

# Sermon 96, Disciplined, Faithful, Righteous Wisdom, Proverbs 29:17-27

**Proposition:** Discipline, faith, and righteousness are key components of wisdom.

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## **Introduction**

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, we proceed apace toward the end of Proverbs. When we finish this sermon, we will have only two chapters of this magnificent book left to look at. Today we come to the close of section 5 of Proverbs. Remember, this section is proverbs by Solomon copied by Hezekiah's men sometime about two hundred years after they were written. Like the other sections of Proverbs, this one emphasizes discipline, which takes up the lion's share of our text today. But it also highlights revelation (the law and the prophets, called here "vision" and "torah"), faith, and righteousness. What we'll see is that discipline, faith, and righteousness are all key components of the wisdom that makes the Father glad.

### **I. The Wisdom of Discipline, vv. 17-26**

We begin by looking at the wisdom of discipline.

## **A. The Promise of Discipline, vv. 17-19**

The sages begin by highlighting three things that discipline will yield. This is the promise of discipline. We know the whole book of Proverbs recommends the discipline of wisdom to us and tells us that Jesus Christ, the ultimate Wise Son, underwent this discipline as He learned obedience. Because Jesus underwent discipline, we know that it holds promises for us too!

### **1. Comfort, v. 17**

The first of those promises is comfort. A disciplined son will bring you comfort, just as the disciplined Son brought God the Father comfort through the perfect performance of His calling to save the world for the Father. Parents, why do you discipline? If the answer is because you want to be obeyed, because you think you ought to, because God tells you to — all of that is good, but it's not God's best! You should discipline for the sake of joy. Discipline rightly administered brings joy to the soul — to the soul of the father and therefore to the soul of the son, and indeed, we can say, to the soul of God Himself. Brothers and sisters, a disciplined son gives comfort and delight. Any discipline that's for any lesser goal than that doesn't live up to what discipline should be. The point is not to be a killjoy. Indeed, discipline rightly understood is the exact opposite of H.L. Mencken's old crack that Puritanism is the haunting fear that somebody, somewhere might be happy. Actually, libertinism is the haunting fear that someone might be miserable, and the attempt to drown the knowledge that one *is* miserable under a load of decadence and excess. Being undisciplined is the surest road to misery, as we'll see in a few moments. God the Father disciplines out of joy and for joy. God the Son brings joy because He was chastened. And if you discipline your children, that too will bring joy to their lives and to yours.

We're going to see an enormous CAUTION sign about discipline farther down in this text. It's in v. 25, and tells us that fear of man, as opposed to the fear of God, is a huge trap. It ensnares people. Brothers and sisters, if you're trying to instill the fear of man into your children that's not the discipline of wisdom! If you want them to fear you, and that is the goal of your discipline, then you have missed the point. The point is that they need to fear God. Yes, fearing you is a healthy part of fearing God. But they will never learn to fear God by fearing you first. Rather, they need to learn to fear Him before they can fear you properly. Don't discipline to teach the fear of man. Discipline only to teach the fear of God. When you do, your discipline will bring joy and life. It will delight your soul. But discipline to teach them to be afraid of you, and your discipline will produce misery and death. Telling your kids to worship you is no better than putting any other idol in their hearts. In fact, it's worse, because then they are idolaters and they have to live with someone who has a god-complex. Don't.

Discipline them to fear God. The rest will take care of itself.

### **2. Happiness, v. 18**

You see the second outcome of discipline is happiness. This verse is one of the more famous ones in this part of Proverbs, and a longtime staple on the conference circuit and in leadership development classes. It doesn't mean that when leaders fail to "cast a vision" the organization

will fall apart. Rather, it is referring to prophetic revelation and to the law of God. Here, then, the law, the prophets, and the wisdom books all meet together. Without God's prophetic revelation, the people will perish. Man lives by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God, and that's why people with no concept of divine revelation (including both general and special revelation) cannot live. When people cast off what God has said, they die. Where there is no revelation, the people perish. But the one who keeps the law of God, who follows God's teaching, is happy! That man is blessed who does not walk in the way of sinners. Of course, how does one gain this happiness? How do you learn to keep the law? Through discipline! By being taught to fear God, you learn to obey Him. By the rod and reproof, you gain an ability to master yourself and keep the law — and then you are not only joyful, but blessed too.

The law is the source of happiness. God's instruction is the source of blessing. And without it? People run wild. How many times this week (this week!) have you used some kind of vocabulary of mental illness to describe what you see happening around us in this country? I guarantee that all of you have said "It's crazy." "This is nuts." "The world has gone mad." Some variant of those sayings has crossed your lips this week; I'm sure of it. Why? Because when God's revelation is ignored, the people run wild. They go nuts. And of course, they are not happy, because the one who keeps the law is happy. The one who disobeys the law is miserable. Do you doubt? Go find someone whose life is given over to breaking God's law and ask him how happy he is. Get beneath the surface a little bit, and you'll find that he is not happy at all. Do you want blessing? Listen to the prophets. Listen to the law. And listen to them not in a haphazard fashion, but in a disciplined fashion. The promise of discipline is that it will bring happiness!

### **3. Obedience, v. 19**

But do more than listen to the law and the prophets. Obey them. What is this verse saying, exactly? I agree with the commentators who say that it is referring to the slave mentality, the bad attitude of the slave that says "I didn't choose this lifestyle and I'm going to do as little work as possible." Not all people with the title "slave" actually have that attitude. But if you have it, then the promise of discipline is that it will teach you to overcome that attitude. Mere words won't solve an attitude problem. Telling someone "you have a bad attitude" isn't going to make their attitude a better attitude. When the attitude is rotten, when the attitude is slavish, you will understand what you're being told. You'll understand it perfectly well. You just won't care enough to do anything about it. But if you submit to discipline, the discipline that goes beyond words and actually deploys physical pain to help you care, then you will be able to obey. That, brothers and sisters, is the promise of discipline.

#### **B. The Peril of the Undisciplined, vv. 20-24**

But though our text states the promise of discipline positively, it also warns us about the peril into which the undisciplined are likely to fall.

### **1. The Hasty Speaker, v. 20**

The first of these undisciplined types is the one who says whatever pops into his head. He is the same one we met before, the man wise in his own eyes. At least, he is one major type of this fellow. The man wise in his own eyes is often guilty of shooting off his mouth! He is convinced that whatever the thoughts of his mind are, they are good, necessary, wholesome thoughts. And so he spouts them off at the first opportunity. He's wise in his own eyes, and he doesn't care who knows it. That man, brothers and sisters, is undisciplined with how he uses his tongue. And that means that he is pretty much hopeless. The regular old fool has a better chance of finding repentance and hope than the man wise in his own eyes.

### **2. The Servant-Pamperer, v. 21**

The next undisciplined type is the servant-pamperer. The problem with this proverb is that we don't know what its last word means. The one who pampers his slave will in the end find him to be a *manon*. That word appears only here in the entire Bible, and frankly, it could mean just about anything. Some translations guess that it's positive — indulge your slave and he'll become your son. Others guess that it's negative — indulge your slave and he'll become arrogant later on. Since we don't actually know what this proverb says, it's not safe to build any conclusions on it. Instead, I would just take the opportunity to observe once again that chapter as a whole celebrates the promise of discipline. The one who fails to discipline can hardly have a good outcome from that failure.

### **3. The Outraged, v. 22**

The outraged person is always sinning. Brothers and sisters, if you are motivated by rage then you are bound to sin. It's that simple. Righteous anger does exist, but it's not common. It's almost never to be found in the downright angry. The outraged are not disciplined in their emotions. They don't control themselves; they let anger control them. Like the man wise in his own eyes who has no ability to restrain his tongue, the angry man has no ability to restrain his flesh.

How do you handle this problem of anger? You have to confess it. You have to work through it. Why are you angry? What real injustice has made you upset? What pain are you avoiding by being outraged? Find that out, and then work on yourself, and you'll find that your anger diminishes. A disciplined man is not angry. He is joyful, even in the face of anger and outrageous treatment.

### **4. The Arrogant, v. 23**

The next undisciplined person is an arrogant wretch. He is driven by pride. As Asaph put it, "They set their mouths against the heavens, and their tongue struts through the earth" (Psa 73:9)! That is the kind of person who will be brought low by his inability to be honest about what he truly is. The humble will be honored, but God will resist the proud.

Do you want God Almighty to be against you? Then go ahead and think well of yourself. Go ahead and walk in the pride that says "I don't need to apologize. I don't need to think before I speak. I don't need to admit when I'm wrong because I'm never wrong. I don't need to consider

the other person's idea, because the other person's idea is stupid." Brothers and sisters, don't! The law of God is against the proud. The law of God says that you are sinful, that you are finite, and that you are far from perfection. Don't be proud; have an accurate view of yourself! How do you do that? By spending time with Jesus and learning His attitude. He is meek and lowly of heart.

### **5. The Accomplice, v. 24**

The final undisciplined type is the accomplice. This fellow has a death wish. He can't testify against the criminal, because then it would come out that he knows all about the robbery because he was getting a piece of the action. He has received stolen goods, so it would be a little awkward for him to turn in the perp. Under the OT law, people could be put under oath and required to tell all they knew. We have that same law, of course — we call it a subpoena, which literally means in Latin "Under penalty of pain." If you knew something and remained silent about it, you were guilty. Brothers and sisters, this comes from being undisciplined. If he had been disciplined, he would not have accepted stolen goods. He would rather be poor than dishonest. If you are conformed to Christ by being with Him, then you too will rather be poor than dishonest!

### **C. Substitutes for Discipline, vv. 25-26**

Well, the next two verses present two activities that can induce a degree of outward conformity to the law of God. They even seem like they are able to provide a degree of happiness. It's illusory, but the illusion is a powerful one.

#### **1. Fear of Man, v. 25**

The first of these is the fear of man. We all know what this is. It is just like the fear of God, except with an unworthy object. People who are subject to the fear of man are driven by worry about what people are going to think. Man-fearers, man-pleasers — call them what you will, they live as the slaves of public opinion. Whatever my friends think, I'm going to do it. Whatever the crowd is pushing for, that's what I'll be pushing for too.

You know what the fear of man is. Some of you are completely wracked by it. All of us have tasted its power. The fear of man is why we lie. It's why we hide our sin. It's why, in the famous phrase, we spend money we don't have to buy stuff we don't need to impress people we don't even like. The fear of man is peer pressure, negative peer pressure, turned up from "pressure" to "morbid terror." And it brings a snare. If you live for the approval of the in-crowd, the cool kids, or anyone else, you are not living for the approval of Jesus Christ! If you live for the approval of your pastor, your spouse, or your mother-in-law, you are not living for the approval of Christ. And in this sense, the fear of man is the opposite of the fear of God. It excludes the fear of God. It makes you a craven creature, one who flees when no one is pursuing, who dreads what other people are thinking when chances are that they aren't thinking about you and your problems at all.

The fear of man is a substitute for discipline because it can produce some conformity to community norms. In fact, it can produce a lot of conformity to community norms. If you figure

out that you will be shunned for certain thoughts, questions, or behaviors, you get really good at either abstaining from those behaviors or at least hiding them from your neighbors' prying eyes. Yet that is not discipline. Discipline is the training that helps you do the right thing because it is the right thing. Discipline is a moral workout that strengthens your ability to obey God. Fear of man is not a moral workout. Fear of man doesn't strengthen you; it weakens you. It takes away your ability to serve and obey God because you have a different master and you want to serve and obey him.

## **2. Rent-Seeking, v. 26**

The second substitute for discipline is rent-seeking. This is the practice of trying to get the power of the state to send favors and customers your way. In those days, it consisted of trying to get noticed by the king so he would give you some gold or some land somewhere. These days, it consists of special interest lobbyists that pressure legislators to tilt the playing field in favor of some industry, group, or profession. Again, the result looks disciplined. Someone who single-mindedly pursues the attempt to coax favors from the state appears to be disciplined. But he is not disciplined; he is not trained in the ability to do the right thing and please God. Instead, he is putting his strength to an evil use. He is using his talents to extort things that don't belong to him rather than using it to serve God.

Don't give way to the fear of man or to rent-seeking. Both are abominations in the sight of God. And both are a negation of faith.

### **II. The Wisdom of Faith, vv. 25-26**

Yes, faith is required. Discipline is good. But it is not alone in the practice of wisdom. Faith is there too.

#### **A. It Exalts, v. 25**

And what does faith do? It exalts the one who has it. Faith lifts you out of the pitfall into which the fear of man topples you. The fear of man puts you into a dark, hopeless hole. The fear of God, otherwise known as faith in God or trust in God, raises you into the heavenly places and seats you with Christ. Faith exalts. This doesn't mean that other people will worship you, or that your socio-economic class will suddenly change for the better. It means instead that you will be joyful throughout your life. You will meet life from a high place, not a low place. You will be able to get your mind and actions out of the gutter. Your character will be high and noble, even if your social status is low and beggarly. Faith exalts. That is the promise of God.

#### **B. It Reorients Hope Toward the Father of Justice, v. 26**

The other thing faith does is reorient your hope. Many seek the ruler's favor. Many say we ought to pass laws requiring the state to give favorable treatment to black Americans. But does justice for man come from the state? Will the state make everything right? Can it do so? Of course not! To ask the question is to answer it. The state is an institution run by wicked people, and it will not be able to set everything right. Justice comes from Yahweh. When you have faith, you believe that He will bring justice. And that's what gives you the patience to simultaneously live with injustice and work for greater justice in this wicked world. If you think that the only justice

that will ever happen is what we can bring, you might become a self-righteous crusader. But if you have any self-awareness whatsoever, your self-righteous crusading will burn out rather quickly. Why? Because you'll have to recognize that no matter how much you do, there will always be more injustice that you can't possibly hope to tackle. I don't care whether you're president of the United States, secretary-general of the United Nations, or what. No earthly power can perfect this world and fix it all! But if you trust that God is putting it all to rights, that gives you the courage to do your part without becoming a nasty crusader or giving up altogether when confronted with the size of the task. Just as being loved is what gives you the ability to love, so being treated justly by God is what gives you the ability to do justice and patiently endure injustice during your earthly sojourn.

So the wisdom of faith exalts you and keeps you willing to endure misery and injustice while patiently seeking greater justice.

### **III. The Wisdom of Righteousness, v. 27**

Finally, then, we see the wisdom of righteousness. Our verse here tells us that being righteous does two things.

#### **A. It Makes You Intolerant of Evil**

First, it makes you intolerant. The more righteous you are, the more you hate evil. The caricature (and it's all too true in too many cases) of the hypocritical Christian who condemns adultery but commits it himself comes to mind here. Intolerance of evil is NOT about denouncing other people in the culture wars. Intolerance of evil means a settled commitment to rooting every last vestige of wickedness out of your own heart and life. You have no right, and indeed no ability, to confront evil in the public square while you are coddling it in your own heart. If you tolerate your own wickedness, your value to the culture wars and to stopping societal sin is zero. Indeed, it's negative. You are part of the problem, not the solution. Every wonder why the church is so singularly ineffective in stopping moral decay? I just gave you the answer. When morally fouled-up people are the only ones standing against sin, no one is standing against sin. Not really. Because if you were really standing against sin, you'd stand against your own first and foremost. Yes, the righteous are intolerant of the wicked. They won't stand for the wicked being wicked around them. But the only way to create and sustain moral fiber is to, you know, be moral. And the only way to do that is to be full of the Holy Spirit of God. He comes to you when you fear God and live for Christ. And if you won't fear God and won't live for Christ, then you will never know the wisdom of righteousness — or the joy of denouncing evil and really meaning it.

#### **B. It Makes Evil Intolerant of You**

The downside, if you can call it that, is that genuine righteousness will make evil intolerant of you. You will be called names like "counterrevolutionary," "homophobe," and more. Your intransigence and unwillingness to let evil happen will earn you the badge of honor: being denounced by the world as insufficiently moral. When people with the moral sensibilities of a dictator, or the aesthetic sensibilities of a chimpanzee, call you immoral, that's a compliment. You will be an abomination to the wicked, just like Jesus of Nazareth was. Are you ready for

that? No. Most of you aren't. I'm not. And we won't be ready for it until we have spent more time with Him, learning to be like Him, learning to love Him no matter what. We won't be ready to be treated like abominations until we have learned to be upright in the way and to hate all sin passionately and our own sins most of all. When we have learned perfectly to hate the sin and love the sinner, to wage war on evil and to save people from the jaws of hell, to love like our Master and denounce evil like He did, then we shall be ready to be treated as abominations.

In other words, brothers and sisters, we need to get cracking. Our status as "abominations" is being traced into the wet cement of culture even now. Within a few months, a few years at most, it will be written in stone. The barrage has already started. It's directed against the Trump voters. It's directed against the evangelical old guard. It's directed against anyone who holds to biblical sexual ethics. It's directed against anyone who holds to six-day creationism. And it says that we are an abomination, too disgusting to share this earth with the paragons of woke sensitivity who run Harvard and *The New York Times* and the rest of our cultural institutions.

Are you ready to be an abomination because you believe in discipline, you believe in chastity, you believe in Jesus of Nazareth and know that just as He was crucified by a colonizing empire you probably will be as well? Are you ready?

The proverbs of Solomon end here. This is his last word in the book of Proverbs. It tells us that the wise son is ready to be mocked, to be an outcast, to be an abomination because of his views and his attitude and his actions. When you know the wisdom of discipline and the wisdom of faith, then you will learn the wisdom of being a pariah. Don't grow weary. Don't flee from it. Instead, look to the Father of Justice. Look to the one who exalts.

If you live for the fear of man, you won't discipline. You won't be willing to be an abomination according to the world. And you will perish because of it. Don't do that. The one who trusts God and accepts His discipline will be exalted — maybe not here on earth, but where it counts, in Heaven where your treasures are anyway. That's where you'll find comfort and happiness: in the arms of the Wise Son, who keeps your treasures. Amen.