

# (Proverbs) ch.27:17 - 28:18

by Zac Poonen

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*God's intention for relationships is for us to be like iron, sharpening and strengthening one another, rather than like clay, destroying and being destroyed.*

**Duration:** 1:00:33

**Scripture:** Proverbs 28:1-15, Luke 15:7, Luke 15:10

**Topics:** "Parental Wisdom", "Moral Integrity"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of teaching wisdom to children from a young age. They highlight the need for parents to prioritize instilling wisdom in their children rather than focusing solely on their education or material wealth. The speaker also discusses the responsibility of shepherds or pastors in caring for their flock and emphasizes the importance of obedience to God's commandments. They caution against risky ways of making money and encourage a simple and honest approach to earning a living. The sermon concludes with a reminder that the wicked flee when no one is pursuing them due to their guilty conscience, and the importance of moral integrity in both personal and family life.

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## Transcript

In the book of Proverbs and chapter 27, Proverbs 27, we were looking at verse 17 in our last study, iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another. And we saw that that is how God intends our relationship to be with one another. We can have strong convictions established in the Lord, we're not weak like clay, we're like iron.

And yet when we come together, it's not God's intention that we destroy one another. You can take one piece of iron and hammer another piece of iron with it and destroy, each can destroy the other. And that's what happens in fellowship between a lot of brothers.

And then you have the other alternative where one man's like iron and another man's like clay, and then they stay together and they call that fellowship. But it's not fellowship, it's just one iron putting its stamp on the clay. No, God's intention is that we can be like iron, both of us, and yet that we don't destroy each other, but sharpen one another.

And that's a wonderful thing, when we can have a relationship like that, where, as we read here in verse 17 in the Living Bible, a friendly discussion is as stimulating as the sparks that fly when iron strikes iron. When iron strikes iron, there are sparks, but that results in a sharpening. And it's a wonderful thing when

we can be strong and yet fervently in love with one another, even if we don't see eye to eye on a whole lot of minor issues.

Our love is not tested when we agree with one another, but when there are certain things we have slightly different opinions on, then we can know whether we love one another or not. Verse 18, He who tends the fig tree will eat its fruit, and he who cares for his master will be honoured. There are two things there.

First of all, like it says in the New Testament in 2 Timothy 2.6, the hardworking farmer will be the first to receive his share of the crops. So, that's only righteous of God, that those who have worked hard on their life will naturally be the first to receive, they will be the first fruits. And he who tends the fig tree will eat its fruit.

He who watches his inner life will reap the benefit of having an inner life from which rivers of living water can flow. Of course, he who neglects that inner life, cares only for the external, will not be able to eat that fruit because he also will reap what he sows. And he who cares for his master will be honoured.

Now, what that means is that we have to seek God's honour and not our own. We care for our master means that we are not concerned about our own name, but about the Lord's. He who cares for his master will be honoured.

There again, God sees the inner attitude of a man. Verse 19, As in water, face reflects face, so the heart of man reflects man. And that verse teaches us that just like in water we can see our own face reflected, so very often when we try to judge what is in another person's heart, we all have the tendency to have opinions as to what another person is thinking, or why a certain person did this, or why a certain person did that, and we have a certain opinion, and it says here that what we see in the other person's heart is actually only a reflection of what is in our own.

That's a very searching verse if you think about it. It means that when you think that other person is selfish in what he did, it's because you yourself are so selfish that you think that everybody else must be having some wretched, selfish motive like yourself. That's it.

Or when you feel that that person said that to hurt you, that's a reflection of the fact that in your own heart you always have this wretched attitude of wanting to hurt other people, so you imagine that his heart is also like your filthy heart. But it may not be. It may be good.

But we have that tendency to always imagine that other people have the same rotten motives that we ourselves have. Just remember that the next time you think that some other brother or sister has got a rotten motive, say you are actually looking at a mirror, you can't imagine that anybody can be purer than you are yourself, and since your motives are so rotten, you think other people are like that too, as in water, face reflects face, so the heart of man reflects man. That's a very good way that when we tend to judge another, I get light on the condition of my own heart.

And if I can only humble myself there and say, Lord, what I'm seeing is not his heart, because I can't see it in any case, but I imagine that he's got these things in his heart because that's the condition of my own heart, then I can cleanse myself and purify myself. Verse 20, Sheol, that is the place of the dead, and Abaddon, that is the place of judgment and hell, are never satisfied, nor are the eyes of man ever satisfied. Now that's speaking about covetousness.

When the New Testament speaks in 1 John chapter 2 about the lust of the eyes, that's different from the lust of the flesh. Fornication is a lust of the flesh. The lust of the eyes is to lust after material things which we see with our eyes and we want.

That is the particular meaning of the lust of the eyes, or as the Living Bible puts it, the desire to buy and possess everything that my eyes see. And that's what it says here, the eyes of a man are never satisfied. He sees this and he wants that.

He sees that and he wants that. He sees the other thing and he wants the other thing. Just like it says, death and hell are always waiting for more and more people to come into it.

Hell is always waiting for more people to come in. And every day it's receiving people by the thousands. And the same way, the eyes of man, this covetousness there, is equated with the desire that there is in hell to always have more people in there.

So you see what a horrible thing covetousness is. Like someone has said, God has made enough in the world for the need of every single human being, but not enough for the greed of even one man. Because the more we get, the more we feel we should have.

I mean we can examine ourselves and see how some years ago we would have been quite satisfied with what we have today. But you may find that we're not satisfied with what we have today because now we're longing for something more. There is a continuous dissatisfaction in the life of the covetous person.

Verse 21, the crucible is for silver and the furnace for gold. And a man is tested by the praise accorded to him. And that says that just like we put gold into the fire, and silver also, to test it, to see whether it's real gold or silver, you can see the genuineness of a true man of God, at least we can know it ourselves even if other people can't know it, by my reaction when people praise me.

Of course, it's also true that when people criticize me, my reaction is a test of my spirituality, but I can pass that test, that I have now died to the opinions of people to such an extent that even if I hear that someone has said something bad or criticized, it doesn't disturb me. Good. But here is a higher test than even criticism and opposition, and that is praise.

It's easier to face criticism than it is to face praise. That when somebody says something good about us, and still there is no flicker in our heart of a little satisfaction and a little happiness that so-and-so brother or sister has such a good opinion about me, then I have overcome in that area. If there is a flicker there when I heard something said good about me, maybe I heard that someone said something good about me behind my back, and there's something flickers inside of a little happiness and joy, then I know there's a little dross still in the furnace to be melted away, and it's good for us when we get that to judge ourselves and cleanse ourselves from that little dross that is there which made me a little happy.

We are to come to the place where we so die with Christ that criticism does not produce any flicker in our hearts and praise does not produce any flicker in our hearts either. We have really then lived before the face of God. Only such people are really living in the most holy place before God's face continuously.

Most of us, we live there now and then and come back into the place where we want the praise of men. So this is a tremendous verse that tells us a man is tested. The real value of a man is seen by his own reaction to praise, and that is something which another person cannot know.

Because you don't know what I feel in my heart when somebody praises me. I don't know what you feel in your heart when somebody praises you. So this is not a verse for us to judge one another in because we don't know, but it's a wonderful verse for each of us who are, if you are wholehearted, to judge yourself by and say, Lord, here's a verse by which I can find out whether I'm really wholehearted in judging and cleansing myself.

Verse 22, though you pound a fool in a mortar with a pestle along with crushed grain, yet his folly will not depart from him. You know, a mortar and a pestle is that solid iron piece which you put inside an iron vessel to crush various bits of grain and powder, chillies and things like that. He says even if you put a fool inside there and crush him down, his folly still doesn't depart from him.

But compare this verse with chapter 22 and verse 15. Chapter 22, verse 15, it tells us about when this fool was a little child. When this fool, whose folly does not depart from him now, even when he's put inside the mortar and hammered with a pestle and pounded in a mortar with a pestle, if he, when he was a child, if his father had been a little wise and used the rod a little more on him, then, it says here that folly would have departed from him.

And that's where we see that when young people grow up to do a whole lot of stupid foolish things again and again and again and again and again, we have to say we feel sorry for those young people because the folly is with the parents. The folly is with the parents who never drove out that folly from this fool when he was a little child. Now it's too late.

The fool's grown up. And now, no matter what you say, you can hammer him with the word in the meeting, they're still going to do the same stupid foolish thing. You can pound him with a pestle and mortar and they're still going to do the same stupid foolish thing because it's a bit too late.

Now, praise God that if we are wholehearted, wholehearted, we can humble ourselves and really ask God to discipline us and do for us what our parents failed to do when we were young. And if you're wholehearted, there's hope for us there because God's now become our father and he'll take care of our discipline. If we are really wholehearted and come to him and say, Lord, my parents didn't discipline me when I was small.

They petted me and they loved me and they cared for me. I grew up to be an absolute fool. Now, Lord, you take me in your hand and discipline me so that I will not continue to be a fool in the coming years.

Then there's hope for us. And that's a warning for all parents to really don't give your child a heritage of growing up to be a fool that one day this verse has to be said about him. It's too late even if you put him inside a mortar and with a pestle, the foolishness will not depart.

Let's take that seriously as parents so that we drive it out of our children when they are young so that we don't give them an inheritance. I mean, parents are so concerned that they don't give their children an education. Think of a parent who's concerned, oh, I can't get my child into the best school for admission and they're so bothered about that.

But here is the thing which they don't seem to be so concerned about. And that's why we must take it more seriously, that we teach them wisdom when they are young. Verse 23, it says, know well the condition of your flocks and pay attention to your herds.

It's a very good verse for all those who have shepherding responsibilities. And we know that in the church a shepherd or a person in a church, it's impossible for one pastor to look after more than about ten or eleven people. I believe that.

Jesus himself never tried to handle more than twelve. Jesus shepherded only twelve. You've got to be an absolute idiot to think that you can be a pastor of a hundred and twenty people and there are multitudes of idiots like that in the world who think they can be pastors of hundred and two hundred and three thousand and five thousand and all that is just a lot of rot.

Jesus Almighty, Son of God, came down to earth as man, the perfect one who never sinned, never tried to handle shepherding more than ten, twelve people. That's all. He preached to multitudes, of course.

But he shepherded only twelve, so that he could really work with them. And that's why in the church, in the body of Christ, God raises up many pastors, shepherds. They're not full-time workers.

They're in the secular job. They're not all 60, 70 years old. Some of them may be only 22 years old.

Yeah, they can be a shepherd to some of those who are younger to them. A shepherd is one who cares for the sheep. Do you have to wait till you're 70 before you care for the sheep? You can care for those who are younger to you when you're 25.

Have a concern for those who are young in the Lord to encourage them and bless them. Think if you can grow up to be a shepherd in the church, to encourage some of the others. And then, so that's the verse for all those who have a father's heart, we can say, a shepherd's heart.

God has given a few people. In some way, He's linked them to me. Okay, let me care for them.

We don't have a pastor in our church. But here, some God has linked up with me. I can care for them.

Yeah, that brother, God's linked up some brothers with that brother. He can care for them. We're not in competition.

I'm not trying to attach these people to myself. I'm trying to attach them to the Lord. But since it's humanly impossible for one man to take care of a hundred or so many people, God's given me a few, God's given that brother a few, another brother a few.

And like that, we can handle about 10 or 12 people and encourage them, and build them up. And then, this word is for such people. Know well the condition of your flock.

If you take that responsibility, take it seriously. Don't just know it, but know it well. It says, what is the spiritual condition of each of those brothers for whom you're taking responsibility? Do you know their spiritual condition? Pay attention to your herd.

See how it is going with them. Don't just say, ah, that's their responsibility. Of course, it's their responsibility.

But if God's given you a shepherd heart, it's your responsibility too. And it says, don't take it 1 Peter 5, it says, those who are shepherds and elders, don't take this responsibility out of necessity and compulsion that somebody says, brother, why don't you do that? No, it says, do it voluntarily unto the Lord. Don't be so irresponsible.

There's so many irresponsible people in the church. God wants those who are shepherds. There are multitudes of sheep wandering around without a shepherd.

And Jesus looks down upon them like he says in Matthew 9, and he's grieved. And he says, the harvest is plenteous. There are so many sheep, but there are very few shepherds.

So what shall we do? Shall we appoint so many shepherds? He says, no. He says, pray. Pray that God will send forth such shepherds into the harvest, that God will stir up some of these irresponsible brothers who just drift along in the Christian life and are only interested in their own salvation, their own holiness, just coming once in a while to the meetings, or all the meetings perhaps, but who don't have a shepherd heart to see, well, let me care for at least a few to see how it's going with them.

Praise God when God can find in a church someone who, without anybody appointing him, without anybody telling him anything, he just has a concern for a few brothers and tries to help them. Maybe he writes to some of them who are not locally, because he's got a concern for their spiritual development. Every such brother or sister who has a concern for other younger sisters, he's a shepherd.

And I tell you, there's a tremendous reward for all those who do that duty faithfully. That's what Peter says. There'll be a crown of glory waiting for those who didn't live their life in an irresponsible type of way, selfishly thinking about their own salvation alone, but who said, Lord, I offer myself to you with all my weaknesses to be a shepherd for a few people who are younger than me spiritually.

God will accept that offer. And then it goes on to say, riches are not forever, nor does a crown endure for all generations. He's talking about earthly wealth.

He says, that's not going to last forever. And even if you're a king, he says, we know that these days, you're a king one day and there's no guarantee that your son will be a king. There may be a coup and you'll be overthrown and you may have to run out of the country altogether.

That's happening in many parts of the world. A crown does not endure to all generations. But if you work in the fields, he says, when the grass disappears, the new growth is seen.

If you work in the fields, it's not like these riches and this crown that disappears. You've got a little field and you work on it, you cultivate it, you get something. And the herbs of the mountains are gathered in.

You gather in a harvest from working on your own life and you're going to get a reward also for looking after the lambs and the sheep and the goats. The lambs will be for your clothing and the goats will bring the price of the field. And there'll be goat's milk enough for your food, for the food of your household and sustenance for your maidens.

Of course, it's speaking in that Old Testament situation about not depending on earthly wealth and your bank account. But he says, do some work. Work on your fields and look after your flocks and care for them so that you can have a return from your labors.

Avoid all these risky ways of making money, investing here and getting a lottery there and a chip fund here and something else there and something else here. Various ways of trying to make money quickly. Avoid it.

Be careful. It says, be careful. Far better to go into these simple ways of just earning your living and learning to live within your income.

Right, now we go to chapter 28, verse 1. The wicked flee when no one is pursuing, but the righteous are as bold as a lion. Now, why does the wicked man flee when no one is pursuing him? You see, because he has a guilty conscience. That's why.

And he always thinks that this chap has come to catch me for that. It's like a thief, you know, who's stolen something and every knock on the door he thinks is a policeman. And he's got to run out of the back door because it may not have been the policeman, it may have been a friend of his who's come to see him.

But this guilty conscience makes him run out of the back door. Now that, we're not thieves, but it can be in other ways. Where a guilty conscience makes us, for example, you're in debt to somebody and you don't want to see his face.

And you'd like to avoid him. Or you hurt someone and you harm someone and your conscience bothers you about it and you don't like to see him for a few days. You'd like to flee.

You're a wicked person. No one's pursuing you. But this conscience is making you run and taking away all the courage out of your life.

But a righteous person whose conscience is clear, he's bold. He can face everybody squarely. If there's anybody whom you cannot look straight into the face, there's something wrong.

I've met some believers who, when they talk to you, they're always looking down. I'm not talking about here in our assembly, but some outsiders I've seen who've come sometimes and I'm always wary of these people who can't look straight into your face. I say, there's something fishy about a man who cannot look straight into your face.

Remember that. If he can't look straight into your face and talk to you, there's something fishy. Cain's face was swollen because something was wrong in his life.

The Lord asked him, why is your face swollen? There was a reason. He'd done something wrong. But the righteous person, he's bold.

He can look straight into the face and he's not perfect, but he's got a clear conscience. And it's only righteousness in our conscience that gives us boldness. God has not given us this spirit of fear, but of power and of love and a sound mind and discipline that we can have a clear face and look somebody straight in the face.

We don't have to avoid anyone because we've got nothing against anyone. Think of that. When you've got something against someone, isn't it difficult for you to look in that person's face straight with cheerfulness? Because in your heart, you've got something.

And it's reflected on the countenance on the face. Praise God that we can live with that boldness if we have a clear conscience toward God and men at all times. And that's how it should be.

Verse 2. It reads like this in the Living Bible. When there is moral rot, moral rot means moral corruption within a nation. In the Old Testament, it was a nation of Israel.

Today, the equivalent of the nation of Israel is the church. Its government, that is its leadership, topples easily. But when there are honest, sensible leaders, or a man of understanding and knowledge, then there is stability.

And there's stability in a church as well when the leadership in the church is as understanding and is honest. And we see that when moral corruption comes into a church, as it has come into so many denominations, this verse tells us you can trace the problem to the leaders. It's not that you say, oh, the people are like that.

The people are like that because the leaders are like that in their private life, even though you may not know it. It's the leaders that make the people like that. If it's one or two people who are corrupt, it's okay.

But when a whole church sort of becomes corrupt, you know that you can be pretty sure that the leadership is corrupt. You can always assess the quality of the leadership of any church by seeing the general condition of that whole church. So when some people say, yeah, he's a good pastor of that church, but the people are like that, we are deceiving ourselves.

No, it's because there's moral rot there that there's instability in the whole situation. And that's why we have to be very careful in our own life, particularly when God gives us any responsibility. And that kind of responsibility can just be over the Sunday school or over your family.

There'll be moral rot in your family if the father or mother is not, there'll be instability in the family if there's moral corruption in the father or mother. Verse 3 reads like this in the Living Bible. When a poor man oppresses those who are even poorer, he's like an unexpected flood sweeping away their last hope.

Now one would think that a rich, arrogant man will naturally oppress the poor people, but when a poor person comes up to power, well, he'll understand the plight of these poorer people. But it's not always the case. We find some of these poorer people when they get power, they behave worse than all those other tyrants that were there before them.

They want to bully the weaker ones. And when a person desires to oppress those who are weaker than him, he's unfit to be a leader. He's unfit to be a leader even as a father in a house or a mother or a master who has people working under him in the factory or a mistress having a servant under her.

If your desire is to oppress those who are weak, then it's like a driving rain, like a flood that takes away their last hope. There's no bread. And so that teaches us in our own spiritual poverty to be meek and merciful and kind to those who are under us in any way, whether children or laborers or anything.

Verse 4 reads like this in the Good News Bible. If you have no regard for the law, you are on the side of the wicked. But if you obey it, then you are against them.

It's no use a person saying, well, I'm against all unrighteousness. If you're against all unrighteousness, then you must have a regard for the commandments of God's word. If a person says, no, these commandments of God's word are not, we are all clothed in the righteousness of Christ and we don't have to be bothered about keeping all these little commands in God's word.

This word says that such a person who has no regard for the law is actually, whether he knows it or not, on the side of the wicked person. But if you obey those commandments, then only can you say you're against unrighteousness. There we find that the vast majority of Christians are not really on God's side

against unrighteousness because they don't regard God's commandments seriously.

They don't even take one command like husbands, don't be bitter against your wife seriously, so that they never are bitter. They never take commands seriously like backbiters are haters of God. They don't take that seriously.

Gossipers are mixed with haters of God in their judgment. They don't take those things seriously. They have no regard for these commandments.

Then of course, it's foolish for such a person to think that he's on the side of righteousness because he's not. And that verse reads like this in the Living Bible, to complain about the law is to praise wickedness. And to obey the law is to fight evil.

If you want to fight evil, the first thing you've got to do is obey the commandments. That's what this verse says. But to complain about it, how do we complain about it? When we say it's a bird, people say it's a bird.

I am being tested beyond my ability. That's a sad thing. It really is a sad thing when a person complains against the law.

The law says, God's word says, you shall not, God will not allow you to be tested beyond your ability, but you complain. No, this is too much for me to bear. It's beyond, that means God has sort of forgotten about you altogether.

Yeah, you're a wicked person. To complain about the law is to praise wickedness. It's like praising all the drunkards and praising all the gamblers and all the murderers to complain against God's word.

Yeah, it's the same thing. We've got to take it seriously. But if we obey the commandment, that is how we fight evil.

We don't fight evil by fighting against the drunkards and the murderers. We obey God's commandments and we fight evil in our own flesh. And that's the best thing we can do for God in a world full of wickedness.

Verse 5, evil men do not understand justice, but those who seek the Lord understand all things. Now those evil men may be clever men, but they still don't understand. It is not cleverness that makes us understand God's ways, it is righteousness.

It says an evil man, that means even if he's very clever and intelligent and a PhD, he cannot understand justice. He cannot understand what is righteous. He doesn't have discernment because God has hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and he's revealed them to babes.

So we see that it is the evil which prevents us from understanding God's truth, not lack of cleverness. Let no one sitting here ever think that I'm not clever enough to understand God's word. It's better to say I'm not wholehearted enough against the evil in my flesh to understand God's word.

If I were a little more wholehearted, I would understand God's word a little more. If I fought against sin a little more in my life, I would understand God's word more even if I studied only up to the fourth standard. No, it's evil men who do not understand.

But those who seek the Lord, whether they are clever or whether they haven't even been to school, what do they understand? What does it say there? It's a fantastic word. All things. All things does not mean all things about geography and chemistry and physics.

That's not the Bible. It's not written about such things. God has given us, 2 Peter 1.3 says, all things pertaining to life and godliness.

That we will really understand even if we can't explain physics and chemistry. Those who seek the Lord will understand all things. Verse 6 reads like this in the Living Bible, it's better to be poor and honest than rich and a cheater.

Yeah, that's always better. That's repeated many times in Proverbs that it's better to be a poor man and honest and upright, paying your taxes correctly, doing everything righteously than to be a rich person and you are cheating people, you are taking advantage, you are deceiving, cheating the government, etc. It's not worth it.

Word of God repeats that many times. Verse 7, he who keeps the law is a discerning son. He who keeps the commandment as we have just seen, is a son of God with discernment.

But he who is a companion of gluttons humiliates his father. We can apply that to our heavenly father. Now notice, if it had spoken about being a companion of murderers, we can understand that.

I don't want to be a companion of murderers, or a companion of thieves, or a companion of liars. These are the things that we think are quite serious. Yes, they are serious.

But here it speaks about those who are companions of gluttons. That means those who only think in terms of eating and drinking. They are companions of people who are interested in eating and drinking.

They don't want to kill or steal or anything. Just eat and drink. Be careful.

People are only interested in eating and drinking. They humiliate their father. And there are Christians like that.

If we announce that we're going to have chicken biryani tomorrow night, we'll see how many people there are. And if we announce that we're going to have a prayer meeting tomorrow night, we'll see how many people there are. You can find out very quickly that there are Christians who are gluttons too.

It's not just unbelievers. How is it that the number of people increase when there's food served than when there is a prayer meeting arranged? Because that's how it is. Yeah, so it's good for us to be free, to cleanse ourselves.

We don't want to judge other people, but we have to live in a self-judgment ourselves. That's all. Verse 8, it reads like this in the Good News Bible.

If you get rich by charging interest like a money lender and taking advantage of people, your wealth will go to someone who is kind to the poor. And this is speaking about taking advantage of poor people there in the Old Testament. Somebody needed money and they would give it at interest and take advantage of the poor person in some way.

And there's a lot of it going on, not in our midst, but in the world around in Bangalore, how many poor people are exploited by these money lenders. It says God will judge them that one day they die and they leave their wealth. They die early and they leave their wealth to someone else who probably learns to be a little kind to the poor.

Anyway, one day the meek will inherit the earth. So one day all the wealth is going to be inherited by those who have learned to be kind to others who are needy. Jesus spoke much against this trying to take advantage of your poor brother.

Supposing he borrowed something from you and he couldn't pay it back, forget it. Forget it. Don't keep on sitting on his neck and oppressing him, particularly those who are financially poor.

Verse 9. He who turns away his ear from listening to the law, even his prayer is an abomination. Now what that means is that if you hear God, then God will hear you. I mean, that's only reasonable, isn't it? I mean, if I have no time to listen to God, it's not unrighteous if God says I don't have much time to listen to you either.

It says in Psalm 18, there's a very wonderful verse in Psalm 18, I don't know whether you've noticed it. It says in Psalm 18 verse 25, with the kind, you show yourself kind. That means somebody is kind to others, God is kind to him.

Or somebody is merciful to others, God is very merciful to him. With the blameless, you show yourself blameless. That means a man really seeks to walk in uprightness, God is also very upright and straightforward with him.

With the pure, God shows himself pure. That means I'm pure, God shows himself to me in purity. But with the crooked, the twisted, he says God shows himself also a bit twisted to that person.

Think of that. I try to be a little crooked with some other person, and I find later on somewhere in life God is also a bit crooked towards me. And I wonder why, and I've just got to think back, now whom was I crooked to within the last one month? Or maybe within the last six months, and that's maybe why God's acting a bit crooked towards me now.

I don't bother to hear his word, and when I kneel down to pray, he doesn't bother to hear me. It's like prayer is like communication through the telephone. Every time God rings me up on the telephone, I just put the phone down, I have no time to listen to him.

But one day when I want to pick up the phone and ring him up, I find that he doesn't pick up the phone either. He is crooked to those who are crooked. It says there, if I turn away my ear from listening when God is speaking through his word, God will turn away his ear when I'm trying to pray to him in prayer in my knee.

And I believe this is the reason why so many prayers are not answered. See, we can understand that the prayers of the Hindus and the Muslims and the Roman Catholics and so many unconverted people, their prayers are not heard, even though they pray millions of prayers. But what shall we say when believers' prayers are not heard? If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not answer me? No.

Psalm 66, 18 says, the Lord will not even hear me. He won't even pick up the phone. Oh, that's coming from someone who's got iniquity in his heart.

No need to pick up the phone even there. No need even to find out what the request is. That's a serious thing.

What does it say in Hebrews 5, 7? Jesus' prayers were heard because of his godly fear. He was so afraid of not listening when the Father was speaking. So afraid.

The Father is saying something, let me drop everything and listen. And brothers and sisters, we can very profitably judge ourselves in this area. If I hear God's word, then when I speak, God will hear me.

Jesus say, I thank you, Father, you always hear me. Why? Because Jesus always heard the Father. It's exactly equal.

If I hear him when he tells me 20% of the things he tells me, he hears me when I say 20% of the things I tell him. 80% of my prayers are just fallen to the ground. But think that we can increase that percentage just by increasing the percentage of my listening to what God is saying to me.

That's why it's very important to hear God's word and receive it. Verse 10 reads like this in the Living Bible, a curse on those who lead the godly astray. But men who encourage the upright to do good shall be given a worthwhile reward.

Jesus said, if you stumble one of these little ones, it's better that you hang a millstone around your neck and go and drown in the seas. Like saying, go and jump in the river with a millstone around your neck. That's what Jesus said.

If you stumble one of these little ones, if you as a parent stumble one of these little ones, leading them astray, that child is at the moment very upright, but it sees the parents and goes astray into an evil path by some habit that it sees the parents do. Yeah. There are children who have learned smoking and drinking from their parents and other evil habits like gossiping, backbiting.

It's no worse than smoking or drinking. In fact, it's worse. It's worse than smoking and drinking.

It's no better. Yeah. If you lead the upright astray, someone is living a good life and then is polluted by your conversation.

It's better that you go and put a millstone around your neck and jump into a river. You'll fall into a pit, it says. Sure.

And that's why we are against so many preachers today who lead astray some simple person sitting in their congregation who is trying to live a godly life and this pastor or preacher who doesn't fear God, preaches all types of things and leads them astray. For example, tells them there's no such thing as victory over sin. And here's this simple person who's come wanting to hear and he leads them astray.

There are lots of people like that. We must never be found in that number. Never.

To lead someone astray when he was trying to live a good life because he saw something in me. That should bring a fear in our hearts. It should.

There was a man called Balaam who was a preacher in the Old Testament. And it says because he got money, he taught the king of Moab a scheme by which to pollute the Israelites. He said he could not curse them.

He said, I can't curse because God's blessed them. But he says, I'll tell you something by which you can make God curse them. I can't curse them, but I'll tell you a technique by which you can make God curse them.

And he told the king of Moab, you read about in Numbers chapter 25, just send some of your pretty looking Moabite girls, seductive ones into the Israelite camp and let them tempt some of the men and get married to them and then God himself will curse them and do what I cannot do. That's how Israel got corrupt through Balaam. Of course, Balaam was killed for that.

But people may not be doing such things today, but there's an illustration of someone who leads another person who was living an upright life astray by his own corruption, by justifying the wrong thing he did. For example, I do something wrong and another brother asked me, yeah, is that right to do it? And because I want to save my reputation, I justify it. Instead of saying, yeah, brother, what you say is right.

Maybe I need to think about that. Maybe it was wrong what I did. That would have helped him to be upright.

But I am an older brother and I justify it and I prove no, no, no, this is right and in such circumstances we have to do this. What have I succeeded in doing? I succeeded in leading him astray. I myself have gone astray into some corruption and now I'm justifying that corruption and leading him also astray.

It's very easy to do it. If I have any love for justifying myself, we must be willing to hear, maybe we are wrong in that thing that we did. And it's good to be honest.

Verse 12, the rich man is wise in his own eyes, but the poor who is wise sees through him. Now notice, he doesn't say here that a poor man is blessed just because he's poor. We shouldn't think that.

There are a lot of poor people in the world who are not at all spiritual. A lot of poor people have gone to hell just like rich people. But the poor man who has got understanding, that means the poor man who is wise.

He can see through the emptiness and the hollowness of this rich person who in his own eyes is very wise. He is very spiritual in his own eyes. But this poor wise man sees through that and therefore he does not covet any of his riches.

When we covet what somebody else has, that proves that we ourselves don't have any wisdom. We may be poor, but we are poor foolish people just like that person is a rich foolish person. But think that whether we are poor or rich, that's not the point, but that we can have wisdom.

That's the point here. Verse 12, when the righteous triumph, there is great glory. Maybe not in this world, but there's certainly great glory to God we can say.

When a righteous person stands for righteousness and does not yield in temptation and he triumphs, there is a great glory there. You must think of that. Never mind what people think, but there is great glory to God every time I overcome a temptation.

Every time I overcome a temptation. You know, we've all heard the story of what Jesus said about the man who had a hundred sheep and he lost one of them. Who were the 99 sheep? What did Jesus say the 99 sheep were? Can anyone tell me? They were 99 symbolizing 99 what? Yeah, that's not it.

It says in Luke 15, 7, they were 99 righteous persons who need no repentance. 99 righteous persons who need no repentance. Think of that.

Think of being one like that. That I'm so careful in my daily life that I'm cleansing myself and judging myself so immediately and so constantly that I'm living as it were without any repentance that I need to have in my life. It's a fantastic description which Jesus gave all those 99.

When people say we are to go for the one lost sheep, that's evangelism. You act as though all the other 99 sitting in the church are like these 99 people who need no repentance. Far from it.

The sheep are all lost. Nowadays, it's the one righteous person who needs no repentance and the 99 are lost. It's the other way around nowadays.

So we need to keep that in mind. Who need no repentance. Think of that.

Think of that. We read the scriptures carefully. We see what Jesus was talking about.

That's a tremendous thing. When the righteous triumph, that means they are living in that overcoming life. But when the wicked rise, that's sad.

Men hide themselves because a wicked person has got power. That's a sad thing that men cannot be free. Verse 13.

This is a very wonderful verse in the Old Testament. He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will find compassion. Now right from the time of Adam onwards, man has had the tendency to cover his transgression.

As soon as Adam sinned, the first thing he wanted to do was hide. And he couldn't not just hide behind a tree, but he also wanted to hide himself behind some fig leaves that he stitched. Always trying to hide in all of false religion is basically this man trying to hide his sin by giving money to the poor, going on some pilgrimage, shaving his head or doing this or doing that, going for a meeting, singing in the choir, doing something in order to be approved to God.

It's trying to cover one's sin. There'll never be any prosperity that way by trying to cover up our sin, either by hiding it, pretending that we never did it, or that I hurt somebody and I don't go and make restitution. When I don't go and apologize to someone whom I've hurt, what am I actually doing? For example, if I hurt my wife by what I said, and I just act as though, yeah, yeah, it's alright, we're good friends, aren't we? What am I doing? I am concealing my transgression.

Now even if she's a very spiritual wife, that she just ignores it and says, yeah, because she's learning to die to herself, and she's having a good relationship with you, you shouldn't be so stupid to think that because of that you don't have to apologize. You still have to apologize. Even if you have a good relationship with her, because you did something wrong.

You can't say, yeah, relationship is good. Relationship is good, but you still did something wrong. The relationship is good because that person was wholehearted enough to deny herself.

Or it can be with a brother too. Where we have done something wrong, even if that other brother has so denied himself that he has a good relationship with us, that does not mean that my transgression is clear. I have still sinned and I should not cover it up.

The only way to clear it up is by saying to that brother with whom I have an excellent relationship, I'm sorry, I've sinned against you, forgive me for that. He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper. And I'll tell you, the vast majority of believers have just no interest in living in this standard of Christian life.

That's why their life is so shallow. But he who confesses, and that requires humility to God and to man, and forsakes, I forsake it, I give it up, will find mercy. And not only find mercy, but in the new covenant will find grace.

Also, the old covenant was only mercy. In the new covenant he'll find mercy and grace to help him in his time of need. And it goes on from there to verse 14.

Once our sins are forgiven, why are our sins forgiven? One of the most important verses on this is found in Psalm 130 and verse 4. God forgives us so that we may fear him. God forgives us so that we may fear him. And so after it speaks about forgiveness, in verse 13, it goes on to speak about fear.

And the devil's got so many ways of getting that out of people's minds by saying, no, no, no, we must think of God as love. Nothing to fear. And that's why they do such a lot of wrong things.

No, how blessed is the man who fears always. And I believe the important word there is, always. You see, I can fear God for a long period of time.

And then one particular moment, I don't fear God. And I can do such a sinful, shameful thing in that moment that I can lose my testimony for my whole life. Isn't that how David looked at Bathsheba? Didn't fear God at that moment.

Many of the other times he feared it. In fact, in Psalm 34.10, he tells people, come, children, I will teach you the fear of the Lord. He was that type of person at one stage.

He could teach people the fear of the Lord. But then he just became careless. And his testimony was ruined not only for his life, but generations after him.

Know that failure. Think of Joseph. Tempted again and again with potty for his wife.

He didn't sin. Think if he had slipped up just for five minutes. Five minutes! In his long life of a hundred years, he slipped up for five minutes.

What sort of Joseph would we have thought of today? I doubt if God would have ever made him the Prime Minister of Egypt. It's possible, brothers and sisters, that we slacken off and do one stupid thing, one stupid thing, and we can ruin our testimony almost for our whole life. How blessed is the man who fears the Lord always, always, always, so that there is not even one moment of carelessness in our life.

But he who hardens his heart will fall into calamity. And to harden our heart is to, when we hear, if you hear his voice, harden not your heart. That means when I hear, I don't respond.

I postpone. I heard of a man, an evangelist, who died long ago, a very well-known evangelist in India and died many, many years ago. He testified when he took water baptism at a very old age.

He said that, when I was a young man, God spoke to me about water baptism, and I did not take it. If I remember his testimony correctly, it was like this. And because I thought I would lose my post as an evangelist in this particular denomination, which does not believe in adult baptism, and the result was,

sometime later, after being a mighty preacher, he fell into adultery.

And he realized that one little disobedience had hardened his heart and finally ended up like this. It's a serious thing that when God speaks to us about something, we don't take it seriously. He who hardens his heart will fall into calamity.

Of course, he repented, he confessed, and he obeyed the Lord. But that plot was on his character. Verse 15.

Like a roaring lion and a rushing bear is a wicked ruler over a poor people. This is also speaking about those who oppress others, who take advantage of others, who rules over others. It can be those who work under us.

We are not to be like lions and bears to them that the very sight of us brings terror into their hearts. We are not to be like that towards our children. That's why the Bible says we should never use, it doesn't say that, but the Bible says we should use a rod to punish our children.

We should not use our hand to hit them because, to slap them on the face, for example. Most unchristian for any father or mother to slap a child. The hand's not given for slapping, the hand's given for stroking the face.

But when you lift your hand towards your child, the child is 100% certain that your hand is not coming to hit it. Your hand is coming to stroke it in love. We are not to oppress that the sight of us brings terror into the hearts of others.

Verse 16, a leader who is a great oppressor lacks understanding. If such a man is a leader or a father or an elder who lords it over other people and bosses over them and tries to control their life, we can say that such a father or an elder or whatever it is, is a man without wisdom. Whatever else he may have, he doesn't have wisdom.

In contrast, if a leader hates unjust gain, he will prolong his days. Unjust gain means where I'm seeking my own honor and own profit. Gain something for myself.

What is unjust gain? For example, to do something in the church and get some honor for myself. Isn't that unjust gain? If we do something in the church, it must be for the glory of God. But if I do something in the church in order to get some honor for myself, that is unrighteous.

The payment for that should go to somebody else. It should go to God. That's unjust gain.

To seek anything personal for ourselves in the church, that's unjust gain. It's like a man who is trying to earn money unrighteously for me to get up and preach to get some honor for myself. And I'll tell you what is more dangerous and those of us who are singing next Sunday can think of that.

It's much more difficult to sing and seek the glory of God than it is to preach and seek the glory of God. Because when we preach, we are using a normal voice. But when we sing, yeah, there's a special type of voice and all and tune and melody and all that.

That's good. But I tell you, if a person doesn't work out his own salvation playing an instrument, oh, what a fantastic danger of seeking one's own honor if a man's not living in a cleansing of himself. I tell you, I've sung, I've played instruments and I know from my own flesh how easy it is to want to play a little louder

than everybody else or sing a little better than everyone else and all this wretched manifestations of our flesh.

Yeah, and if we cleanse ourselves, I'm not saying we shouldn't do these things. All I say is there needs to be a cleansing. It's unjust gain.

I've no right to take that to myself. It is for God's glory. Verse 17 A man who is laden with the guilt of human blood, that is a murderer will be a fugitive until death.

Let no one support him. Now, who is likely to go and support a murderer? Who do you think is likely to support a murderer? His own relatives. Maybe his father or mother or brother wants to somehow cover up.

And basically that verse means don't support a guilty person even if that person is your relative. We are not in danger of supporting all the other murderers on the streets. But if someone is a very close relative, somebody in our family has done something very wrong and have a terrific tendency to support be careful.

Be impartial. Be righteous. There's a principle there that we can keep in mind.

Verse 18 He who walks blamelessly will be delivered but he who is crooked will fall all at once. That means, even though when I walk uprightly and righteously in the world, even though I'm oppressed and troubled and harassed by people in the world finally God will always deliver me. That's sure.

But, if I'm crooked, because you say we have to be a little crooked here in this world to live. I've seen Christian businessmen who say that. You can't survive brother if you're not a little crooked.

And I told one of them, then give up your business and do something else. You weren't enough. Why don't you go and put that money into some deposit so that you can at least live off the interest instead of continuing this business and always having to do something unrighteous.

No, they don't want to do it. They have to be a little crooked. Okay? They will fall all at once.

There are a lot of people like that. I tell you this, if you can't do something which is, can't do a business righteously, it's better not to do it. It's better to look for something else.

And those who have stood for the Lord like that, the Lord delivers them, provides their needs.

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