

Proverbs Week #38 (4:3-4)

When I was a son to my father, tender and the only son in the sight of my mother, then he taught me and said to me, "Let your heart hold fast my words; Keep my commandments and live..." Proverbs 4:3-4

Last week I asked the question to the children, "How do you respond when your parents come to you and try to teach you something? Do you stop what you are doing or try to multi-task and "listen" while you are playing a game, watching TV, or engaging in some other activity?" I mentioned that last week's verses served as a STOP SIGN and directed you to "be attentive" to the teaching that your parents provide. The lessons that we learn from the wisdom of Proverbs require us to be involved in the learning process. This learning is in a family environment.

Our verses this week provide a glimpse at an intimate family setting. It recalls a story of a mother and father who taught their son when he was still young and when he held a special place in their eyes. It is here that the parents directed, "Let your heart hold fast my words." But what we see here is more than just a mother and father teaching their son. We see a third generation. The father is speaking to his son about the son's grandmother and grandfather. The wisdom that is being taught is generational and the son is being instructed to consider the keeping of these commandments as life itself. He says in effect, "Your grandfather (my father) told me to keep his commandments and live." The first verses of this chapter ask the son to pay attention and our verses today add the context that he should pay attention to the advice of his father, mother, and grandparents.

Let's stop for a minute and think about these verses as they might apply to families in our community. We see in our verses a child, a father, and grandparents.

As I continue to teach these children's lessons through the Proverbs, I also want to keep in mind how we as a community are also involved in taking the message of the Torah to the next generation. Not everyone has young children or even a family of their own. One aspect of today's lesson that I want to focus on and apply to everyone is the importance of fostering and maintaining a community that functions like a family. At first that may not seem like a positive idea. Many of us look back on family relationships with mixed or even bad memories. The family I'm thinking of is the type of family that is a family after God's own heart. These words from the Apostle Paul give us advice on how that family functions and conducts itself.

"Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth each one of you with his neighbor, for we are members of one another. Be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not give the devil an opportunity. He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have something to share with one who has need. Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear. Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in the Messiah also has forgiven you."
Ephesians 4:25-32

In context, Paul taught these words and was thinking about a healthy community. He describes it as a body where each person does their part. When that is happening the body grows into the fullness of the Messiah and it matures past childhood to a stature that can endure the storms that buffet it. If we have placed our faith and hope in Yeshua as our Messiah and Master then we are a part of that body. The Spirit of God seals those who are redeemed and our failure to live lives that are right in His eyes can grieve Him. As someone who is now a grandfather I say to you, "Keep God's commandments and live."