**Keep Them Within Your Heart**

**Proverbs 4:10-23**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

What does the law say, how do you read it? We heard that question asked last week by Jesus when the lawyer tried to test Him, and then tried to justify himself. It is almost similar to what is being said in proverbs this morning. I’d like to read it to you again.

Hear, my son, and accept my words, that the years of your life may be many. I have taught you the way of wisdom; I have led you in the paths of uprightness. When you walk, your step will not be hampered, and if you run, you will not stumble. Keep hold of instruction; do not let go; guard her, for she is your life. Do not enter the path of the wicked, and do not walk in the way of the evil. Avoid it; do not go on it; turn away from it and pass on. For they cannot sleep unless they have done wrong; they are robbed of sleep unless they have made someone stumble. For they eat the bread of wickedness and drink the wine of violence. But the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, which shines brighter and brighter until full day. The way of the wicked is like deep darkness; they do not know over what they stumble. My son, be attentive to my words; incline your ear to my sayings. Let them not escape from your sight; keep them within your heart. For they are life to those who find them, and healing to all their flesh. Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.

To many people, this sounds like the author is giving a prescription to his son, “do this, but do not do these things. If you do what I instruct you will have life. In fact, if you do as I instruct, nothing will get in your way, you will have no problems.”

Dear friends consider these thoughts.

How many of you have been instructed in the truth? How many of you have been taught the wisdom of God’s law? I doubt there is anybody here that could claim they do not know what God demands of them in regard to keeping His law. How many of you are perfectly doing as God’s Word instructs?

It is interesting, the approach many take to looking at God’s law. Some look for the smallest loophole, that which will let them get away with what they desire to do. Some will say that since God’s Word does not specifically mention something, then they can do it. I have had someone suggest that having CDs with copied music is not stealing since making digital copies of music it is not mentioned in the Bible.

In fact, in talking with young people, I see in trend that is followed not only by those in their childhood, but also by many adults – they ask what I call situational ethical type questions. They know exactly what they can and cannot do, but they want to know how far they can go into what many call “the grey area.”

“Pastor, I know it is OK to kiss my girlfriend, but when I have crossed the line and gone too far? Tell me specifically what I can do, and what I cannot do. When is it considered fornication or adultery?”

“I know being drunk is a sin, but how much is too much?”

A good response is, “If you have to ask about it, your conscience is already bothering you. If your conscience is bothering you, you have gone too far, for your conscience is God’s guide for you.”

Oh, and just so you know the specific answers for the two questions, here they are. If you lust after a woman in your heart, you have committed adultery with her – even if you are simply kissing her. So, when does it go too far? The Scripture also tells us to be sober and vigilant for the devil is prowling around like a roaring lion, he wants to lead us astray. So, when you are having a couple drinks, if your “no” button is diminished by the amount you have drunk, or if your inhibitions are gone and you are doing or saying things that you wouldn’t normally say, then you have had more than you should.

So, how are you doing? Are you following the Word of God passed on down to you? Or, are you stumbling and falling?

Solomon seems to be suggesting in our text, that it is from our heart that good things come. That it is from our heart that comes uprightness and holiness. But Jesus, very God Himself, says something different. When confronted by the Pharisees who are talking about their tradition of ceremonial washing before eating, Jesus points out that it is not what goes into a man that makes him unclean, for He has this to say about the heart, *For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander.* (Matt. 15:19 ESV)

In our epistle lesson, Paul says that the desires of our flesh are against God’s Spirit. He give an extensive list of what our flesh desires, and what is therefore sinful. He writes, *Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God*.

I cannot speak for your heart, but I know that my heart has number of things on that list to which it likes to cling. If I were left without understanding this word from Proverbs, I might find myself depressed and lost without hope. But there is more here than meets the eye.

What word is it, that is a word of truth and life to believers? What is the path of the righteous that shines brighter and brighter? What Word contains life and healing? What is the heart from which flows springs of life?

Dearly beloved of God, we are talking about the hope of believers. Yes, Proverbs was an Old Testament book, but those who lived before Jesus took up flesh in the womb of Mary also had faith in this One ***who was to come*** – the One who was going to come as God had promised. God’s Messiah, the Christ. He is our heart from which flows springs of life.

It is this Word of truth that is life to the believer, that God knows of your sinfulness and gave His only begotten Son to die for you. You are a forgiven and redeemed child of God. You are baptized into Christ’s death, and into Christ’s resurrection. You live each day in your baptism, you put to death you sins in ***DAILY contrition and repentance*** and in that faith which trust’s Christ atoning work, you rise to live a new life – a life lived in you by Christ. Christ’s life is your life. This truth is that which gives eternal life to those who believe. This is how God recreates hearts from those inclined to sin, and makes them into new hearts.

Those who walk in the paths of Christ’s righteousness, those who trust not in themselves, but in Christ, walk in the light of Christ. This is the light that no darkness can overcome, it is the eternal light of God’s glory. Christ is the light of the life of all believers.

That to which you should incline your ears to hear, is the Word that comes from the mouth of God – you are forgiven for all your sins. You are to walk in this promise, this Word from God, that you are the dearly beloved of God. This is the joy of your heart – your heart remade and constantly renewed in Christ. This is what you are to keep in your heart.

Notice that the evil eat the bread of wickedness and drink the wine of violence. This is in direct contradiction to the meal of the righteous. Oh, the righteous also eat bread and drink wine, but they do not simply eat bread to satisfy their belly and drink wine to catch a buzz.

The righteous eat bread and drink wine when they gather at the Lord’s Table. They eat bread and drink wine because their heart has come to believe that hidden under these outward forms they are also receiving the very flesh that was pierced for them and drink of the very blood of Christ shed for their redemption. They know and believe that this is a meal that grants forgiveness of sins, and in so doing believers also receive life and salvation. This is a meal that strengthens faith, it grants steadfastness of heart.

Dearly beloved of God, you know God’s law. You also know how you are doing in that regard. But this is not what God wants you to remember and keep in your heart. Instead, He wants to be the One who keeps your heart and mind in Christ Jesus.

Hear these words, and keep them in your heart – God’s grace is yours in Jesus Christ. The Word of God took human flesh, giving His life unto death upon the cross to redeem you from sin, and to grant you life and salvation.

Keep this Word within your heart – you are baptized into Christ.

Keep this Word within your heart – your sins are forgiven, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Keep this Word within your heart – take eat, this is my body; take drink, this is my blood, shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.

Dearly fellow redeemed. Keep this Word within your heart – you are the beloved child of God for all that is Christ’s, is yours. He has done it all for you and gives all that is His, to you.

Live in God’s grace to you in Christ Jesus your Lord. Amen.