Lord is to hate evil. I hate pride and arrogance, evil behaviour and perverse speech."* This is what God says. He is to be feared. We should have a holy, healthy fear of God and realise that He does not and cannot ignore the sinful pride that says it does not need Him. He does not and cannot ignore wickedness of any kind and all are answerable to Him for the things we say - "every idle word will be called to account."

Those who truly know God, hold Him in reverence and awe, hate all that is wrong, all that is opposed to Him, and seek to live lives that avoid all appearance of evil and that are pleasing to Him.

And finally we can know "What God promises." In verse 17 God says, *"I love those who love me and those who seek me find me."* God promises something very wonderful here - success for seekers. Seeking and finding go together in the Bible, and seeking God with all your heart ensures finding. God's promise is absolute, it's guaranteed. God says I love those who love me and who seek me. As we close this study, can I ask, do you have a hunger for Christ, for the one who said that the water I give shall be within you a spring of water welling up into eternal life?

For Further Study

Consider 10 more things we know about God: Psalm 90: 2; Psalm 147: 5 and Psalm 139: 7-18; John 4: 24; 1 Timothy 1: 17; 1 Peter 1: 13-16; 2 Peter 3: 9; 1 John 4: 8-10.

What Kind of Man is This?

This time we are discovering Proverbs 8:22-36. We are asking a question that the disciples asked in Matthew 8:27. After Jesus had stilled a storm on the lake they said, *"What kind of man is this?"* You will remember that in an earlier lesson in this series we discovered that where we read of 'wisdom' in the book of Proverbs, we are reading about God and about the Lord Jesus Christ. Wisdom's characteristics are the characteristics of the Lord. Verse 12 of this chapter begins with the words, *"I wisdom"* and there follows a description of what wisdom is and what wisdom does. This is continued in the verses we are looking at. We are going to discover four wonderful facts about wisdom that can be applied to the Lord Jesus Christ and which will help us to answer that question of the disciples: *"What kind of man is this?"* (Matthew 8:27).

First of all we see that the wisdom which is from God is as eternal as He is. Here is a picture of the eternal being and deity of Christ. This is in verses 22 and 23 where we read, *"The Lord possessed me at the beginning of his work, before his deeds of old; I was appointed from eternity from the beginning before the world began."* This statement does not mean that Christ was created when God created everything else, but that He has always existed. John, at the beginning of his Gospel, puts it like this, *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the word was God... And the Word became flesh and lived among us..."* The eternal Word became the Eternal son. Of course, the inspired writer here is using language that we can understand to convey deep spiritual truths. Christ, the Eternal Word, was there before the world's creation and before the beginning of time. He was in the Father and the Father was in Him. In the eternal councils of God He was appointed, or anointed, to be the wisdom and power of the Father and to be light of life in the creation of the world and the redemption of his people.

Christ was appointed before creation for the work of redemption, and this Scripture is setting all this before us in this passage in a whole variety of ways. It tells us that before the oceans were created, Christ was there; it says that before the earth was created, before man was created Christ was there. Therefore, the last Adam, that is Christ, was there before the first Adam who was made of the earth. This explains the words of Jesus in John chapter 3:31, where he says *"The one who comes from above is above all; the one who is from the earth belongs to the earth and speaks as one from the earth, and the one who comes from Heaven is above all"* - and of course He is referring to himself. So in verses 24 and 25 we are told that He was before the creation of the oceans, the mountains and the hills. When Eliphaz asked Job, *"Were you brought forth before the hills?"* (Job 15:7), he was showing Job his sheer inability to understand God's great wisdom. So, in this very remarkable passage in the Old Testament we have a lovely picture of the deity of Christ and of the wonderful truth of his eternal being.

Secondly we see "Christ's design" - in verses 27-29. The writer says in verse 27, *"I was there when he set the heavens in place, when he marked out the horizon on the face of the deep."* This is a very interesting verse because the word *"marked out"* means to circle. It is the same word that is used in Isaiah chapter 14:22, *"He (that is God) sits enthroned above the circle of the earth"*. There are other references in the Old Testament pointing to the roundness of the earth, especially the spherical nature of the sea level which defines the global shape of the earth. In other words, the Bible never teaches a flat earth. How could these ancient writers be so scientifically accurate apart from the revelation of God Himself? The Lord Jesus Christ could say, *"I was there at the beginning of creation."* Christ was the great architect. He was no mere spectator in the creation of the universe for, as John again tells us, *"All things were made by Him and without Him nothing was made that has been made"* (John 1:3). Do you remember how God silenced and humbled Job after all his trials and

testings? He said to Job, *"Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?"* (Job 38:4). Of course, Job could not answer such a question, but Christ, the eternal Word, the eternal Son, can say "I was there".

The third thing we learn about Christ in this section is "His delight". We see it in verses 30 and 31: *"I was filled with delight day after day, rejoicing always in his presence."* In his prayer in John 17:5 the Lord Jesus said to his Father, *"And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began."* Here is the closeness of the Son and the Father. In Isaiah 42:1 we read, *"Here is my servant whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight."* Here is a glimpse of the infinite delight of the Father in his dear son. Christians have been *"rescued (by God the Father) from the dominion of darkness and brought into the kingdom of the Son He loves"* (Colossians 1:13).

The delight of Christ is also expressed in the great work of creation. We read in Psalm 104:31, *"May the glory of the Lord endure forever, may the Lord rejoice in his works."* And in verse 31 of our chapter we are told that He rejoices in his whole world and delights in mankind. How very wonderful to think that God should delight in people like you and me with all our sins and failures. Yes, the Lord delights in those whom He has forgiven and brought to Himself. Do we delight ourselves in Him?

The fourth thing we see about Christ in this passage is "His great deliverance". In verses 32-36 we find the word "listen". *"Now then, my sons, listen to me, blessed are those who keep my ways. Listen to my instruction and be wise, do not ignore it."* "Listen to my instruction", he says, *"blessed is the man who listens to me."* Three times the Lord says "listen". And as we listen there is this promise of deliverance in verse 35: *"For whoever finds me finds life and receives favour from the Lord."* Of all the voices in the world, listen to this one; listen to Christ for He is the wisdom of God; He is the source of all light and knowledge; He is the king of kings and He is the loving rewarder of his children. We can see all these things in Proverbs 8, and his blessing is upon all those who listen to Him, who keep his ways, who love Him, who obey Him, who worship Him and thirst for Him. Here then is Godly fear, here is the deity, the design, the delight and the deliverance of the Lord Jesus. What kind of man is this? He is the Christ, the eternal Son of the living God.

For Further Study

Study these passages which speak about our Lord Jesus Christ and wonder and worship! John 1: 1-14; Colossians 1: 15-20; Hebrews 1: 1-14.

The Two Feasts

In Proverbs 9 you have a choice! Have you ever asked: "What is real wisdom? What is real understanding?" This chapter in the Old Testament of the Bible tells us. Two feasts are set before us. They are rival feasts! One is offered by wisdom and the other by folly. Solomon, who wrote this, is giving us a picture, an illustration, of what he is saying in verse 10 where he tells us: *"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding."*

Two invitations are sent out for these two rival feasts. So you have a choice! It is a choice that everyone makes. However, if you have already been to "Folly's feast" you can leave it and come to "Wisdom's feast" which is obviously the right one to go to. Verses 1-6 of this chapter describe wisdom's feast, and verses 13-18 describe folly's feast.

Now, as Jesus said that the Old Testament speaks everywhere about Him, we realise that "Wisdom's feast" is a picture of the gospel. It presents a little picture of what it means to come to personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. "Folly's feast" is a very sad picture of what it means to refuse the first invitation. The second meal is very popular, few can resist going to it. Far less people attend wisdom's excellent meal. You are invited to a fine house with seven pillars. Why seven pillars? Well, in the Bible, "seven" always speaks of perfection. When you come to faith in Christ you are coming to the wonderful Son of God. He IS God. He is perfect in all His ways. His character is perfect. His life on earth was perfect. He is the only person to have ever lived a sinless, holy, perfect life. His death on the cruel cross was a perfect sacrifice for the sins of all those who would come to trust Him as their Lord and Saviour. So when you come to Christ, you come to the Perfect One! You can trust all His promises, you can be clothed in his perfect righteousness, your many sins and failures and shortcomings can be forgiven and forgotten by the God you have offended.

The invitation to "Wisdom's feast" reminds me of the invitation in Isaiah 55:1, where we read : *"Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost."* And it goes on to say, *"Eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare."* In Proverbs 9:3, the messengers issuing the invitations are described as 'maids'. It is a lovely picture of those who are inoffensive, gentle, kind, innocent, even vulnerable. It describes those whom the Lord has called to issue his gospel invitation. People who are abrasive and arrogant are not going to see too many people responding to their invitation! They just put people off! But those who are winsome and humble and gracious and caring are the ones the Lord uses in His work. I can imagine these maids not only being gentle, but serious and earnest as they invite people to this special feast. It is a serious invitation. The gospel is about people's eternal destinies. When we proclaim the gospel we want to do it in a way that is appropriate to the amazing message that it is. We don't need clever methods; we don't try and manipulate people or use techniques such as entertainment or hypnotism. The apostle Paul said to the Thessalonians that *"the appeal we make does not come from error or impure motives, nor are we trying to trick you. On the contrary we speak as men approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel."* He says, *"We never used flattery, nor did we put on a mask to cover up - God is our witness"* (1 Thessalonians 3:3-5).

The invitation is a call to "leave your simple ways" (v. 6). When we come to Christ there has to be leaving of the old ways of selfishness and sin. This is called repentance when our whole desire is to change the way we live. I'm so glad that Jesus said that He didn't come to give his life for "good" people but for sinful people like me. Actually there aren't any "good" people in God's sight because we have all come short of His standard. The really great thing about this feast is that it is free!! You can't begin to pay for it. An old hymn writer put it this way: "Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to

your cross I cling! Naked come to you for dress, helpless *look to you for grace; foul I to the fountain fly. Wash me Saviour or I die*".

There is a real sense in which the gospel corrects us and rebukes us. It shows us our sin and ourselves as we really are in God's sight. Many people are deeply offended by that. Some of them get really angry. That is exactly what Solomon says to us in verses 7-9 of this chapter. *"Whoever corrects a mocker invites insult; whoever rebukes a wicked man incurs abuse. Do not rebuke a mocker or he will hate you; rebuke a wise man and he will love you. Instruct a wise man and he will be wiser still; teach a righteous man and he will add to his learning."* The wise person will listen to what God has to say and will take it to heart.

So what is this rival feast at the end of chapter 9? Well, "Folly" is pictured as a coarse woman with a loud voice! She is said to be undisciplined and without knowledge. She sits on her door step and shouts to people as they pass by. There is nothing gentle or kind in her manner at all. She too is inviting the simple to come and feast with her. Those who respond are described as lacking in judgement. There is something very different about her food. Even the water she is offering is stolen, presumably from someone's well. She shouts out that *"food eaten in secret is delicious"*. Why is it being eaten in secret? The other feast wasn't a secretive affair. This speaks of things that are underhand and deceitful and dishonest. Isn't it a picture of the life that is lived without any reference to God? Isn't it a picture of a life lived apart from the Lord Jesus Christ?

The final verse in this chapter describes the real truth about folly's feast or life without Christ: *"But little do they know that the dead are there, that her guests are in the depths of the grave."* Aren't you glad that Wisdom gives you an invitation to her feast? Aren't you glad that the Lord Jesus Christ invites you to come to Him to receive life and wisdom and understanding and a right relationship with God? The message of Proverbs 9 is simply this: *"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom"*, so come to Christ to-day and He will receive you and forgive and love you, and one day take you home to Heaven to be with Him always.

For Further Study

Proverbs is all about being wise.

1. Look-up 2 Timothy 3: 15 and think about the part the Scriptures play in bringing people to Christ. See John 5: 24 and Romans 10:17.
2. Read Matthew 22: 1-14 and consider how this is a parable about the gospel invitation.