

Prov. 4:23-27; 19:5-23; The Character of Wisdom I. Wise Attitudes II. Wise Words III. Wise Actions

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, as we near our conclusion to our series on the Wisdom of Proverbs we find that Christ is concerned with our character. But what is character and how is it formed? If the wise man is one who fears the Lord- what will the wise man think, say and do? There is a development throughout a man's life- what he takes in he starts to believe- and so he speaks and acts. Our theme text is 4:23- keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life. The heart is the seat of emotion- the wellspring of life- the center of your being! Out of the heart the mouth speaks. An unguarded heart is open to attack, pollution and corruption will seep in! We must guard our heart- keep it, guard it and protect it! Imagine the consequence if the guard's at Fort Knox fell asleep! What loss there could be if the watchman was slumbering! Well, your heart is more precious than any gold in Fort Knox! Like the jewel of our inner being, the heart is precious and needs to be guarded with all diligence. In each point we will see the things or traits to be guarded against, so that positive traits would be encouraged to grow! So today we see that Jesus teaches and enables us to guard our heart so that our character would be wise.

I. Wise Attitudes

We start with the attitudes of the heart. Included in the heart is what we think, what we believe and what we love! Our desires and emotions- are all parts of the heart. So which emotions or attitudes will be guarded against. In spite of contrary opinion, our emotions and attitudes are something that can be altered- as our response to events is something we can choose. We can choose to allow poison to remain in our hearts- or we can purge the poison and cast it out! Like being stung with a bee- you need to remove the stinger first before the pain will stop! Well which attitudes does the wise man resist- what traits do we pull out? Well, Proverbs tells us that there are a group of attitudes that we must avoid. That of anger, wrath and selfishness. As 19:19 says, a man of great wrath will pay the penalty. A wrathful man stirs us discord, hatred stirs up strife! Not only is a quick temper bad enough, those who are easily

enraged cause great division and harm. If as 19:11 says, good sense makes one slow to anger; that means that bad or evil sense makes one easily angered. Anger usually comes from a heart that is proud and opinionated- that is both arrogant and rude. As ch. 16:18 says, pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall. When a person thinks that they have all the answers, they are no longer teachable! They are their own advisor- they go their own way and do what is right in their own eye. This is the character of fallen man- by nature unwilling to consider the direction given by others. The problem with this mentality is that wisdom and truth are received from the outside. Folly is bound up in our hearts. So the opinionated, proud and angry man shuts himself off from the source of wisdom! But by God's grace and Spirit, the church becomes convinced of her need for change and direction. So that wise man is one who humble and teachable! As 19:20 says, listen to advice and accept instruction, that you may gain wisdom in the future. Or 15:31- the ear that listens to life-giving reproof will dwell among the wise. And again in 15:33, the fear of the Lord is instruction in wisdom, and humility comes before honor. A heart that is teachable and submission- willing to receive instruction from the Lord and His word. That is the heart of the wise- that is the character of wisdom! As Prov. 1 sets forth- to receive instruction in wise dealing, in righteousness, justice and equity. Hear and increase learning- for the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge but fools despise wisdom and instruction. It is in this willingness to learn that you will find joy, compassion, prudence, self-control and all the other fruit of the Spirit that Proverbs sets forth. Wise attributes can only be gained when you submit yourself to the Lord and His word- asking the Spirit to produce them within you while you pursue them with all your heart! And over time, this wise attitude produces wise words. For example, you will be slow to anger and slow to speak- while being quick to listen as both Prov. 14 and James 1 says. So take wisdom into your heart- drink long at the waters! Note- this is not the power of positive thinking. Rather it is submission to God and His Word- fearing the Lord so that His Word is embraced. Allow Him to tell you how you should think and speak.

II. Wise Words

The book of Proverbs addresses speech over 100 times. The fact is, language reflects your attitude. Your words display your character. If you grumble and complain- you likely have a bad attitude. For as Jesus said in Mt. 12, the mouth speaks as an overflow of your heart! So when your heart is humble and teachable, what will your words be like? Well, to start with your words will not be many nor will they be hasty. As 10:19 says, when words are many, transgression is not lacking, but whoever restrains his lips is prudent. Or 12:18 The is one who rash words are like sword thrusts, but the tongue of the wise brings healing. So being fast with words leads to sin and does great damage. Who here does not remember a time when they wished they could take their words back- to unsay what they said! The mouth of the wicked does great harm- like the throwing of live coals at a campout. The tongue causes great harm- damage- just like the smallest spark can enflame a great forest. A loose tongue is like a loose cannon. In the early years of naval warfare, a loose cannon was a great threat. When fired the cannon's kickback would snap ropes and imperil sailors. So a loose tongue causes great harm and destroys your own ship. But not only is a fool known by their many words, their words are also foolish in themselves. Full of vanity, lies and deceit. As 19:9 says, A false witness will be punished, he who breaths out lies will perish. The mouth of the wicked devours iniquity and consumes men. Mocking justice and despising the truth. But the tongue of the wise is one that builds up, encourages and restores! Seasoned with salt and full of great- the good heart brings good things out of that heart by way of godly speech. The wise are patient with their words- 17:27 says whoever restrains his words has knowledge, he who has a cool spirit is a man of understanding. Instead of being combative, the wise one keeps a level head and is willing to let the matter go. For without words an argument dies! Avoid unnecessary or unhelpful quarrels- these seek to build up and be a blessing! As 16:24 says, gracious words are like honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and health to the body. But don't assume that these words are weak! No- it is a soft answer that turns away wrath- a soft tongue that breaks a bone- 25:15. By wisdom we learn to speak the right words in the right way! As 25:11 says, a word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver. A wise answer is a thing

of beauty and great worth! The fact is, words have great use and power. They can build up and tear down. Bless or curse. Words also shape. Not only do our words reflect what is in our heart- the character of our inner being- but words also shape others. We hold great power of influence over others. Words have a unique power to not only convey a message, but also to convince of truth! We know that Jesus uses the words of the gospel to shape up- to convince us of the truth. He molds us into His image- by telling us how to live in the way of wisdom and life. The Spirit of Christ uses the Word to teach us- and our speech begins to reflect wisdom. These kinds of words endure- for truthful lips endures forever, but a lying lip is but for a moment- 12:19. True words have a way of lasting- but lies will always be exposed in the end!

III. Wise Actions

In our final point we see that the character of our heart develops into the words of our lips and the way in which we live! What we do is the end result and fruit of what we believe! If we think that we do not need instruction- if we are proud and rude in our mind that will display itself in how we act! As 16:27 says, there is a way that seems right to man, but its end is the way of death. Doing what is right in our own eyes will destroy not only the lives around you, but your own life as well! A worthless man plots evil- the wages of the wicked are sin and death as ch. 10 says. The actions of the foolish- as we have seen in our series- only bring ruin, destruction and bondage and they ultimately lead to death! They destroy your life- the life of others- and leads to the path of darkness. But the wise man's works are a blessing! His actions bring light and life to himself and others. He seeks to be a benefit and a blessing! He builds homes and families- taking his place in the church and society- and the people call him blessed! He is one who walks in integrity- as 20:7 says. What is integrity? It is a truthful character and action! He speaks the truth from his heart- and even better- he does what he says and does what is right! His good thoughts lead to good words and good actions! He is consistent and dependable! He is also righteous- keeping the Law of the

Lord. AS 19:16 says, whoever keeps the commandments keeps his life. He loves the Law of the Lord- obeying the commandments of God from a heart of gratitude.

In our works and actions, a Christian is motivated by God's goodness and seeks to reflect God's goodness. The blessings that God has given to us moves us to thanksgiving. His Spirit plants His Word within and our hearts are made new. It is from these new hearts that godly character can flow. When we are born again by the Spirit- we can and will have good thoughts, words and actions. To say this another way- the Fear of the LORD is the root of a wise character! Jesus Christ has paid for your sins, has washed you and made you clean, and has ransomed you. Your thoughts, words and actions flow from this new identity! We seek to be a good reflection of the goodness God has shown us! Our desire is to be holy in character because our God is holy in His character. As 19:23 says- the fear of the Lord leads to life. True wisdom starts when you trust in Christ- believe in Him and obey His Word. Trusting in the Savior and by the strength of the Spirit- following His way. In this way we reveal what our hearts are like- as 20:11 says- you make yourself known by your actions. As we come to the Lord's Table, we are reminded of our sin and our need to grow more and more like Christ. We continue to need His body and blood to feed us as we grow in His image! So today we see that Jesus teaches and enables us to guard our heart so that our character would be wise. So where the good way is, walk in that path! Where wisdom is found, go in that way! Your heart reflects your being- so guard your heart and commit yourself to wisdom's way!