

The book of Proverbs is a book which is full of sayings. And we might be tempted to think that these sayings are meant as good advice, right? You just listen to this is advice, and life will be generally better for you. But Christians, Proverbs is not a book written to give you tips about living. Proverbs is a book that is written to describe what it means to follow after wisdom, what it means to follow after God. And so if we want to know what that way looks like, we need only consider what it is that Proverbs has to say.

Because the Bible shows us, Christians, that there are really only two ways in life. And the Bible describes these two ways in lots of different ways. Sometimes in Proverbs it's called the way of wisdom and the way of folly. Sometimes in Proverbs it's called the way of life and the way of death. Sometimes in Proverbs it's called the way of righteousness and the way of wickedness. And Jesus himself in Matthew chapter 7 calls them the narrow way and the wide away. But whatever you want to call these two ways doesn't make that much of a difference. What matters is that there is not a third option. There's not multiple ways in which we could go. There is either the one way or the other. And everyone who lives is on one of these two ways. There's no exceptions. But these two ways also go to very different places. Because the way of life leads to life, but the way of death leads to death. Or to put it in a different way, the one way leads us to heaven and the other way leads us to hell. So the question that Proverbs asks you today is this: which way are you on? Which way are you going down?

Now, of course, we'd probably be quick to say we're on the road to life, right? We're on the way to heaven. That's what everybody's going to say. Everything is just fine for us. But consider what Jesus has to say in Matthew chapter 7: "Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few." So, the narrow gate, the gate which leads us to heaven, the way which leads to life, is a hard gate. And those who find it are going to be few. Because it's not enough for us to just claim to be on that way. As Jesus tells us in verse 21 of Matthew 7: "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord' will enter the kingdom of heaven." In this sense, words aren't enough. We need something else to show that we are, in fact, on the way which leads to life.

So what is that? What is the proof that shows us that we are on that way? Jesus continues in verse 21, when he says: "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven." So that's the difference, then. It's not just words. It is those who do the will of the Father. They are the ones who are following the way of life. But what is that will? What is it that God wants us to do? To believe in the one whom he has sent. As Jesus tells us in John 6, verse 40: "This is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day." So Christians, Jesus is the way to life. Jesus is the way to heaven. Jesus and Jesus alone is the one who will lead us down the right path. And when we are in him, Christians, our lives are going to show that. You'll be able to see it. Because we're not walking in the way of darkness. We are no longer in the works of the flesh, as we heard in Galatians. We are now walking by the Spirit, so that we are walking in the light of Christ. Because Jesus Christ is the one way which leads us to heaven.

So with that, then, we can understand the point of the book of Proverbs. It's not a bunch of advice on how to live your life. This whole book is meant to show us what it means to follow Jesus, what it means to walk in the light of life. In our particular passage in Proverbs chapter 4, which is an introduction to the book, it's a call to us to hold on to that life and to turn away from the way of wickedness. To hold on to Christ and to turn away from the world. Because Christ is the one who leads us to life, and wickedness, the way of the world, is the way that leads us to death. So, as the Lord tells us: "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."

So what does that mean then, Christians, to keep your heart? To guard it so that we walk on the way of life? It means holding on to those things which God has given to us, those gifts which we have which lead us to him. So first of all, that means holding onto the Word of God, the very Scriptures themselves, the voice of the living God, the words of eternal life. Because when we delight in them, as the Psalms say, we will see that these are worth more than gold, even much fine gold. And so when we reflect on them and think about them day and night, we are doing something that will keep us away from temptation. It will keep us away from evil. Because the time which we spend in his Word is time which we spend with him.

The second thing that we have is prayer, coming before the Lord and bringing our petitions to him. Because when we pray to him, Christians, we are with him. And by prayer, we can resist temptation. By prayer, we can put evil to flight. Evil will be driven away from us when we are spending time in prayer. So yes, Christians, we should pray to our Father, because this is one of the weapons which he has given us in our spiritual struggle.

The third thing which we have, of course, are the sacraments: Baptism and the Lord's Supper, which are not only given to us to forgive us our sins, but also to strengthen our faith. Because it is there that we meet God. It is there that God himself gives himself as a gift, so that he is living and dwelling within us. And the Holy Spirit is making us new through that gift.

The fourth thing which we should hold on to is charity or almsgiving, or even more generally speaking, good works. Because God has not created us to be all by ourselves. God has created us to take care of one another. And when we use what we have in the service of one another, when we use what we have to take care of the needs of someone else, then we are doing what God would have us do. Because Jesus has given us himself so that we might live.

The last thing which we have, Christians, is self-denial or restraint. Because Jesus himself commands us to take up our cross and to follow after him. And when we push back against the world in that way, then we will be able to resist the temptation, because the world will no longer have an allure to us. When we take up our cross, we become like Jesus. And in all of these things, we are being conformed to the image of God's Son. So all of these things, Christians, are meant to strengthen us, to cause us to walk in the way which leads to life. And when we abide in them as God would have us do, then we will be strengthened, and we will guard our hearts against all evil.

So Christians, avoid Folly. Avoid the way of wickedness. Turn away from sin. That way will lead you only to death. But hold on to wisdom. Hold on to Jesus Christ, because he is life for all who trust in him.

Let us pray. Lord God, heavenly Father, you have given us your Son, Jesus Christ, to set us in the way of life and to call us to yourself. We pray that you would strengthen us in everything, so that we may follow after him with all that we have. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.