

The Book of Proverbs: Living Wisdom, Part 3

Caleb Nelson | Harvest Reformed Presbyterian Church | Summer 2019

Sermon 53, How Christ Became Shrewd, Proverbs 15:5-12

Proposition: Our Lord Jesus grew in wisdom by submitting to His Father's discipline, and we should imitate Him by listening to the Father too.

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Introduction

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, Luke the evangelist tells us that Jesus grew in wisdom, in stature, and in favor with God and man. Hebrews tells us that our Savior learned obedience through what He suffered. Though He was fully God, and thus divinely immutable, He was fully one of us, and we know that if there's one thing people can do it's to change. Jesus didn't just change physically, though. He also grew in wisdom. Our text this morning, like the rest of Proverbs, talks about growing in wisdom, and particularly about how the wise son grows in wisdom by heeding His Father's discipline. First we'll see Jesus as the wise son, then we'll look specifically at the things the Father teaches us in these verses, and then we'll see the warning about the fate of everyone who rejects the Father's discipline.

I. Jesus, the Shrewd Son who Submitted to His Father's Discipline, v. 5

We begin, as we so often do in Proverbs, with a statement about the wise son and the Father's instruction. This is one is phrased with the negative portion first, though. The point is simple: A fool rejects his Father's discipline.

What does this mean? That to not listen, to blow off what you father tells you, is the hallmark of a fool. If your father is attempting to give you the structure we call discipline that enables you to control yourself, and you don't pay attention to that structure but rather ignore it, then you are a fool.

Let's say that you have a problem with getting your math homework done. Your father says "Every Tuesday night I'm going to sit with you and do math homework. Every problem you work I'm going to work right beside you. Every question you have, I will answer. And we will do this until you are able to do the problems more quickly and easily than I am."

Only a fool would say "No thanks. I'd rather fail math class." A wise son would heed his father's discipline in this instance. He would value the opportunity to have the need for discipline reinforced by his father. Anyway, we can apply this to all parental instruction, and especially to all of our Heavenly Father's instruction. And that's the positive side: The one who regards reproof becomes "prudent," as most English translations have it. Again, though, this word is the same one that describes the serpent in Genesis 3, the serpent was who more *arum* or cunning than any beast of the field. To listen to your Father's instruction is to become cunning. Now, that word has such negative connotations in English that we don't dare describe our Lord Jesus as cunning, even though He personally commands us to be as cunning as serpents. But I want you to recognize with me that He is shrewd, and the reason He is shrewd is because He listened to His Father's instruction. The Lord Jesus was never evil, manipulative, egregious, or out of line. But He was shrewd. He was crafty in how He approached situations. He was the opposite of naive. He was not born yesterday, not a man who just fell off the cabbage truck.

The Lord Jesus listened to His Father's discipline, which took the form of moral instruction, and He grew shrewd. He gained shrewdness over the years by listening constantly to His Father.

Now, reproof is specifically a moral correction. It means telling someone "What you just did is wrong. This is the right thing to do." At General Assembly this past week, one of the speakers was droning on about something. As he drew near the end of his speech, he said "Finally."

I immediately whispered (very loud) "Yes!" Instantly the friend I was sitting next to, an elder at a PCA church in Pennsylvania, whispered to me "Caleb! Hush."

That was a reproof. That was a word from the Father delivered to me by one of His children telling me how to be shrewd. A fool would double down; a wise man will listen to reproof and back down.

Obviously, Jesus never needed to hear the Father say "You're wrong." He needed no corrective discipline. But for all that, He learned by heeding His Father's preemptive discipline.

II. The Content of the Father's Instruction, vv. 6-9

Well, the word translated "discipline" is also frequently translated "instruction". What are some of the things our Heavenly Father wants us to know, things to which Jesus listened perfectly and which He learned perfectly?

A. Our Father Blesses the Righteous with Wealth, v. 6

The first of these things is that merely belong to a righteous household is a great treasure. The house of the righteous is great treasure. Some versions add the preposition "in," but it's not in the Hebrew. If you're righteous this morning, your house is worth a lot. This is not necessarily

speaking of dollars and cents. Sometimes the righteous live in shacks and hovels. But the relational wealth, the spiritual wealth, that's to be found in the homes of the righteous is an unmitigated blessing.

Do you believe this? Do you recognize that merely to maintain a righteous household is not only the equivalent of wealth, but is actually better than wealth? Many of the proverbs work by contrasting something pretty good with something even better, something we would not have thought to be better than the first thing. Oftentimes our lifestyles show that we value money more than we value having a righteous household. But our Father tells us here that the home of the righteous is more blessed than the home of the wicked *even when the wicked have a better income*. You see, layered on top of that income of theirs is trouble. Trouble is in the income of the wicked. This does not deny that the wicked can have a very nice income. In fact, they often do. But their household lacks the Father's blessing, a blessing which rests upon the home of the righteous.

Again, brothers and sisters, this proverb applies in a superlative degree to our Lord Jesus. His house, which is the church, is wealthy — not always with the goods of this world, but always with the love, joy, and peace that the Holy Spirit brings. The house of the wicked is troubled, but the house of Christ stands firm and endures for eternity. So what's more important to you: Getting money or being righteous? Solomon makes it very clear that righteousness is more important than wealth, because righteousness always gains God's blessing but wealth can come with His curse.

B. Our Father loves Sons

But not only do we learn that our Father has blessed and enriched His Wise Son who listened and became shrewd; we also learn further what our Father loves as we read on.

1. Whose wise lips display their upright hearts, v. 7

He loves sons whose wise lips display their upright hearts. Did you notice the contrast here between the lips of the wise and the heart of the wicked? The lips of the wicked aren't their biggest problem. Their lips are driven by their heart. And of course that's true for the righteous as well. Why did Jesus spread knowledge wherever He went? Because His heart was and is upright. Everything He has to say is wise, right, holy, and perfect. His heart is right with God, and so what He has to say is edifying, is a blessing to everyone who hears it. I challenge anyone to read the Beatitudes and say that they are unpleasant and unedifying. Even those who don't believe in Jesus and don't think the Beatitudes are true have to admit that they are at least beautiful.

Jesus spread knowledge with His lips. Our Father loves to see us do the same. He wants us to build up, to enlighten, to bless wherever we go and whoever we're talking with. This verse does not mean that the wise subject people to vast amounts of unwanted information. Rather, the wise spread knowledge that's helpful, useful, and relevant to those they're speaking to. Above all, they spread the knowledge of wisdom. They tell people about Jesus Christ, personified wisdom.

Let me put it this way. Have you heard a single verse yet in Proverbs that was relevant only to people in 10th century B.C. Judah? Anything describing the Jerusalem water system, or the palace bureaucracy? Anything that gets into the minutiae of something the rest of us don't really care about? No. This book, which communicates wisdom, speaks to all ages, to all times and places, precisely because it talks about eternal types of people and gives wisdom that's valid in any culture and for those in any walk of life.

Is that the kind of thing your mouth (and heart) major on? If you can tell me everything about Marvel Studios or such-and-such baseball player, that's not the knowledge this verse is speaking of. Rather, this verse is talking about the knowledge of how to live well, the knowledge of how to be upright and pleasing to your Father, who loves to hear His sons spreading knowledge from right hearts. That is what you and I need to be aiming for. That's what should characterize our conversations. Yes, we need to know something about the temporary and forgettable. But the truly wise will say many things that endure because they have hearts that spread knowledge.

2. Whose worship flows from an upright character, v. 8

Our passage goes on to tell us what the LORD loves: He loves the one whose worship flows from an upright character. The contrast here is not between prayer and sacrifice, but rather between the acceptable worship of the righteous and the unacceptable worship of the wicked. The bottom line is that God hates the worship of those whose lives are given over to sin. If you don't obey God or even try to obey Him, then He has no pleasure in your acts of worship. That includes sacrifice, no matter how expensive, and prayer, no matter how fervent.

If you're swearing, cheating, stealing, and lusting all week, but then come in here on Sunday morning and say "I'm going to make up for it all by giving a million dollars right in the collection plate," then your million is distasteful to God. In fact, He loathes it. It's an abomination because it's not truly an act of worship. It's simply an act of bribery.

On the other hand, God loves those who obey Him. He delights in the prayer of the upright. He is thrilled when you pray to Him.

God delights in prayer! Do you? So often our praying seems boring and tired even to ourselves. But if you are truly attempting to follow Him in the power of the Spirit, forgiven by the blood of Christ, then know that God accepts and rejoices in your prayer. It is something that gives Him great pleasure. So I ask: Do you pray? Do you delight in this act of communication that delights your Father? Do you sacrifice? I don't just mean in your giving to the church, though that's important. Do you authentically worship God in every detail? And especially do you rejoice in the Lord Jesus Christ, the one who worshipped the Father perfectly in offering Himself as the ultimate flawless sacrifice? The sacrifice of that righteous one is the Father's greatest delight. He loves Jesus in part because Jesus gave Himself over to the Father's wrath in our place. Do you love Jesus for that? Do you delight in what your Father delights in?

3. Whose lifestyle is one of following righteousness, v. 9

If you do, then you will love to obey Him. Our Father wants us to listen to His voice, as the entire Bible and especially this book of Proverbs makes clear. Wicked lifestyles are something God abominates. That is, He loathes and rejects them. But God loves the one who follows righteousness. We know that this means that above all, He loves His Son Jesus Christ, who never turned aside to the right hand or to the left but always followed righteousness perfectly. But it also means that He loves those who, in Christ, honestly try and experience a measure of success in following righteousness too.

Do you want to be loved by God? Then follow Christ, who is righteousness. Seek to get to know Him better and look like Him more.

By the way, does God love us when we sin? Yes, because He sees us clothed with Christ. But at the same time, our sin displeases Him, and in one sense He does love us more when we are following righteousness. So pursue holiness. Follow righteousness. What that means is *follow Christ*. Yahweh knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the ungodly will perish because it is an abomination to God.

III. The Fate of Everyone who Rejects the Father's Discipline, vv. 10-12

And indeed, we have three verses of warning here. Our Lord Jesus heard these warnings, too, and acted on them.

A. Death for those who don't listen, v. 10

The first is the clearest: The one who can't bear to hear that he's wrong will die. If you forsake the way of holiness, if you stop following Jesus, rest assured that you will be taught some painful lessons. You will experience harsh discipline. And the final act of discipline is capital punishment. The one who persists in evil will die. That explains the 70,000 overdose deaths in the USA in 2017. That explains all death, ultimately speaking. The reason we die is because of sin. And those who "stay dead," who experience the second death in Hell, are those who refused to listen.

Do you want to die? Don't listen. Don't listen to your parents, your boss, your landlord, the cops, the judge, the guards — and you will experience death soon enough.

B. Hell for those whose wicked hearts are exposed before God, v. 11

And that's not all. Solomon warns us that Sheol, the place of the dead, and Abaddon, the Destroyer who is the prince of the Pit, are not hidden from God. No matter how deep underground you go, God sees. He knows what's happening in the bottom of Hell. And if He can perceive Hell and Destruction, if He can read the mind of the Devil, then surely He can read yours. Indeed, how much easier is it to tell what you're thinking than to penetrate the fume and smoke and subterranean caverns of Hell! Notice how the comparison implies a threat. To say "I know what's going on in deep Hell" and "I know what's going in your mind" back to back like this is to say, "What's going on in your mind may send you to Hell. Beware." And so, brothers and sisters, the shrewd person says "If God can read my mind, I will follow Christ and seek the Spirit's help to think pure thoughts! If God can read my mind, I will do my best to make my

thoughts pleasing to Him.” That’s what Jesus did. And by His Spirit’s power you and I can seek to think pure thoughts even while we are forgiven for our own impure thoughts.

C. An inability to love for the scoffer who sidesteps the Wise Son, v. 12

Well, the final consequence of failure to listen and become shrewd is a pre-death consequence. It is the consequence of a shriveled heart. A scoffer, for all his bluster, is a coward. He won’t go to the wise because knows what they’ll say and that it will not be favorable to his scoffing. He doesn’t love the one who reproves him — which is why ch. 9 actually says that if you rebuke a scoffer, you get wounded. The scoffer physically attacks the one who tells him that he’s wrong.

So if you avoid the wise son whose name is Jesus, your heart will shrivel. If you can’t love the most lovely of the sons of men, you will soon not be able to love at all. And as a scoffer, you will be imprisoned in your selfishness forever. You won’t go to the wise. You won’t become wise. You will simply grow worse and worse as a sinner who hates wisdom and will do anything to avoid it.

Avoid that fate. Don’t be the fool who rejects his Father’s discipline. Be the wise man who speaks the truth. Love the Lord Jesus, the ultimate wise son. And above all, listen to your Father! Do you see the beauty of Christ, who listened and grew in wisdom? In Him, united to Him by faith, you too will grow in wisdom. So believe, and pray, and worship, and you will become shrewder and shrewder. Amen.