



Rules To Live By

By Keith Greer

When we read the book of Proverbs, we should remember that Solomon got his wisdom from (1 Kings 3:12). In the beginning of the book, he set an eternal principle: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction" (Proverbs 1:7). In Ecclesiastes, he summed up man's whole duty to God: "Fear Him and keep His commandments" (Ecclesiastes 12:13). By examining, studying, and applying the Bible's teachings, we please our Creator as we walk before him.

God told us we are not able to direct our own steps (Jeremiah 10:23). In Proverbs 4:23-27, Solomon gave five basic rules to help us as we sojourn here on earth. Let's examine them to determine how they can help us live acceptable lives before God.

1. "Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life" (Proverbs 4:23) All actions, good and bad, begin in the heart. Jesus taught this same truth. "But those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile a man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies" (Matthew 15:18-19). Both Christ and Solomon taught that our true treasures are stored in our hearts. "For as he thinks in his heart, so is he! Eat and drink he says to you, but his heart is not with you." (Proverbs 23:7) (Matthew 12:35).

We are responsible for determining what we allow to penetrate our hearts. The world and its evil influences constantly seek to find their way in. Music, TV programs, advertisements, newspapers, magazines, movies, and the world in general all have one aim -- to change the way we think. Our minds are like computers. The things we program into them, we process to create their output. Too many of us need to clean up our minds. We begin by filtering out the things that can lead us to do wrong, and therefore to displease God.

Do you have trouble controlling your thoughts? Could it be that you allow your mind to wander into places where it should not be. If our hearts are clean, our eyes are less likely to be led away into places where lust and ungodliness take root. The world, by constantly redefining what is right and what is wrong, attempts to change our values and morals. Our minds are slowly programmed to accept that some things are not as bad as they used to be. Homosexuality is not unnatural; it is just an alternate lifestyle. How do they package such a bill of goods? TV programs and movies depict the homosexual lifestyle as normal and put it into a good light. Little by little, they reconstruct the way we view sin. Do not be deceived. Do not allow modern thinking to change the pure truth of the gospel.

"Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter! Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight." (Isaiah 5:20,21). We must guard our hearts continually, ensuring that what we put in them is godly, righteous, pure, holy, and not sinful and unrighteous. This is a job that one can never take too lightly. What we think upon is what will eventually be practiced in our lives. We need to be serious about this.

2. "Put away from you a deceitful mouth, and put perverse lips far from you" {Proverbs 4:24}. Yes, the tongue is one of the most powerful members in the entire body. "Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things. See how great a forest a little fire kindles! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell" {James 3:5,6}. Many problems, heartaches, and discouragements can be traced back to this small body part. Each person has one, and each person controls how he/she uses it.

The scriptures contain much warning about the tongue. "If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion is useless" {James 1:26}. "But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth" {Colossians 3:8}. When

we leave our hearts unguarded, our emotions can take over. Anger, bitterness, resentment, envy, and hatred can cause us to unleash our tongues as weapons that can cut more deeply than sharp knives! It has often been said, that in one moment, a loose tongue can destroy a lifetime of good works.

Do you have trouble controlling your tongue? Do you listen to such things as dirty jokes, gossip, and backbiting, and then pass them on to others? Do we spend more time using our tongues to run people down than in building them up? We always seem to find evil things to tell about people; but we seldom share the good things. "Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so" {James 3:10}.

Our speech should tell others something about us -- and it does! Men judge us by what we say. "Sound speech that cannot be condemned, that one who is an opponent may be ashamed, having nothing evil to say of you" {Titus 2:8}. We forget that by our words, we can do much damage to the cause of Christ and His church. I knew a sister who bowled weekly with the mother of another of our members. The member's mother was not a Christian and, to this day, has not obeyed the gospel. I believe one of the reasons she hasn't obeyed is that her friend, who is a Christian, continually said unkind things to this lady about the preacher and the church members. She attacked the sermons concerning worldliness and spread nasty tales about church members and how ungodly their lives were. No wonder this lady hasn't obeyed the gospel. Why would she desire to join a bunch of people like that! This sister will give an account of the way she used her tongue with her friend!

"All the words of my mouth are with righteousness; nothing crooked or perverse is in them. They are all plain to him who understands, and right to those who find knowledge" {Proverbs 8:8,9}. There is great temptation to use our tongues to do evil and harm. We must be careful what we say, how we say it, and what our words tell others about our love for the Lord and His cause. Never forget the power of your tongue, use it wisely, and not to your soul's harm. "But I say to you that every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment" {Matthew 12:36}.

3. "Let your eyes look straight ahead, and your eyelids look right before you" {Proverbs 4:25}. Many times, we have problems with where we go and what we do because of where we look. We often look at things that can bring only sin and heartache if we follow where our eyes lead us.

So many sins begin because of wandering eyes. Where should we direct our eyes? Solomon said "straight ahead." I believe that implies that we should focus on things before us, not on the things around us. "Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" {Philippians 3:13,14}. Many become discouraged when they "look back" with regret at some of the things they gave up when they came to Christ. Such thinking makes our service to Christ difficult. "...No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God" {Luke 9:62}. Our eyes should focus on the Lord. "Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" {Hebrews 12:2}.

We need to focus our eyes on the cross and remember the price that Christ paid to redeem us. "Who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness -- by whose stripes you were healed" {1 Peter 2:24}. Our salvation did not come cheap -- it cost the life of God's only Son! If we keep our eyes on Him and on His cross, it will keep our mouths from deceit." The lamp of the body is the eye. Therefore, when your eye is good, your whole body also is full of light. But when your eye is bad, your body also is full of darkness" {Luke 11:34}. We must keep our eyes on the path that can lead us to heaven and not on the worldly path that leads to eternal destruction!

The wise man, Job, gave some excellent advice. "I made a covenant with my eyes; why then should I look upon a young woman" {Job 31:1}. All of us would do well to make such a covenant with our eyes; to keep them from wandering and looking at things which could lead us to sin against Him. If one determines to keep from the path of evil, he must, of necessity, keep his eyes focused on spiritual -- not temporal -- matters. Dear reader, what do your eyes see? If you follow after what you see, will it bring you closer

to God, or further away from Him? The choice of what to look at is in your hands; and depending on your choices, your faith will be stronger or weaker.

4. "Ponder the path of your feet, and let all your ways be established" {Proverbs 3:26}. The word, ponder, means "To weigh in the mind with thoroughness and care." We must give serious thought to what direction we take in life. Careful deliberation is called for because of what is at stake. If a man walks around a steep cliff, he carefully measures his steps to prevent falling over. To keep our feet from wandering into dangerous areas, we must be diligent about charting our courses.

We must constantly check to determine the path we are following, and where we are going. "Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? -- unless indeed you are disqualified" {2 Corinthians 13:5}. Keeping our feet on the correct paths will prevent our going into dangerous places. "I thought about my ways, and turned my feet to Your testimonies" {Psalm 119:59}. In Proverbs, Solomon warned his readers to avoid the paths of evil men. "My son, do not walk in the way with them, keep your foot from their paths" {Proverbs 1:15}.

The best way to walk in good paths is to walk according to God's wisdom -- and not according to the wisdom of men. "See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil" {Ephesians 5:15,16}. How could any person find better paths than those ordained by God? "Uphold my steps in Your steps, that my footsteps may not slip" {Psalm 17:5}. "The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord, and He delights in his way" {Psalm 37:23}. How can I go about choosing the best paths? By looking into God's word and allowing it to show us the ways that are safe. "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" {Psalm 119:105}.

5. "Do not turn to the right or the left; remove your foot from evil" {Proverbs 3:27}. This rule discusses the need for commitment and determination to stay on course. Each Christian must trust in God's word and have confidence that the things it contains are the things to pursue. Some Christians start out on the right path, but they get

sidetracked and go back to the world's path. "For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning" {2 Peter 2:20}.

God designed a path for us, and His is the only path that leads to eternal glory. His word must govern our lives, and we must maintain His course until we are no longer living in this world. "Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it" {Matthew 7:13,14}.

The path to heaven is straight; it is filled with those who are holy and pure. "The highway of the upright is to depart from evil; he who keeps his way preserves his soul" {Proverbs 16:17}. Isaiah painted the picture very clearly. "A highway shall be there, and a road, and it shall be called the Highway of Holiness, the unclean will not pass over it, but it shall be for others..." {Isaiah 35:8}. The road to heaven involves many different steps, but each follows the "blueprint" our Maker established.

If we follow the teaching in these five basic rules, we will gain direction and hope as we travel through life. Faithful travelers will eventually find the way to the heavenly city where they will forever be with God and His Son. What road are you traveling dear friend? Will it lead you to the heavenly shore where God awaits your arrival?