

## Sermon 8, How God Protects His People, Proverbs 2:10-22

Read Psalm 37

**Proposition:** God protects His people through wisdom!

- I. The Protection of a Wise Heart, vv. 10-19
  - A. Protection from the Perverse-Talking man, vv. 11-15
  - B. Protection from the Unchaste Wife, vv. 16-19
- II. The Protection of a Good Walk, vv. 20-22
  - A. Life in the Land, v. 21
  - B. Deliverance from the Fate of the Wicked, v. 22

### Introduction

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, I want to begin this morning's sermon by pointing out the obvious. This chapter, the second chapter of Proverbs, doesn't tell you to do anything. It does not contain a single imperative. Compare it for just a moment, if you would, to the next chapter, which issues a blizzard of commands. Now, of course, this chapter does strongly imply that you and I ought to take certain courses of action. But it implies that by making promises, by holding out benefits that of course any normal human being ought to want. In other words, this chapter teaches us by enticing us. It shows us what's lovely, what's attractive, what we ought to want, and what wonderful blessings will come when wisdom becomes pleasant to our souls. We have already seen that this chapter envisions the embrace of wisdom as a collaborative divine-human project. With God's help, and only with God's help, do we learn how to understand the fear of Yahweh and find the knowledge of God. The result of this is an ethical maturity, a wise walking in every good path. And that wise walking specifically protects you from sin, typified here by the sinful man and the sinful woman. God protects His people, as v. 8 says — but He protects them through their character, which has been formed by His wisdom.

#### **I. The Protection of a Wise Heart, vv. 10-19**

The first thing, then, is the protection that a wise heart gives. When you have sought wisdom earnestly through prayer and study, then, as God answers those prayers and rewards that seeking, wisdom will enter into your heart. Again, this is not a command (“bring wisdom into your heart”) but rather a part of the then-clause. If you seek for wisdom as you should, and if you ask God for it, then it will enter into your heart. Wisdom dwells in words, as we saw — but it also dwells in persons. You will receive what we call internalized wisdom, and what the Bible elsewhere calls writing the law on your heart. This is not simply a knowledge thing, an intellectual thing, though. It is very much a matter of taste, of desire. You see, when wisdom enters your heart in the way that Solomon is talking about, then knowledge becomes pleasant to your soul. This does not mean simply that you become a more and more curious person, one who

is constantly asking questions and reading science magazines. By “knowledge is pleasant to your soul,” the text means that you personally love and enjoy wisdom. It is something that deeply attracts you, something that appeals to you, something that means a great deal to you. Fundamentally, this verse is saying that the result of the seeking in vv. 1-9 will be a newfound love for the discipline of wisdom. Folly will stop being so attractive, and you will come to love wisdom instead.

Has that happened to you? Or do you still enjoy your folly? Brothers and sisters, people who enjoy folly are all around us. From the obvious examples of unhealthy eaters, to the bad parents, to the financially irresponsible, to the relationally oblivious, we can easily find many species of fools who seemingly enjoy their folly even as they loathe its consequences. What is the solution to this problem of those who love their folly, who hate knowledge and will not choose the fear of the Lord? They need new hearts. And if you find yourself persisting in folly, you too need to cry out for God’s help to change your heart.

If you don’t ask God for that help, then you will never have the protection that is promised to the wise. This is not protection from physical risk, or from financial risk. This is preeminently protection from moral risk. If you have the new heart, the wisdom-loving heart that God alone can give, then you will be delivered from the immorality that seeks to get you to participate in sin. Clearly, of course, this is ultimately a matter of degree; Solomon himself mentioned both in 1 Kings 8 and in Ecclesiastes 7 that everyone sins. Rather, as is his customary way in this book he simply indicates in general that wisdom protects her lovers from the temptations and wiles of the wicked man and the wicked woman.

#### **A. Protection from the Perverse-Talking man, vv. 11-15**

The first kind of protection that wisdom offers is protection from the moral danger of the perverse-talking man. Again, discretion and understanding do not protect you from the knife of a mugger in a back alley (though they might deter you from entering that back alley!). Rather, when they are part of your character they protect you from the wicked man. Notice how he is described.

His first characteristic is that he speaks distortions or perverse things. We generally use “perverse” in English to mean “really egregiously sick and twisted.” And wisdom, of course, will preserve you from such a man. But the translation “distortions,” I think, captures the reality of the wicked man’s speech much better. Have you noticed this? Turn on the TV and listen to the news anchor describe some battlefront in the culture wars, whether it’s sexuality, abortion, gun control, climate change, or what-have-you. I daresay that you will find plenty of distortion in a ten-minute segment of his speech. It’s not that the real world isn’t there in his words; it’s just being viewed in a funhouse mirror, all out of proportion and wrongly presented. In fact, this problem of distortion is rife within our society. Anyone remember the “alternative facts” that Kellyanne Conway mentioned in January 2017? Or has anyone spoken recently to the man in the street about foreign policy, the teachings of the Bible, or world history? If you have, then you know that distortion is the order of the day, from societal elites down to the societally marginal.

Wisdom, internalized as shrewdness and good sense, will guard you from such distortion. You will gain the ability to recognize what's true and what's false in the statements people make. You will be protected from the distortion that evildoers perpetrate.

Yet the distortion here is not merely factual distortion, portraying the world incorrectly. It is even more fundamentally moral distortion, a twisting of the boundary between good and evil. The evil man wants you to be evil like him, and for that purpose he will tell you that a little illicit sexual pleasure is okay, that some drunkenness is fine, that it's okay to bend the rules on your taxes or in your other business practices, and so on. He will tell you that evil is good and vice versa, both directly and through more subtle artistic channels. His only goal may even be merely to make something bad into something arguably good, to shift the terms of the debate a little bit. "Oh, I'm not saying such-and-such is right; I'm just saying that it might be, that it can't be dismissed out of hand." Brothers and sisters, such a thing is the definition of distortion.

Are you protected from the distortions of the distorter? Do you have the wisdom and insight to filter the claims you hear from the media, from the pundits, from the popular culture? Wisdom would tell you that if you are unable to distinguish between truth and error, particularly in the realm of morals, that you need to go back to seeking and praying, searching for wisdom in the word of God and with the Holy Spirit's help.

Well, the evildoer not only speaks distortions; he also abandons the truth he once knew. In particular, then, we can see that this evildoer grew up in a Christian home. He knew the truth, but he abandoned it. Most of us know such people, whether they've grouped themselves together as "Homeschoolers Anonymous" or are just quietly bitter on their own. Solomon calls them evildoers. He adds that they walk in the darkness, on the paths of evil. The wicked man does not want his lifestyle to be public. In a very literal sense, you will find that many or even most of those Solomon would call evildoers live most of their lives at night. The crowd that's in the club at 11:30 PM on Saturday is probably not the same crowd that's in the church at 10 AM on Sunday! The person who does most of what he considers important social interaction between 10 PM and 4 AM is more likely to be walking in evil ways than the man who does most of his interactions between 4 PM and 10 PM. Again, these are not hard-and-fast rules. But the ways of evil and the paths of darkness are strongly correlated with one another.

This wicked man is described as one who rejoices in evil duplicity. He finds evil entertaining, and enjoys watching and participating in the activities of the wicked. Again, I don't think most of us in here are going to be regulars at the nightclub anytime soon. But watching such scenes of excess on a TV or computer screen falls under the condemnation of this verse just as thoroughly. Do not rejoice in evil duplicity, whether real or simulated!

The evildoer's paths are crooked, and he is devious in his tracks. He does not walk straight ahead. The point is that his life is convoluted, as he's always trying to escape the consequences of his sin by committing further sin, rather than avoiding sin and seeking to turn away from sin by repentance. How do you handle sin? Do you deal with it by sinning more? Or

do you turn from in repentance, seeking the power of God to change you? One way is the way of folly. The other is the way of internalized wisdom.

### **B. Protection from the Unchaste Wife, vv. 16-19**

Not only does wisdom give protection from the evil man; she also gives protection from the unchaste wife. Traditionally, this person is identified as the “strange woman.” But what’s strange about her is simply that she belongs to another man. She is a married woman who is open to an adulterous relationship. This unchaste wife represents a catastrophic moral danger, on a par with believing the distortions of the evil man in the previous section.

This strange woman is actually not described in terms of beauty or sexual allure. No. Her appeal is not to the lust of the eyes, but rather to the pride of life: she flatters with her words. She tells you that you are a manly man, and that she is far more impressed with you than your wife is. She strokes your ego first and foremost, even, perhaps, by sending the impression (or saying outright) “I’m already married, but I’d give it up for you.” That kind of flattery is a drug to us, men. Its allure is overpowering. Today, of course, the unchaste wife can flatter and send messages of sexual availability simply by posting pictures and videos of herself. In broader terms, of course, the whole pornographic industry is built on unchaste women and unchaste men getting together and taking and selling films of their activities. This woman has abandoned her lawful husband, and everyone who enters into her will never come out. She is the gateway to death.

Now, obviously a woman like this is not the only kind of evil woman out there, just as wicked men who try to get you to join a gang and commit armed robbery aren’t the only kind of evil men out there. The point is the same: Solomon is bringing forward the worst example of a particular type, and saying, “Wisdom can protect you from this, and if wisdom can protect you from this, the worst of its kind, how much more can it protect you from your garden-variety skimpily-dressed girl next door?” Wisdom can and will protect you from the allurements of an unchaste wife, and so it will also protect you from illicit sexual activity with an unmarried woman, with pictures of women, with chaste women who aren’t aware of your presence, and on and on.

Now, do we need this kind of protection in our sexualized culture? Absolutely. Again, Solomon is not implying that the fault in sexual immorality is all the woman’s. Clearly, it is the young man who will end up dead, because the wages of his sin is death. But at the same time, he is not shy about pointing out the woman’s share of the blame. His goal is not directly to urge young men toward chastity, but rather to point out the benefits of wisdom. Wisdom internalized will protect you from the most seductive woman you can imagine! Wisdom internalized will protect from the most distortion-ridden man you could ever encounter. So seek wisdom, because she is so attractive.

### **II. The Protection of a Good Walk, vv. 20-22**

The result of this protection wisdom offers is a good walk, a keeping to the path of the righteous. This, indeed, is simply a paraphrase of v. 9. Every good path will be yours if you dedicate

yourself to seeking wisdom. You will be protected from the evil man and the evil woman, and their distortions and flatteries. You will walk in the way of good men. The point, of course, is that this should be something you want. Walking in the way that is right and just and fair should be exactly what you desire. Of course, as the rest of the Bible makes clear, you will want this unequivocally only if you are already converted. But as a believer, as one who has begun to internalize wisdom, are you attracted to the promise of wisdom? Do you want what she has to offer?

#### **A. Life in the Land, v. 21**

What does wisdom have to offer? Life in the land. Those who obey God will live. The text promises life in the land or life on the earth. But the larger promise, as shown by the use of this same phrase in Psalm 37, is that those pleasing to God will inherit the earth and dwell in God's presence forever. Ultimately, those who inherit the earth are the children of Abraham, to whom God promised that he would be heir of the world.

Do you want to live or die? That is the question that this final proverb pair at the end of ch. 2 bring up. If you want to live, then you must seek wisdom, as the first half of the chapter indicates. If you do live, though, that life wisdom grants is not merely a limited earthly life. It is an eternal life.

#### **B. Deliverance from the Fate of the Wicked, v. 22**

The opposite is true of the wicked. They will be torn away from the land, cut off from earth — and, the implication is, cast into hell. They won't inherit the earth, but only the outer darkness.

What do you want? Do you want to embrace these promises of wisdom? Do you want to dwell with God? Or do you want the ways of darkness? Choose wisely. Amen.