

## Sermon 48, Walk in Wisdom, Proverbs 14:1-7

**Proposition:** To walk in wisdom, be sure to protect yourself, enrich yourself, and to look who's talking.

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### Introduction

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, our passage this morning talks about protecting yourself, enriching yourself, and examining the character of the one who's talking. It tells how to walk in wisdom; he who has an ear to hear, let him hear.

#### I. Protect Yourself, vv. 1-3

We can organize the first three verses of our passage like this: the one walking in wisdom protects himself. That is, to obey is to enjoy safety. We've seen this message over and over in the book of Proverbs. And we have reason to listen to it; who among us does not passionately desire safety? You can protect yourself in three major ways — protect yourself from evil, that is.

##### A. Through Wisdom, v. 1

The first way is through the wisdom to build your house. We're going to look more at this next week for mother's day. But for now, recognize that the wise woman builds her house. The idea, of course, is that she does it through wisdom. It's by being wise that she uplifts her household. How does that work? Well, to be wise is to obey God. It's to know Personified Wisdom so that you can walk in internalized wisdom. And the upshot is that your house will not be torn down — at least not by you.

How does wisdom build a house? Well, wisdom always knows what to say. Wisdom knows how to listen. Wisdom knows how to love, and how to feed children. That's why she builds a house.

All of you live in homes. I'm pretty certain that we don't have any homeless people in this congregation. And so all of you know how important a home is for life. Many of you paid tens or hundreds of thousands of dollars for your home, and went into debt for a very long period of time, because you valued a house so much. Guess what's more valuable than a house? The wisdom that builds a household. Build your house and bless your family by loving Christ and listening to your Father's wisdom. To not listen to Him, to not fear Him, is to depart from wisdom and to begin the destruction of your household.

### **B. Through Uprightness and the Fear of Yahweh, v. 2**

And so, Solomon tells us to walk in uprightness, for it is such a person (and, by implication, *only* such a person) who fears the LORD. On the other hand, a person who is devious in his ways despises the LORD. What does that mean? To be devious in your ways is to live by lies — to be different people to different audiences, to say things you don't mean because you think the other person wants to hear them, and so on. Preeminently, to be devious in your ways is to lie to yourself — about your habits, about your sins, about your lifestyle. If you don't live honestly, “walking in the light” as the Apostle John put it, then you aren't just harming yourself; you're showing that you despise God.

To despise God is to look down on Him, to think little of Him, to blow Him off as unworthy of your notice. To despise Him is to make God functionally irrelevant to how you live your daily life.

Do you think of sin in these terms? It's not just harmful and offensive horizontally, to you and your loved ones and neighbors. It is preeminently evil because it's a way of saying, “God, I despise you.” Walking uprightly, though — keeping God's commands to the best of your ability, by participating in Living Wisdom through the power of the Holy Spirit who unites you to Him by faith — that is a way of showing that you fear God. To fear Him is to reverence Him, to be impressed and awed at all times by a sense of His dynamic energy and overwhelming power.

To walk uprightly is to walk in wisdom. To walk uprightly is to protect yourself from the consequences of despising God. Don't be deceived; He is not mocked, and He will let no man despise Him.

### **C. Through Wise Lips, v. 3**

Finally, you must protect yourself through wise lips. The fool's tongue is a rod of punishment. The figure is odd, but it essentially seems to be saying that the fool's tongue beats people up, and perhaps even that the fool's tongue will beat him up. This is connected with the fool's pride. He is so unbelievably arrogant that his tongue can't help but reveal that. The NIV guesses that the figure of speech means that the fool lashes out in pride. All of us have certainly seen that happen. Anyway, the point is that the fool's tongue is a proud tongue, and most likely a damaging tongue. Far from exercising self-protection, he exercises self-destruction.

The lips of the wise, though, are a different story. We saw some weeks ago that the wise are delivered by their knowledge from the destructive mouth of the fool. Today we see that the wise are delivered by their lips from the destructive mouth of the fool. Surely these are two

parallel perspectives, and their unity is found in Christ the word! The word, of course, is something spoken — but it is also a morsel of knowledge. Both come together here. The righteous are delivered by what they say, because what they say is knowledgeable, accurate, and fitting for the situation. Thus, to speak well is a means of self-protection.

Now, in the crudest literal sense, surely this is true! My mother's late brother was a very good talker. He could talk to anybody. His people skills were off the charts. One time he was employed to check on properties back in the woods in Northern California. Going about his business, he was accosted at a gate by a hostile property owner with a shotgun who informed him briefly that if he came onto this fellow's land, it would be the last thing he ever did. Well, Uncle Steve said, "I'm a big guy. You wouldn't want to shoot me; there would be a big old mess to clean up." And with these and other similar sentiments, he talked the fellow down and was able to cross his property to do his job. There was a case of a righteous man being protected by his lips. Rather than escalate the situation, he gave the other man an out, showed him that it was okay to laugh about the situation, and generally used his lips to make things better.

But the second half of v. 3 is also true in a more sophisticated sense. Ultimately, the lips of the wise protect them not just because their speech influences other people favorably (though it does), but also because God Himself favors their speech. It pleases Him, and He rewards those who please Him. He delivers us by means of our own character, but also by means of His overruling providence.

So do you want to be protected and saved from the tongue-lashing of a fool? Then use your lips to speak that which pleases Yahweh. This is the ultimate in self-protection. Notice, then, that lying is out! We often think of outright lies and bureaucratic euphemisms as a form of self-protection. "Oh, he's just covering his rear end by telling me such-and-such, even though he knows that I know he's lying." But is lying really self-protection? Not at all. It is the righteous speech that protects the wise man. The unrighteous speech called lying is no protection at all from God's wrath or from the disaster of disobeying Him.

## **II. Enrich Yourself, v. 4**

Well, a wise life is not merely one where your character protects you and builds your home. It is also one that is open to growth, along with the mess and change that growth sometimes brings.

### **A. No mess, no fuss, no wealth**

And so, the sage informs us that where there are no oxen, there is no food either. The manger is empty. Now, often this proverb is read as saying, "But at least you get to keep your stable spic-and-span when there are no oxen resident there." That is probably not what it's saying. Rather, it's saying that when you don't have oxen, you don't have anything to put in the manger. The point is that the absence of the animal's work power implies equally the absence of anything to eat, not just for the animal but ultimately for its owner too. No mess means no fuss means no wealth.

Remember, this proverb occurs in a section of Proverbs that's talking to us about how to live wisely. To walk in wisdom is to recognize the connections here. It's to know that without the means of production you don't have anything.

### **B. Hard-working Ox, Abundant Harvest**

With them, though, you have an abundant harvest. Now, this proverb is a miniature parable of sorts. It's not advocating literally that we all purchase oxen. It's instead making the point that you need to spend the time, effort, and energy to live well. Laziness will never pay off. It will only lead you to starve. Living without the means of production is not an advantage.

The applications are myriad: Basically, you need to be open to change, to growth, to fuss and mess and sweat and strain, if you want to see an abundant harvest. Is the meaning really this non-specific? I think it is. You won't have anything to eat unless you are willing to go to the trouble of procuring and maintaining what you need to generate a large harvest.

### **III. Look Who's Talking, vv. 5-7**

So the man who lives wisely will engage in the upright, God-fearing behavior that is ultimately self-protective. He will also work skillfully, doing the toilsome labor and acquiring what he needs in order to be productive in his business. But finally, the wise man will look who's talking. He won't pay attention to just any words; specifically, he will pay attention only to the words of those whose character warrants listening to them.

#### **A. Is this witness a liar?, v. 5**

So, one might ask first of all, "Is this witness a liar?" That is a wise question. You see, this proverb, like so many others, is pointing out the connection between actions and character, between words and character. An honest witness doesn't deceive precisely because he's honest. Remember how Professor Kirk asked the Pevensie children whether Lucy was known to lie, and when they said that she was not, then he told them that they ought to believe her about Narnia? That was simply him taking this proverb at its word. Lucy was known to be a faithful witness, and therefore should not be lightly suspected of lying. In one sense, then, we can see that the theme of self-protection is applicable here. You can protect yourself by familiarizing yourself with someone's character up front. Notice, too, the connection back to the ultimate wise son. Remember how in Revelation 1 He bears the title "Faithful Witness"? Jesus is the Word, and thus the Truth, and thus the Faithful Witness. He does not deceive. That means that (self-protection again) you can trust Him with your eternal soul. You can trust Him to take away your sin and transform you to be like Himself. You can trust Him because He feared the LORD and walked uprightly. As you look who's talking, your ultimate question must be "Is what I'm hearing the teaching of Jesus Christ, or something else?" If it's something else, then it is not the truth spoken by the faithful witness, and you can safely disbelieve it.

#### **B. Is this seeker a scoffer?, v. 6a**

Well, our next verse makes it clear that the wise man doesn't trust every seeker. The mocker, too, is seeking wisdom. That's how he's identified — as a seeker! Now, there's been a seeker-friendly movement in the American church, and I think those of us here at Harvest would agree that the

seeker-friendly movement has ended up being mature-Christian-unfriendly. That's not a good thing. Furthermore, the text here warns us that seekers may not be what they purport to be. This man has some kind of desire for the truth, but in reality, he is a mocker. That is his character. He laughs at and despises God's truth.

Why does the scoffer prove unable to find truth? The text hints that it is because he is not discerning. He lacks understanding. Put another way, he is unwilling to submit to Christ who is personified Wisdom, and thus he is unable to find any wisdom. It eludes him because his character is truly that of one who can't handle the truth. He is not willing to submit to the truth when he finds it, and so he can be sure that he never will find it.

Do you want wisdom? If so, wonderful. But be assured that the acquisition of wisdom will not be easy or pleasant. It will require submission. It will require you to knuckle under and submit your intellect to the Word and Wisdom of God.

Wisdom is a discipline. It is the discipline of obedience, obedience that specifically takes the form of listening to the words of Christ. If you lack discipline, if you don't want to obey, if you prefer to be the scoffer who laughs at the truth rather than to be a faithful witness who pays attention to the truth, well, you will not find wisdom. You can't. Wisdom can only be found by the one who has an ear for her.

### **C. Is knowledge easy for me?, v. 6b**

So as you look who's talking, ask whether this seeker is a scoffer — and then ask yourself whether you are. Does knowledge come easily to you? This is a tricky question, because most people will answer it with a "yes" and those who answer "no" are possibly in the grip of laziness or false humility.

Brothers and sisters, we were made to know. That means that there is definitely a sense in which knowledge should come easily to us. If you have a hard time grasping and retaining truth, and especially spiritual truth, it may be a physical problem (i.e., you hit your head too hard, or something like that). But if everything physical is working normally, then it very well may be a spiritual problem. If you would say, "I read the Bible but it doesn't make sense and I can't remember it," then you're admitting that you resemble the mocker more than the wise Son.

How do you become someone who can retain knowledge, and especially the knowledge of the Holy One? Start by asking for it. Ask the Lord to change your heart so that you can understand and obey Him. The LORD gives wisdom; out of His mouth come knowledge and understanding. That means that you will have to both ask for and it work for it if you want to have it. And when you ask, He will give. The book so far has made it clear that in many senses, wisdom is not easy. But knowledge comes easily in the sense that it is congenial to the wise son. If your character is such that you are in sympathy with Christ the Word, then you will more easily retain what you have received from Him through prayer and study. And you will also come to worship, where you will be reminded of Christ and learn to know Him better. Knowledge comes easily to those who do the work required to put themselves in it pathway. It doesn't come easily to anyone who refuses to work.

#### **D. Is this impartor of knowledge a fool?, v. 7**

Well, finally, our passage closes with one of the few imperatives in this section of Proverbs. The sage tells us to stay away from a fool because what the fool has to say will not be knowledge. Remember, the philosophers define knowledge as “true, justified belief.” The fool is more than ready to tell you about his beliefs, but they are neither true nor justified. After all, he’s a fool who foolishly believes falsehoods on pitifully slender evidence.

Leave his presence. Look who’s talking. If the content is not from Christ the word, it’s not something you need in your life. As we’ve said before, that means turn off the television, silence the radio, close the browser, and get alone with God. Go in your closet and meet Him. And then come to church and meet Him here, in the presence of His people.

Ask these questions about Jesus. Is He a faithful witness? Is He a scoffer? Is knowledge easy for Him? Is He a fool? I trust that the answers are obvious. He is worth trusting, worth listening to. And if you listen to Him, you’ll be wise.

Brothers and sisters, again, remember, the reason to be wise like this is to please your Father. Walk in wisdom. Be like Him because in Christ, He has adopted you as His child. That’s all the motivation you need to be wise, for in being wise you will find protection, favor, and success. Amen.