

“THREE THINGS NOT TO DO”

I. Introduction

- A. It doesn't take very much for a person to make a real mess out of their life.
 - 1. An unwise decision, a bad habit, an impulsive response -- such things can have disastrous results that are felt for a long time, sometimes even for the rest of a person's life.
 - 2. This is the kind of thing that the book of Proverbs is seeking to prevent.
 - 3. As we have noted before in this series, the purpose of Proverbs is to give us skill for living.

- B. While the individual proverbs speak to a wide array of life issues, the first nine chapters, which are cast in the form of a father exhorting his son about life, have a more narrow focus.
 - 1. The general emphasis in these chapters is upon the importance of getting wisdom and how to obtain it.
 - 2. And as far as specific topics are concerned, no subject receives more attention in these nine chapters than the one that we addressed in last week's sermon: the subject of sexuality.
 - 3. Beyond that, the only other topics that receive any extended treatment are the ones that are addressed in the passage that is before us tonight.
 - 4. This tells us that these are matters of great consequence.
 - 5. In these verses, the father uses three negative examples in order to teach his son about three extremely important aspects of life: money, work, and how we treat other people.

II. Don't Secure Someone Else's Debt

- A. In the first section, the father tackles the subject of money by showing his son the danger of putting up security for a neighbor.
1. The same point is reiterated at a number of points throughout Proverbs.
 2. For example, Proverbs 11:15 says, "Whoever puts up security for a stranger will surely suffer harm, but he who hates striking hands in pledge is secure."
 3. Clearly, the writer wants to impress this point upon his readers.
 4. Don't be a surety for someone else.
 5. Don't cosign a loan.
 6. Don't assume the responsibility for paying somebody else's debt if they should happen to default.
 7. The father does not argue against this by saying that it is morally wrong; he simply points out that it is generally unwise.
 8. When a person engages in this practice, he is making his finances subject to matters that are completely out of his hands.
- B. Perhaps the father's warning seems a little harsh.
1. Perhaps it seems stingy and selfish.
 2. After all, shouldn't we be generous?
 3. We certainly should be.

4. God makes it clear at numerous places in his word that he wants his people to be generous and to show compassion to those who are in need.
 5. But the teaching in these verses shows us that there is a difference between generosity and gambling.
 6. While we should be generous, we should also be prudent.
 7. Proverbs' repeated warnings against putting up security for others teaches us that we should not risk what we can't afford to lose.
 8. This is a basic principle that governs the world of finance.
 9. The recent housing crisis illustrated this, as banks put people in homes that they couldn't afford and those banks ended up paying for their mistake.
 10. We should not be financially irresponsible ourselves, nor should we do things that encourage others to be financially irresponsible.
 11. The point being made in verses 1-5 is summed up well by Derek Kidner: "a man's giving should be fully voluntary: its amount (cf. 22:27) determined by him... and not wrung from him by events outside of his control." [68]
- C. The principles communicated in these verses also speaks to matters like gambling and buying lottery tickets.
1. People who engage in such activities are throwing away the money that God has entrusted to them in hopes of striking it rich.
 2. If you know anything about the statistics of the lottery, the person who buys lottery tickets has only an infinitesimally better chance of winning than I do, and I have never bought a lottery ticket in my life.

3. You might find this surprising, but there are some Christians these days who are arguing that gambling can be a perfectly acceptable way to entertain yourself and even a good way to reach out to non-Christians.
4. There was an article in *World* magazine a few weeks ago in which Jerry Jenkins, co-author of the bestselling *Left Behind* books, was making those kinds of arguments.
5. I am not persuaded by such arguments because they fail to reckon with the things that the Bible has to say about money.
6. The person who gambles is either being careless with his money or he is saying that God has not given him enough money the old-fashioned way (by making him earn it).

III. Don't Be Lazy

- A. In the second part of our passage, the father addresses the subject of work by showing the folly of laziness.
 1. Proverbs has a lot to say about work and laziness.
 2. The figure of the sluggard appears repeatedly throughout the book.
 3. In chapter 24 we read these words: "I passed by the field of a sluggard, by the vineyard of a man lacking sense, and behold, it was all overgrown with thorns; the ground was covered with nettles, and its stone wall was broken down." (vv. 30-31)
 4. And chapter 26 has this memorable pairing of proverbs: "As a door turns on its hinges, so does a sluggard on his bed. The sluggard buries his hand in the dish; it wears him out to bring it back to his mouth." (vv. 14-15)
 5. The sluggard keeps putting things off.
 6. He is always seeking the easier way.

7. He never properly finishes the things that he starts.
 8. He is blind to consequences.
 9. The sluggard's approach to life is summed up by the use of the term "little" in verse 10: "A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest."
 10. As Derek Kidner explains, the repeated use of the term "little" in this verse indicates that the sluggard "does not commit himself to a refusal, but deceives himself by the smallness of his surrenders. So, by inches and minutes, his opportunity slips away." [Kidner, 39]
- B. Set in contrast to the sluggard is the ant.
1. This is probably the harvester ant, which is common in Palestine.
 2. These ants prepare for the future by storing up grain in their nests.
 3. Another thing that is commendable about ants is that they are self-starters.
 4. They don't need someone with a whip over them to get them to do their work.
 5. They know what needs to be done and they do it.
 6. If a child drops a cookie on the sidewalk, you always know that the ants will be on the job.
 7. Ants are always working.
 8. While we are lounging at the beach on a hot summer day, what are the ants doing?
 9. They are busy carrying off food from our picnic baskets.

- C. Proverbs' teaching on work is straightforward: hard work pays off.
1. We need to strategize ways to use today to improve our situation tomorrow.
 2. I came across a story this week about the famous violinist Itzhak Perlman that illustrates this quite well.
 3. A father once took his young son, who played the violin himself, to hear Perlman play.
 4. And not only did the boy get to attend the concert, he also got to meet Perlman afterwards.
 5. When they met after the concert, the boy said, "I would give anything in the world to be able to play like you do."
 6. Perlman responded by saying, "Would you really give anything in the world? Would you give 14 hours per day?"
 7. The only thing the boy could say in response was, "Oh."
 8. You get the point.
 9. The best satisfactions in life come as a result of hard work.
 10. God has designed his world so that there is a connection between industry and prosperity.
 11. The basic problem with communism is that it ignores that connection.
 12. Of course, it is true that there are people who work hard who barely earn enough to get by.
 13. But even in this fallen world, there are very few examples of laziness making a person prosperous.

IV. Don't Sow Discord

- A. In the third part of our passage, the father takes up the subject of how we treat other people.
1. The negative example that he sets forth here is that of the “worthless” person.
 2. It is worth noting that the Hebrew word for “worthless” is used in the New Testament as a name for the devil: the name Belial in 2 Corinthians 6:15.
 3. The picture that the father paints in these verses is a picture of someone who creates conflict and exploits it for his own advantage.
 4. He sows discord so that he can reap its benefits for himself.
- B. Of course, this does not mean that there is never a situation in which it is right for a person to stand up for the truth.
1. If that were the case, then we would have to say that the prophet Elijah, the apostle Paul, Martin Luther, and countless others were violating this principle when they pointed out what was wrong with the church in their day.
 2. When error is pointed out, those who are willing to tolerate the error often contend that those who are calling attention to the error are creating discord.
 3. That is what the mainline Presbyterian church said about J. Gresham Machen when he kept saying that it was wrong for the church to have pastors and missionaries who did not believe in such fundamental doctrines as the virgin birth of Christ and his bodily resurrection from the dead.
 4. That is not what this passage is talking about when it speaks of sowing discord.
 5. The Scriptures make it clear in many places that we always need to contend for the faith.

6. The thing that is being condemned here is the use of conflict to achieve one's own selfish ends.
- C. This point is reiterated in verses 16 through 19, where we find a literary device that appears at various points in Proverbs.
1. The father says, "There are six things that the LORD hates, seven that are an abomination to him."
 2. By stating a number and then adding one more to it, the author communicates that the list that he is about to give is not exhaustive.
 3. There are many things that the Lord hates, but these seven relate most directly to the topic at hand.
 4. Notice also that this list is a catalogue of the human body: eyes, tongue, hands, heart, feet, and breath.
 5. This is a description of a person whose entire being is given over to his wicked plots.
 6. And in these kinds of lists, the emphasis falls upon the last item, which in this case is "one who sows discord among brothers."
- D. It can be easy for us to read passages like this and think that they are not really talking about us.
1. In one sense, I certainly hope that that is the case for you.
 2. I hope that you find it difficult to think of yourself as someone who sheds innocent blood or devises wicked plans.
 3. At the same time, we need to remember that the father is describing these things in such strong terms because he wants his son to see how evil it is to treat people this way.

4. The fundamental sin that is being condemned here is the sin of failing to love our neighbor as ourselves.
5. This is a sin that every one of us commits every day of our lives.
6. This passage teaches us that instead of plotting out ways to get what we want out of people, our God wants us to deal honestly with others and to seek their welfare.
7. Instead of stirring up dissension in hopes of achieving our purposes, our Lord tells us that if possible, as far as it depends on us, we should live peaceably with all.

V. Conclusion

- A. The warnings that are set forth in these verses apply to each and every one of us.
 1. They point out our failures, and in doing so they help us to see our need for Christ.
 2. We've all made foolish decisions with money.
 3. We all struggle with laziness in one form or another.
 4. And we all fail to love our neighbors as we ought.
 5. We should thank God every day for the many ways in which he extends his mercy to us, especially for the ways in which he protects us from having to suffer the full brunt of the consequences of our foolish and sinful actions.
- B. That being said, we should not fall into the trap of thinking that we can be irresponsible and expect God to bail us out.
 1. Our Father in heaven loves us, but because he loves us he also wants us to learn that bad choices and evil patterns of behavior lead to bad consequences.

2. So be wise with your finances.
3. Be a hard worker.
4. Be honest in your dealings with others.
5. Not only does such conduct bring honor to the Lord, it is also what is best for you.