

Prudence: The Discipline of Godly Speech

by Art Katz

Prudence is the employment of wisdom, acting with discretion and foresight, and is essential for living a life that reflects God's character.

Duration: 36:22

Scripture: Proverbs 2:6-7, Proverbs 2:10, Proverbs 8:4, Proverbs 8:6, Proverbs 8:17, Matthew 11:29

Topics: "Godly Speech"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of developing the skill of wisdom and prudence. The speaker highlights that God's intention for all mankind is to live in peace and benefit from the wisdom of His ways. However, there are those who choose not to be instructed and lack intelligence. The speaker encourages listeners to seek and treasure wisdom, as it comes from God and leads to righteousness, justice, and equity. The sermon emphasizes the urgency of God's cry for wisdom, as He sees the harm and devastation caused by the lack of wisdom, even among believers.

Transcript

Start from chapter 8 and work backwards. Chapter 8 of Proverbs. Does not wisdom call, and does not understanding raise her voice? On the heights, beside the way, at the crossroad she takes her stand.

Beside the gates, in front of the town, at the entrance of the portal she cries out. To you, O people, I call, and my cry is to all that live. O simple ones, learn prudence, acquire intelligence.

You who lack it, hear, for I will speak noble things, and from my lips will come what is right. For my mouth will utter truth. Wickedness is an abomination to my lips.

All the words of my mouth are righteous, there's nothing twisted or crooked in them. They are all straight to one who understands, and right to those who find knowledge. Take my instruction instead of silver, and knowledge rather than choice gold.

For wisdom is better than jewels, and all that you may desire cannot compare with her. I, wisdom, live with prudence, and I attain knowledge, or give knowledge, and discretion. The fear of the Lord is hatred of evil, pride and arrogance in the way of evil, and perverted speech I hate.

Or maybe we ought to stop there, because there are the two key words. Prudence in verse 12, and perverted in verse 13. So you have to see the one as opposed to the other.

Maybe I'll give you a dictionary definition of what it means, what perverted, perverse, perverseness, perversity, all of those words mean from their root, because in chapter two of Proverbs, just turn back a few pages, and again we see two words coming up in opposition one to another, starting from verse 6, For the Lord gives wisdom from his mouth, come knowledge and understanding. He stores up sound wisdom for the upright. He is a shield for those who walk blamelessly, guarding the paths of justice, and preserving the way of his faithful ones.

Then you'll understand righteousness and justice and equity in every good path. For wisdom will come into your heart, and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul. Prudence will watch over you, and understanding will guard you.

It will save you from the way of evil, from those who speak perversely, who forsake the paths of unrighteousness, who walk in the ways of darkness, who rejoice in doing evil, and delight in the perverseness of evil, those whose paths are crooked, and who are devious in their ways. Crooked is actually at the heart of the definition of what is perverse. Perverse is to take something that is initially straight, true, and right, and give it a twist or a crook that makes it the opposite than what it was intended to be.

It's a deviation. So we know that perversity in sex is a deviation. The man who is perverse in sex is no longer functioning as a man.

He's a homosexual. He's no longer desiring that which is natural to his gender, but what is perverse and crooked to his gender. And it may well be that what begins as perverse speech will end in perverse conduct.

And this whole generation of perversion that is enveloping us everywhere in the modern world has started first with indiscriminate speaking and unrighteous thoughts and expression, allowing a crook to come into things that, however right we were in the expressing of them, we made them wrong by a wrong spirit that gave it a twist that was a deviant, out of the way kind of thing. And if you persist in that, what begins in speech will end in conduct. So what's the alternative? The alternative is to be prudent.

And in a moment I'm going to give you a definition of prudent. This isn't my Wisdom Saints, this is Webster's dictionary, and it's available to you all if you'll bestow yourself to use it. It's a remarkable source.

And I never cease to stagger that the simplest words, when you turn to the dictionary, give such amplification of meaning of what you thought you knew, you realize you knew only in part. So here's what the dictionary says about perverseness. It's deviant, turned the wrong way.

Isn't that remarkable? It could be a truth, but it's turned the wrong way, and it becomes perverse. The truth becomes a lie simply because it's been turned, a corrupted form. It turned into a corrupted form, turned to error and corrupting others, leading astray, misdirecting.

So when it says wisdom and prudence will save you, by the way, there's no wisdom without prudence, because as we have already read, wisdom issues from prudence. So prudence will watch over you, it says in verse 11 of chapter 2, and understanding will guard you, it will save you from the way of evil. That means that we need to be saved.

That means that there's no one who's automatically safe. There's no one who's exempt, and that this is a daily keeping of yourself, because it says in the same book of Proverbs, chapter 4, keep your heart with all

diligence, for out of it issue all of the issues of life. This requires a continual watch care.

It's very easy to lapse into something and just give it a slight twist, because you enjoy that, or you're enjoying someone being inflicted. When you're not only speaking the truth, but inserting it and turning the handle to make sure that they get zinged. As I read and I shared with the folks at yesterday's prayer time, George Will, in his article in this week's Newsweek, talks about the massacre of Jews in Poland.

When the Germans first came to this particular town, the first thing that the Polish population asked of the German occupying troops, can we murder our own Jews? Oh yes, by all means, take your liberty. And they had a bash. They killed the entire Jewish population.

Women took their babies and drowned them in the common pond, and then sought to drown themselves, rather than to fall into the hands of these men who were so malicious in their torture. One of the statements was, the Germans said to the Poles, you're killing them too easy, let them suffer longer. So it's just, talk about perverse, talk about twisted.

What's the origin of that? You're not born like that to perform something like that in a moment. It has to have a history. Before you can act like that, you have already thought like that.

You have already spoken like that. The fact of the matter is that they did not keep their hearts. They did not esteem the word of the Lord, nor his way.

These were Christians, Polish Catholics. But they were not in the word. They did not heed.

And so they acted corruptly. And we need to be careful about our own hearts. For it will save you from the way of evil, from those who speak perversely, but more than that, save you from yourself speaking perversely.

So that's why the word cry comes up frequently here in Chapter 2. If you indeed cry out for insight and raise your voice in verse 3 for understanding, if you seek it like silver and search for it as for hidden treasures, then you'll understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God. For the Lord gives wisdom. From his mouth comes knowledge and understanding.

He stores up wisdom for the upright. Wisdom and prudence go together. Because now I'll tell you what prudence means.

Prudence is the employment of wisdom. It's acting with discretion. I thought I was going to tell you.

Prudence means having forethought or foresight. What does that mean? That before you open your mouth, even to be correct or to bring correction, you think in advance what will be the consequence of this, even if it's true. Is it a truth that is worth inflicting damage to the state? Or is this the time? Is this the prudent time for such a correction? See what I mean? The prudent man does not just blurt out.

He sees something that deserves correction. He's got the scriptures to back him. Boom.

The prudent man has forethought and foresight. He takes into consideration what will be the consequence of this speaking now. Is this the right moment? And if it is, how must I express it so that it will be not misconstrued, misunderstood and do harm, though I intend good? Prudence is a remarkable quality of foresight and forethought.

Most of us just blurt out. We act in the moment. Something happens.

Something comes to our thought. Boom. We say it and we do it.

That's not prudent. Prudence requires wisdom. These are God's own qualities, and it says that wisdom stands at the gates and at the crossing of the streets and cries out to be heard.

So this is God. Wisdom is God, and God is crying out. Evidently, it's more urgent for him than it is for us, or he would not be crying.

See what I mean? Why is he crying? Because he sees with a perfect and undiminished eye all of the damage, the harm and the devastation, not only that come from the unbelieving and the unrighteous, but even from the saints, because they're not acting, living prudently. And so prudence and wisdom is a very requisite of God. Just as a little interesting side note, how did the Lord bring me to the Lutheran seminary? Through Gary Kruse's mouth.

I took Gary to the seminary to shoot down the possibility that I would have to go there. Was God really calling me to go to a liberal Lutheran seminary with all of those lesbians and witches and feminists? So I took Gary. Of course, he's anti-intellectual, anti-theological.

I thought, he'll surely shoot this down. I sat him in the class. He heard the professor, and it couldn't have been worse.

It was like right out of Hollywood with the professor with leather patches on his elbows, a pipe. I mean, just to kind of turn Gary off. We left the room.

He didn't say a word. We're walking down the hallway. I was waiting for the bottom to drop, and Gary, we came to the door.

He turned to me and he said, I perceive that God wants you to be here at the seminary to learn prudence. And when he spoke the word prudence, it went into my heart like a shaft, like an arrow, and I knew that I knew that God wanted me in that place, not for theology, but for prudence. Why prudence? Because I'm a hot-headed, or I was, intemperate guy on the spot.

Let them have it. Give them what they deserve. The truth.

Let the chips fall where they may. And God wasn't going to allow a bull in his china shop because the issues of the last days are exacting and delicate and issues of life and death and bringing something to the church that has been long neglected and will be resisted. You can't come as a bull and bring those things.

You've got to come in the prudence of the Lord. You've got to come in the wisdom. Wisdom and prudence are interlocked.

And so I learned it, and I'm continuing to learn. And the pity is I didn't learn it earlier because, as I said, and my detractors have jumped on, I have done more harm in the name of truth than most men have done in error. That's what you can do when you're bumptious, inflated, confident that you have the truth and you're going to speak it and do it no matter what.

So foresight, forethought, self-disciplined caution. Why? Because the ego always wants to be expressed, always wants to show itself off, even in what is correct, because we're certainly not going to be bringing honor on our heads by speaking lies, but by speaking truths and bringing correction, yes, that could be an ego trip. So what is prudence? Prudence is self-discipline.

Prudence is holding something and not blurting it out immediately with a sense of caution about first examining one's own heart before speaking to that point or to that issue. And that's a discipline, because the flesh wants now to receive the gratification of being heard, acknowledged, people patting you on the back, boy, that was real something, you really said it, you were fearless, whatever. It's amazing how we can be ego-driven over spiritual things.

So it's a discipline to keep that filthy thing checked and to be cautious and know what is the deceitfulness of our own hearts and wait until the Lord will give a proper occasion, time, and release for that very thing. And when it comes forth in his time and in his way, it'll come forth as if he himself had spoken it, and you'll not receive any of the credit, you'll not be able to boast, and the person or church, the body to whom those words are addressed will receive it as a life-giving word, there'll be no recoiling. One of the characteristics of righteousness is peace.

So whatever is being conducted, even necessary correction, if it is being conducted in the prudence and wisdom of God, the end thereof will be peace. And if it's not, the end thereof will be strife. So one of the ways you can know whether you're imprudent or prudent is what has been the result of your speaking or sharing.

Has it brought strife or has it brought peace? So we need to be cautious about ourselves, provident, circumspect, conducting itself judiciously. Is that fancy language? To be circumspect. I don't have a synonym for that.

If we had the ample time, and I encourage you to do it yourself, reading from Proverbs 2 through chapters 8, you'll come to the phrase, the skill of wisdom. It's in the Scripture. A skill of wisdom? That implies that there's something that can be perfected.

That maybe you start out amateurishly, and you're blunt and coarse and miss it, but it's a skill that can be perfected through a kind of training in discretion. You're not born discreet. You're not born wise.

You're not born prudent. We can grow in these things so much as they are value for us. Here is God crying out in the streets to be heard.

And when we will take it to heart, because this is the fear of God and the knowledge of God, and it's the way of peace and righteousness and blamelessness, he'll give us every grace to grow in this. You don't have to wait until you're 72. You don't have to wait until you've left a trail behind you of broken and bloodied and beaten people who have suffered the result of your improvidence and your lack of restraint, lack of caution, your lack of discretion.

You can learn this early and well, because Proverbs is really a book intended for the young. But the old can continue to receive benefit. I can't find the word skill.

Maybe it was in the Amplified. But I saw this morning two or three times. It struck my interest that there's a skill in this.

And it can be developed. Yeah. Chapter 8 does talk about it.

Verse 4 of Chapter 8, To you, O people, I call and my cry is to all that live. Isn't that remarkable? This is God's intention for all mankind. It would certainly make the earth habitable and at peace.

Even if the unbelieving would submit themselves to the wisdom of God's way, there would be such benefit. But my cry is to all that live. O simple ones.

What does it mean simple? Those who choose not to be instructed. Those who have no thought beforehand. Learn prudence.

There's a learning here. Acquire intelligence, you who lack it. Here for I will speak noble things, for my lips will come what is right.

All the words of my mouth are righteous, nothing twisted or crooked in them. Wisdom is of God. True speaking is of God.

Because they are all straight to one who understands. Those who find knowledge take my instruction. So something given from God is both wisdom and prudence.

To those who cherish this value and know that he's the source of it, I will seek him first. This is part of your self-discipline, instead of blurting out from your own inadequate understanding. To wait and be cautious and look to the Lord for what is his thought on that same matter.

For he is wisdom and prudence and will give it. Out of Oswald Chambers, this week, the Christian life is stamped by moral spontaneous originality. Consequently, the disciple is open to the same charge that Jesus, that of inconsistency.

But Jesus Christ was always consistent to God. And the Christian must be consistent to the life of the Son of God in him, not consistent to hard and fast creeds. This is an interesting thing.

They are not the same. The creeds are true. The creeds are statements about God and about the faith and the way of God.

But they are not God in themselves. And we can mindlessly give a first loyalty to the creeds rather than to God himself. And that's when truth can become twisted and perverse.

So that the Christian must be consistent to the life of the Son of God in him, not consistent to hard and fast creeds. Men pour themselves into creeds, and God has to blast them out of their prejudices before they can become devoted to Jesus Christ. Isn't it remarkable that a correct creed can become a prejudice? That you have such an investment in that creed, in that doctrine, in that truth, that it's not serving the purpose of the God but working actually against God's purpose.

It's your own prejudice. And instead of being faithful to the life, you're faithful to the creed. That's the Jewish condition, faithful to the creed of monotheism or what they think to be the truths about God, and in fact so taken up with the creeds of the faith that when they felt those creeds were threatened and challenged by Jesus, they destroyed him rather than the creed.

The creed had taken such a place of preeminence that it was more desirable than the God who himself initially gave it, and his death was required in order to preserve their creed. We are susceptible to that

same danger of some truth that is especially dear to us can become a prejudice and act against God. And so Oswald Chambers is warning about it, lest we become corrupted and devious in that thing and it becomes perverse, though it was to begin with in itself a truth.

So that we need to come to the Lord, learn of me. I am wisdom and I am prudence and I will teach you and don't let it harden into a body of truths to which you subscribe with such a vehemence, even defending God by them, that it becomes a devastating thing rather than a blessing. Because it says, I love those who love me in verse 17 of chapter 8, and those who seek me diligently find me.

Riches and honors are with me. Wisdom is God and with God. And I'm glad that he's kept it to himself.

I'm glad that it's not a book in which we can imbibe and draw from and make it a creed and apply it, but that there's an ever and continual necessity to go to him who is in himself wisdom and prudence. And this is discretion, is always to make room for the Lord and to allow him in on the thing that's in your heart to express. That requires a relationship for which he's jealous.

Because it says in chapter 2, For the Lord gives wisdom, from his mouth come knowledge and understanding. He stores up sound wisdom for the upright. He is a shield to those who walk blamelessly, guarding the paths of justice, preserving the way of his faithful ones.

Then you will understand righteousness and justice and equity in every good path. When? When you get it from him who stores it up, who saves it for the saints, who gives it, he, him. Then you'll understand righteousness, justice, equity, every good path.

For wisdom will come into your heart. It's not coined out of your brain. It's not the result of your brilliance.

It's not your cleverness. It's not your analysis, your critique. It's something that comes from God who is wisdom.

Wisdom will come into your heart. He will give it to you when he sees that you're looking to him because you recognize that he's its source and not yourself. It will save you from the way of evil to which we are, every one of us, prone, even in our best intentions, if we are not prudent.

From those who speak perversely, but it will guard you from even more, not from those who speak perversely, but from yourself speaking perversely, taking a correct thing and giving it a twist that makes it corruptive rather than beneficial. We mustn't be content with getting by. Our relationships are too delicate, and the enemy is waiting at every moment for any opportunity to bring corruption by something that is stated that is clumsy or unwise.

We need to walk with great discretion in the church and in the body, with our children, in marriage, in relationship. We're talking about souls here that can be bruised, set back, the church itself disfigured. And what shall we say for those that we're inviting to learn that they might bring to Jews the hard word of the last day's extremity to which they will be facing and the alternative, which is safety in Messiah? Unless they can bring these thoughts with discretion and with wisdom, what do you do when a Jew blurts out in anger and attacks you, which they're going to do? What is your response to that? If you react in kind and get insulted or offended or talk back, if you're unwise and imprudent, if you're not cautious and discreet, you've lost them.

You see what I mean? One moment can lose the whole investment. So we need to cherish this, seek for it, call for it, and in Chapter 3 of Proverbs, by the way, read the Proverbs every day. I read the psalm for the day and the chapter of Book of Proverbs for today.

Today is the 8th, so the 8th chapter. That's why I was into it. And it's inexhaustible.

But in Chapter 3, verse 13, that begins with an italic title, *The True Wealth*, Happy are those who find wisdom. That means it's outside of us, and we have to look for it, not in ourselves, but in him, and those who get understanding, because there's a God who gives it if we seek him for it. For her income is better than silver, and her revenue better than gold.

The consequences of wisdom and understanding and prudence is beyond any kind of natural, physical wealth. And indeed, by it, physical wealth could be obtained. She's more precious than jewels.

Nothing you desire can compare with her. Long life is in her right hand. Left hand are riches in honor.

Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. So I repeat, you'll know whether you're in the path of righteousness through prudence, wisdom, and understanding, or through being imprudent and uncautious by seeing what is the result of what you speak or do, because everything that issues in God's wisdom must eventuate in peace. All her paths are peace.

Peace is the crown and the testimony of God's approval and presence, because what is spoken and what is done is in keeping with his own character and his own heart. So she is a tree of life to those who lay hold of her, those who hold her fast are happy. And then it goes on to say that the Lord by wisdom founded the earth, by understanding he established the heavens, by knowledge the deeps broke open, the clouds dropped down the dew.

If very creation issued out of the wisdom, knowledge, and understanding of God, if that was required to set in motion the very creation that we occupy, what then about the things that we are about? If God could not create outside of or without understanding, prudence, and wisdom, how shall we continue? If he required it, how shall we not require it? Gary Kruze, I'm quoting him now a second time, made the interesting statement once, but it has always remained with me, that in most marital disputes, in arguments between husbands and wives, maybe we can say between children and parents, or even within the fellowship, the thing in the last analysis is the lust to get the last word in. He used the word lust. There's a lust to make sure that you have gotten in your last word.

So it is a lust, and we need to be guarded against it. Well, we need to treasure this more than any other value, and seek it, and find it, and walk in it, and learn it. So let's acknowledge before the Lord that we have all been blunderers, unthinking and simple, mindless.

We have not given foresight nor forethought to what we say or do. In the lust of getting our word in right now, we speak it forth without thought of what will be the consequence or the damage, because once it's out, it's irretrievable. Something has gone out for death or for life.

So, Lord, we know that we have failed in this, because it has not been commended to us. The Book of Proverbs was just a quaint something, I don't know, for young people. We've passed it by, and yet you're crying out at the head of every street and every gate to be heard, crying out that we should esteem wisdom and knowledge, which is to say nothing more nor less than to esteem God.

And we acknowledge that as much as we have been blunderers and bulls in the china shop, even in the name of truth, knocking off whole shelves of things and failing in the very thing for which we had hope, because we didn't wait, we were not cautious, we were not cautious about our own propensity, about the lust to get something done, the ego of being heard. So, my God, forgive us for all of that and grant us by your mercy a new esteem and respect for what issues from you, it can only come from you, which you're willing to give to those who will learn from you and receive and obtain from you knowledge, understanding, wisdom, prudence. Thank you, my God.

May it become deep character of our corporate life. May our every relationship be affected and be revealed in it. May we so love it, my God, that it will be like a garland around our necks and a crown upon our heads and that its peace, my God, will pervade our life together.

Thank you for this, my God, that this is not poetry, this is not a play on words, this is the cry of God and we've not heard it and we have not considered it. And indeed, we have done much damage in the name of truth. So, give us, my God, a fresh day of new beginnings, new respect.

Hear our cry, Lord, as we desire to learn of you. We desire to be prudent, to walk with restraint, to have discretion, to have that knowledge and the understanding which is God's, not just in the profound last days things, but in the everyday things, in the simplest issue of conversation, in relationship, in how we speak toward one another, that we would be discreet. Thank you, my God.

Oh, we bless you that this is your wisdom and your desire and may we be like you in it. Thank you, my God. Come and birth in us a new esteem, a new respect, a new desire for these things.

Convict us where we have been mindless headlong. Give us a love for the peace that is the crowning hallmark of that which is prudent and wise. Always.

We thank you, give you praise, Lord, that this was the thought of your heart for us this morning. Surely not a moment too late. And we are blessed and we receive it.

And it's coming, my God, from your heart. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Thank you, Lord, that we can learn from the dictionary, not only the synonyms but the antonyms, that the antonym for prudence is haste or being rash, that the antonym for prudence is perverseness. So we want to be saved out from being perverse, from having a crook, being twisted, communicating a corruption rather than a correction. So, Lord, teach us words and give us a love for them, for they signify true things.

And we want to be a people, my God, pleasing in your sight. Thank you for the great gifts that you're willing to bestow for those who will cry out and seek them and learn from them in Jesus' name. This rendering in the amplified could be a real invitation from the Lord to those who are tossing this over in their minds and can't see their way through to this.

My son or daughter, if you will receive my words, assuming that this sharing this morning were his words, and treasure up my commandments with you, making your ear attentive, such an emphasis on our responsibility to hear, making your ear attentive to skillful and godly wisdom, here's where I saw that word in the amplified, and inclining and directing your heart and mind to understanding, applying all your powers to the quest of it. It's as if it's the foremost consideration that deserves our fullest energy before any other consideration. And that's true, because if we have not wisdom, prudence and understanding, how do we proceed to anything else? This has got to be the first consideration.

Yes, if you cry out for insight and raise your voice for understanding, if you seek wisdom as silver and search for skillful and godly wisdom as for hid treasures, then you will understand the reverent and worshipful fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God. For the Lord gives skillful and godly wisdom. From his mouth come knowledge and understanding.

He hides away sound and godly wisdom and stores it for the righteous, those who are upright and in right standing with him. He's a shield to those who walk uprightly and integrity, that he may guard the paths of justice. He preserves the ways of the saints.

Then you will understand righteousness. That came up recently in one of the meetings. I said, can you define righteousness? People blanked out.

They didn't know how to begin. Then you will understand. If we don't understand righteousness, there's no moral basis for our life at all.

Righteousness is ultimate, almost beyond defining. It is what God is in himself, in his own impeccable rectitude. Then you'll understand righteousness, justice and fair dealing in every area and relation.

Yes, you'll understand every good path. For skillful and godly wisdom shall enter into your heart. The Lord has put it there and knowledge shall be pleasant to you.

Discretion shall watch over you, understanding shall keep you, to deliver you from the evil and the evil man who speak perverse things, men who forsake the paths of righteousness to walk in the ways of darkness, who are crooked in their ways and devious in their paths.

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