

Dr. August Konkell, Proverbs, Session 5

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Welcome back to Proverbs. This is our 5th session of the book of Proverbs. We're going to talk about a series of talks in introducing the whole book of Proverbs.

We have already established that the first nine chapters are a set of talks of parents to the children. So, what we're going to do in this talk is look at a number of them that are fairly closely related. They all talk of the way in which the father addresses the child or the parent, I should say, addresses the child.

Because the Proverbs include father and mother, as we have it in chapter 1, verse 8. So, we use father as a shorthand in Hebrew, but it's the way the parents instruct the child. So, we're going to look at these several different little talks. The first one occurs in chapter 3, or I should say, actually, it's the third one.

Chapter 2 was the second of the talks. It's the third in the series. The first that we're going to look at today occurs in chapter 3, the first 12 verses.

A very, very powerful little piece that I have preached from many, many times because it has so many key themes. It begins with the parent addressing the child, saying, do not forget my instruction. Guard my commandments in your mind.

Keep these values at the front of your thinking. Because that's the way in which you get good days or long days. It instructs you in mercy and faithfulness.

This is a way of thinking. To be human is to be merciful, as the church fathers have said. But, of course, the mercy that we have as humans is the mercy that comes from God.

So, it is this mercy that grants us favor and dignity between God and between people. It is just the fundamental thing to the fundamental issue of life, our relationships with other people, how we get along with others. And that all starts with something we've already called the fear of the Lord, which we have said is a dependency on God, rejecting the idea that we ourselves have the ability to determine what is right and what is wrong within our own thinking.

So, trust in the Lord with all your mind and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways, know him and he will direct your path. Do not be wise in your own eyes.

Fear God and turn from what is wrong. Now, that's just the fundamental thing. Stay away from that tree of knowledge.

This does not mean you don't use your intellect. Proverbs is all about using your intellect. It's all about thinking and understanding.

But the problem is this notion of independence that I am free to be whatever I decide I want to be. Humans have this innate striving for power. And in this desire to have power, they want to have the freedom to just do what they want to do, irrespective of anything else.

It's the fatal flaw. Wisdom says, fear the Lord. When God says life works this way, then life works this way.

And if you wander from that way to go your own way, to trust your own decisions about what is right, and lean on your understanding, what you're going to get is death. What you're going to get is destruction. What you're going to get is that day of calamity, as Lady Wisdom said back in her call.

So, this is just a fundamental reaffirmation of that. So then, what happens if we can follow wisdom as this guide to faith and life? You know, it's rather interesting. Benefits for health, it's going to be healing to your bones.

Benefits in wealth, your barns are going to be filled with plenty. And the benefits of correction, God is going to help you to know when you go wrong. Now, this can in itself be a pretty long sermon, and I will resist giving it here.

But I want to point you in the right direction. Are there benefits to health in living the way that wisdom instructs? Oh yes, there are. Is wisdom saying, oh, you're never going to get sick? Well, of course, she's not saying that.

That's not what life is about, determining when we get sick. As a matter of fact, sometimes, some kinds of ailments can be corrected. And that's what we have in the third point.

We often refer to the Apostle Paul's thorn in the flesh, which he prayed three times would be taken away. And he came to the conclusion that something that was actually a benefit that God had given him for his own correction. And he must live with this.

He's ambiguous. No one knows what that thorn was. And we don't know exactly how he dealt with it.

But his point was very simple, God is more interested in our character than he is in us being free from pain. But benefits to wealth. Now, does this mean that there won't be poor people? Well, as a matter of fact, there's a kind of irony in the book of Proverbs.

The person who is humble, is an ani, is the person who trusts God and is dependent on God. The ani is always the person who's poor. Generally speaking, doesn't have any land.

So, therefore, they're quite dependent on others. They work for others. They serve others.

They're not in charge of their own means of life the way some other people are. So, does wisdom grant health and wealth and benefits of correction? Yes, it does. It doesn't say you will be rich.

It doesn't say you will never have an illness. And it doesn't say you will always understand the right thing to do. But I know that many, many times people recognize very clearly that something that they experience as a difficulty is in fact a corrective measure in their lives.

Talk four, life rules. Hold on to competence and discretion. This is what gives you real security.

You know, we want security. I used to be a big fan of Charlie Brown. And of course, as part of the cartoon series, those of you who are closer to my age will remember, there was Linus always carrying around his blanket.

And apparently one day Charlie Brown had decided to have his picnic on the wrong blanket. And as the scene unfolds, Linus has a firm grip on the corner of that blanket. He's wrenching it out from underneath the picnic basket and everything that's under it.

Sandwiches are flying in the air and Linus is saying, that the struggle for security is no picnic. Well, that's something that we understand. And how do you get security? Well, according to Proverbs 3, 21, and 22, you can walk, you can sit, you can sleep.

Now, there's Deuteronomy. Wherever you walk, when you come in your door, when you sit, when you sleep, when you go to bed, these motifs keep showing up. Your life is safe, you're secure.

A life of integrity. You know, it's easy for us to speak about how we need to do what's right with our money. Sometimes it actually comes down to how we deal with our money.

But I can tell you that how you use your money is really going to show you a lot about whether or not you understand wisdom and the fear of the Lord. Because how you deal with your money reflects what it is that's really valuable to you. What is it

that's important to you? And so, if someone has a need and you're tempted to put it off, the wise person is saying, that is not being the neighbor you should be.

When you have it, you make sure you use it. You make sure you give it. You don't scheme with the unsuspecting in order to try to benefit yourself.

Don't pick quarrels. Don't be jealous of the unruly. These things seem simple, but I challenge you to actually keep them in your mind, as Proverbs says, and apply them because most of the time our troubles come from violating these kinds of things.

And then what we will get is a life of dignity. A curse, we will get a blessing instead of a curse. We will get grace instead of scorn.

And we will get honor instead of shame. The contrast that this lecture ends with. In the fifth little talk, which comes in the first part of chapter four, the father explains the way that he learned from his parents.

The child, and especially the adolescent, was a person of very special care. And learning from your parents is a real opportunity. Now, my parents weren't very involved in any of my formal education, but the most important education that I ever received came from my parents.

And now as I look back on my life, I just realize that the things that I learned to value, and the things that I learned were important, I learned from my parents. One of the things I learned from my father, for example, was this whole business of relationships in not scheming, but in keeping your word. And my dad had a commitment to keeping what he said was true, what he thought was important, to keep that commitment to people, even when they really were not expecting that he should have to do that.

And there was one thing I observed was true. If Harold Conkle said he would do something, he would do it. And that made him one of the best neighbors that everybody approved of.

I just learned that. That's how we learn. It's the teaching of the grandfather to the parent because the parent is saying, yes, I learned this from my parents.

So, wisdom must be this thing that is cherished, and it is passed on from generation to generation. Just a little word here about education in Israel, and how did education actually take place. We don't know very much about that at all, but there are little snippets.

And one of them happens in Isaiah 28. In Isaiah 28, the prophet is castigating the people who are supposed to be the teachers and the leaders, that is, the priests and

the prophets. And essentially, there in the capital city, Ephraim, they are living in luxury.

As we read in the book of Amos, they're abusing the poor in order to have their wealth, and they're drunk, and they don't know what they're doing. And the prophet is saying, you know, God is going to bring judgment against you, and of course, that judgment is coming in the form of the Assyrian army, the Lord's strong person. But after the prophet accuses them all of being drunk and incapable of fulfilling their roles, they have this retort.

Who does he think we are? Does he think we're mere infants? Does he think that we're learning tzav, tzav, tav, l'tav? Now, that almost certainly is an indication of the way in which parents taught their children. Perhaps a lot of us learned how to read in school, but in an Israelite situation, a tzav was a Hebrew letter, and a tav was the next Hebrew letter. These aren't the first in the alphabet, but they're in order in the alphabet.

And so the first thing you would start to do was to teach your child the alphabet, and so it would be tzav to tav, tzav to tav. That's what that saying is repeating. And of course, then the prophet says, and what's going to happen is, you mock, and you say, you think we're mere children, and you're going to teach us the alphabet as if we aren't prophets, and if we aren't the priests who know the law.

And then the prophet says, yeah, well, God will speak to you, and it's going to be in the form of the Assyrian army, a foreign tongue, and you're going to listen to him. And then what you're going to hear is, and this is talking about the siege against Jerusalem, and when the armies are all around the city, what you're going to hear is tzav to tav, tzav to tav, tzav to tav, just like an infant learning the alphabet. So, it's pretty clear that in Israel, learning did take place in the home, and literacy took place in the home.

And so, what the teacher is saying here is that learning from your parents is a wisdom that grants you a very special status. That brings us to the warning against the wicked in talk number six. Again, an emphasis on the fact that wisdom must be learned.

There certainly is repetition in Proverbs, quite a lot of repetition in Proverbs, recontextualized in different ways, and very important. And then the parent provides a description of the path of the wicked, that this is the path that must be avoided. It's an open road.

It's just easy to choose that road. So, you have to make sure that you're not wandering from the way that you should go. The wicked are those that can't sleep, if they can't pull someone into their way of life.

And that is so much the pull of culture. I see it all the time. We profess that we're Christians.

We say that we have Christian values. But when you look at the way that we actually live, the values that we hold, and the reputations that we have, we see that the culture, what Proverbs here calls the wicked, has a way of making us wander. So it becomes a little difficult to really distinguish the Christian from the other person, to put this in contemporary terms.

But that is what culture and society do. It says things must be done this way. And here in Canada, where I live, this has come to be a very coercive thing, increasingly coercive.

In fact, our Prime Minister went so far as to say, if you're going to belong to my party, then you're going to approve of abortion. Straightforward and simple. That's the way that the wicked operate.

That's what this proverb is saying. There are the paths of light and the paths of darkness. And the more you know, the better you see the light, the better you're able to stay on the right path.

But in the darkness, of course, the more you get tripped up, and you don't even know what you tripped on. So finally, we come to talk number seven, and what I emphasized before, the right mind. That everything begins in the mind.

And it's especially evident here when we come to verse 23 of this little talk. Of all the things that you watch, guard your mind, for from your mind proceed the decisions of life. You're not what you think you are.

What you think you are. Now I find that very sobering because I don't like some of the things that I catch myself thinking. And to say, but that's what you really are, is then a very disturbing kind of thing.

But this proverb is just really very, very true. Of all the things that you guard, guard your mind. It's really what Jesus said.

You have heard it said, you shall not commit adultery. But I say to you, when you look on that person, to conceive of the way that you could have a relationship with her, the adultery has already begun. That's exactly what Moses said.

He said, you shall not covet. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife. That's the 10 words in Deuteronomy.

You shall not covet your neighbor's wife. Where does the adultery begin? It begins in your head. It doesn't begin in any other place.

So, following the narrow path, as Jesus called it, or as we read about it here in verses 25 to 27, following that narrow path requires focus. It requires that we be very careful about rationalizations that we may be tempted to have. It means that we need to focus on the right things.

So, in these little talks, the parent is seeking to direct the thinking of the child, the thinking of the young person, the adolescent, so that they will stay on what he calls the right path. That is, knowing what it means to make those kinds of decisions that will keep you in the right relationship with God and with people.

This is Dr. August Konkel in his teaching on the book of Proverbs. This is session number 5, Learning to Live, lectures 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7.