

LIVING IN THE LIGHT OF THE WORD — 3

HOW TO LIVE IN THE LIGHT OF THE WORD

For the last two issues, we've focused on this passage:

²⁰*My son, pay attention to what I say; listen closely to my words.*

²¹*Do not let them out of your sight, keep them within your heart;*

²²*for they are life to those who find them and health to a man's whole body.*

²³*Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.*

²⁴*Put away perversity from your mouth; keep corrupt talk far from your lips.*

²⁵*Let your eyes look straight ahead, fix your gaze directly before you.*

²⁶*Make level paths for your feet and take only ways that are firm.*

²⁷*Do not swerve to the right or the left; keep your foot from evil.*

Proverbs 4:20-27

Get the heart right and everything else should drop into place. Ignore the heart and seek to deal only with behaviour, and ultimately we *will* lose. Dealing with behaviour can mow the lawn of our lives, clear away the leaves, and neaten the edges, leaving us cosmetically "coiffured" and temporarily tidy. But it doesn't deal with the seeds and the weeds and the other root issues. Life still flows from the inside out.

Last issue we dealt with the root — with *When, Why* and *How* to Guard the Heart. In the light of that, we must now *choose* to walk it out in practical terms. Having dealt with the root, it's a series of *choices* we now make.

The remainder of the Proverbs passage gives four aspects of practical outworking, concerning our *mouth*, our *eyes*, our *feet*, and our *direction*.

Concerning our *mouth*, uncorrupted speech

Here is verse 24 in various translations:

Put away perversity from your mouth; keep corrupt talk far from your lips. (NIV)

Put away from you a deceitful mouth and put devious speech far from you. (NAS)

Put away from you crooked speech, and put devious talk far from you. (ESV)

Put away from you false and dishonest speech, and wilful and contrary talk put far from you. (AMP)

Never say anything that isn't true. Have nothing to do with lies and misleading words. (GNB)

No perversity, no deceitful, crooked or dishonest speech. To use the well-worn legal phrase, "The truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth." No devious talk, lies or misleading words.

A major thing for us as brothers and sisters in the Church of Jesus Christ is how we speak to each other. It's partly in the area of simple truth, but also in the area of corrupt and corrupting speech. In Ephesians we read: "*Do not let any unwholesome [or corrupt] talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who*

listen" (Eph 4:29). The word translated "unwholesome" or "corrupt" is literally "rotten". A rotten word may have been ripe once.

So if it's not true or not helpful or not edifying, don't say it—and don't *listen* to it—for that's destructive.

We say, "I couldn't help it — it just slipped out." Wrong! *You* are in control. It may well have "slipped out", but take responsibility. "I couldn't help it" is an excuse, and it's not true.

People have often said to me, "If I'm *thinking* it, I may as well *say* it!" And they'll sometimes add, "After all, I don't want to be a hypocrite." I tell them they're self-absorbed. If I'm holding a gun to a person's head, I may be *thinking* about pulling the trigger. But whether or not I go ahead and *do* so makes a major difference to the person concerned! Your *thoughts* affect mainly *you*. But *words* hurt and crush and wound.

We can feel like a pressure cooker, and as the pressure mounts we want to *blow*! The motivation to blow out the words is selfish — "If I get my thoughts out, I'll *feel* better." And we may well feel better. But who has been damaged in the process by our "words of release"?

The matter of corrupted speech affects us all. When we hear these things, we can *all* be convicted. Why? Perhaps because the Bible says: "*If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to keep his whole body in check.*" (Jas 3:2). None of us is perfect, so we all have things to work on.

"... *out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks*" (Mt 12:34). Therefore, out of a guarded heart, we can take responsibility and *choose* to live in the light of the Word as regards our speaking.

Concerning our eyes, undistracted focus

Proverbs 4:25 - "*Let your eyes look straight ahead, fix your gaze directly before you.*"

The Psalmist prays, "*Turn my eyes away from worthless things.*" (Ps 119:37). The New Testament exhorts us to fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, and on the unseen and the eternal (see Heb 12:2; 2 Cor 4:18).

It's easy to be distracted. Sometimes we see people walking, looking away and looking around, frequently bumping into things, always having to apologise — "Sorry, I wasn't looking where I was going." Really it's so simple: we stay focused by looking straight ahead.

So the racehorse runs in blinkers. If all it sees is the course ahead, there's nothing to distract it.

Because we know that in the end he sank, we can easily forget that Peter actually walked on water! He got out of the boat, and took his first tentative steps in response to the Lord's word to him — "Come." And then he walked on the water all the way to Jesus. So why did he sink? Perhaps it was about focus. As he drew closer to Jesus, he didn't have to focus so intently. He could still see Jesus and also look around. When he saw the wind and waves, he was afraid, moved from faith to fear, and started to go down. There's awesome power in concentration and focus.

We said that one of the gates of the heart was the *eye gate*. What holds our gaze is what we think about. It's also true that what we gaze on is what we become like.

By maintaining our focus and keeping our gaze fixed directly before us, we can *choose* to live in the light of the Word as regards our looking.

Concerning our feet, unwearrying stability

Proverbs 4:26 - "*Make level paths for your feet and take only ways that are firm.*"

If we take the first part of this together with Isaiah 26:7, "*The path of the righteous is level; O upright One, you make the way of the righteous smooth*", we could say that level paths are places where the righteous walk, for God makes the way of the righteous smooth. We need to *choose* to walk right.

*Look carefully then how you walk! Live purposefully and worthily
and accurately, not as the unwise and witless, but as wise
(sensible, intelligent people)
(Eph 5:15 AMP)*

"... and take only ways that are firm." Why *unwearrying* stability? Because when we're weary, we're either *tired* and looking for shortcuts, or *bored* and looking for the thrill of danger. In either case, our feet can take us where we really shouldn't go, in ways that are *not* firm.

The sign says, "Keep off the grass." But we think, "If I walk across the grass, I may get there quicker; and there doesn't seem to be anybody about I think I'll give the grass a go."

Why is the sign there? It may have been put there by someone particular about protecting his grass. It may have been put there by a spoilsport. That's the conclusion we're quick to jump to. But it also may be that in the midst of the grass is a hidden swamp, and the sign is there for our protection and safety! In that case in ignoring it our tiredness or boredom would have caused us to take ways that are anything but firm.

By considering the right course and taking only ways that are firm, we can *choose* to live in the light of the Word as regards our walking.

How do we live in the light of the Word? Concerning our *mouth*, uncorrupted speech. Concerning our *eyes*, undistracted focus. Concerning our *feet*, unwearrying stability.

We have one more aspect to consider, but we'll save that until the next issue.

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August 2006

Note: All Bible quotations are NIV unless otherwise stated.