

How blessed is the man who finds wisdom
And the man who gains understanding.
For her profit is better than the profit of silver
And her gain better than fine gold.
She is more precious than jewels;
And nothing you desire compares with her.
Long life is in her right hand;
In her left hand are riches and honor.
Her ways are pleasant ways
And all her paths are peace.
She is a tree of life to those who take hold of her,
And happy are all who hold her fast.

Proverbs 3:13-18

Before I get into the main portion of this sermon, I want to restate the four principles of the Philosophy of Proverbs. When we take these together, we can discern how God wants us to treat the world and those around us.

1. Fear the Lord, for this is where all wisdom and knowledge come from. Fear is recognition of and thankfulness to God for what He does and Who He is, followed by diligent obedience to His commands and instructions. This includes both the discipline to act in accordance with God's law and a healthy amount of knee smiting. Remember from our creeds that we have one Lord, God almighty, and He is the object of this fear. However, as we have seen, the book of Proverbs explicitly acknowledges two of the Persons of the Trinity: the Father and Son. As Wisdom is a type for Christ, we are given insight into the relationship between the Father and Son through how Wisdom and God interact in Proverbs. Our fear is to be directed toward both Persons and colored by their role within the one Being of God and their chosen roles they exercise in Creation. God the Father as the creator of all things — our Father and Judge — and God the Son, who is Jesus, begotten of the father and archetype for all things — our Standard, Friend, and Redeemer.
2. Seek wisdom in all that we do. We should understand God's law and be practical and prudent on how we exercise it. Our Goal in this life is to be like God, not just to be saved. This means that we are to live a life of humble repentance, both of our grievous sins and the small, stupid actions we perform daily. What's more, Wisdom is a practiced habit — that is to say — Wisdom is a discipline that we build in our lives. It is something that we intentionally seek out as a means of self improvement. This self improvement is then honed to a craft. The classic example is playing an instrument, where someone goes from a learner to a master musician. This

same process, classically called a Virtue, is to be the central focus of our way of looking at life and everything that we do. These crafts we build in our lives give us insight into the very nature of God, since He created all things and our excellence of action requires a level of familiarity with nature itself to function. In turn, Nature was created to display God's Attributes, Power, and Nature. So, by seeking wisdom, we are not just being like God, and learning how to act like God, we are also learning about God through that which He made.

3. Honor your parents. Embedded in the very structure of the book is the idea of heeding your father and mother in their advice and obeying that advice, often using the analogy of jewelry. The son is repeatedly told to wear the instructions and teachings of his parents as ornaments and necklaces. This command from the father is like the command of God to wear His law on our hands and heads. This symbolically represents the teachings, both of God and of our earthly fathers, guiding our thoughts and actions. Additionally, this mirrors the first element of this philosophy. Not only is honoring your parents a form of honoring God, it is the most healthy and correct relation from a child to a parent. This shows a parallel between the relationship you have with your father and our relationship with God. This is further reinforced by our explorations of Fatherhood throughout scripture. In Genesis, we see that Seth, the patriarch of the righteous family line from Adam, was said to be in Adam's image, while Cain, the patriarch of the line of wicked men from Adam was not. This is further confirmed by Christ when He equates the wicked Jews of the first century with Cain, attributing to them all the blood of the righteous from Abel to Zechariah. Cain was not only rejecting God, he was rejecting the instruction of his father, who gave his sons instructions on the sacrifices and laws of God. This is so important to God, that He instructed the prophet Malachi to rebuke the Levites for hating their wives and children, promising that John the Baptist would come in the spirit of Elijah to turn the hearts of the Fathers to the children, else He would smite the land with a curse. A proper understanding of our relationship to God requires that we properly honor our fathers, as a rejection of our fathers is a rejection of God.
4. Teach your children. Finally, corresponding to the second element of this philosophy, you are to pass on what you learn to your children, to teach them to love the Lord your God and seek wisdom. This is not merely a means to pass on knowledge, but it an exercise of the very wisdom you are passing on. Entailed in this element is the expectation that you will be wise enough to pass wisdom on and be honorable enough to cause your children to listen. This is the command that God gives Moses, but this command is meant to show us how to be like God, for God teaches His children. The entire book of Proverbs is a manual on how to do this, with the first 9

chapters being a set of lessons given from father to son, showing us what to teach and how to teach it.

For the last few sermons, I have dwelled on Who Wisdom is and what she is. We have seen that she is a type for Christ in the Wisdom literature and that she is a “practiced habit of action toward a particular end.” In proverbs, both the beginning and end of all wisdom is the Fear of the Lord. Today I want to do three things for you, the listeners. First, I want to show you how we should understand the first two treatises in light of our better understanding of who Wisdom is. Secondly, I want to try to get some insight into the reasoning behind the Father’s construction of the treatises so far in the book. Lastly, I want to show what the natural result of everything the father has taught. Remember, how the father delivers the message is just as important as the message itself. We are learning how to teach this lesson while we are learning the lesson itself.

If we think back to the first two treatises, we see that they are opposing arguments. We’ve seen from the beginning that Wisdom interacts with man in a commensurate way to how they treat her, just as God does. It was God who said, “those who honor Me I will honor, and those who despise Me will be lightly esteemed (1 Samuel 2:30b)”. Wisdom goes out to every man, showing them their own foolishness and ignorance. Her call to them is “How long, O naive ones, will you love being simple-minded? And scoffers delight themselves in scoffing And fools hate knowledge? Turn to my reproof, Behold, I will pour out my spirit on you; I will make my words known to you. (Proverbs 1:22-23)” It is here that we got our first glimpse into Wisdom’s nature. This mirrors the command given to us by our Lord when He said, “Go therefore into all the world, [preach the gospel to all creation,] and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you. [He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned.] (Matthew 28:18b-20a; [Mark 16:15-16])” This is the same command as the one given to Moses in Deuteronomy 6, and the same command the father in Proverbs is obeying and passing on in his treatises. In each instance, we are going out to others and act as a means of God to call others to repentance. Our actions are to mirror Wisdom’s, who Mirrors God. The core of this “going out” is a love for the object of the discipleship. It is the greatest fulfillment of the second greatest commandment — that is to Love your neighbor as yourself. In doing so, we are also loving God by being like Him in our love for others.

Notice another similarity between what our Lord said and how Proverbs portrays this relationship with Wisdom: “He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned. (Mark 16:16)” In my last sermon, I connected these two responses to a phrase used by

Paul in his epistle to the Romans: “Behold then the kindness and severity of God; to those who fell, severity, but to you, God’s kindness, if you continue in His kindness; otherwise you also will be cut off. (Romans 11:22)” The father in Proverbs gives us this contrast in the first two treatises. The father’s first treatise is a warning to the son to not act like the wicked. His second treatise gives the antidote to the evil of the wicked, teaching the son to love Wisdom.

The wicked men of Proverbs 1 reject wisdom and seek wealth through violence. It’s important to understand that God does not hate wealth, nor does he discourage you from gaining wealth. Repeatedly, in Proverbs, we are told that wealth is a blessing from God, and we are instructed through the sayings to leave an inheritance to our children’s children. What God does hate is when you are blessed with wealth and repay God’s blessing by twisting His grace into a means to gain through the destruction of others. In our example of Tyre, the city had splendor and wealth. The people of Tyre had accumulated Wisdom and their king was more wise than Daniel. God’s condemnation was not directed at their wealth, but at their heart. The people of Tyre saw themselves as gods due to their wealth. Instead of providing an inheritance for their family, caring for their poor, using that wealth to bless and love their neighbors, and honoring God from their first fruits, they turned ravenous in their greed. As God said through the prophet, “You were blameless in your ways From the day you were created Until unrighteousness was found in you. By the abundance of your trade You were internally filled with violence, And you sinned (Ezekiel 15-16a)”

As with Tyre, the men of Proverbs 1 were not wicked because of their wealth, but because they ultimately rejected the source of whatever Wisdom they had. Since these men reject Wisdom, Wisdom rejects them. Just as Tyre was brought low by the corruption of the wisdom, so are these men brought low by their own wit. The father tells us of the traps they set for others then says of them, “Indeed, it is useless to spread the baited net In the sight of any bird; But they lie in wait for their own blood; They ambush their own lives. So are the ways of everyone who gains by violence; It takes away the life of its possessors. (Proverbs 1:17-19)” Wisdom’s response to these fools and their wickedness is to run and hide from them, laughing as they flail about in their ignorance. Wisdom tells them, “Because I called and you refused, I stretched out my hand and no one paid attention; And you neglected all my counsel And did not want my reproof; I will also laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your dread comes, When your dread comes like a storm And your calamity comes like a whirlwind, When distress and anguish come upon you. Then they will call on me, but I will not answer; They will seek me diligently but they will not find me, Because they hated knowledge And did not choose the fear of the Lord. “They would not accept my counsel, They spurned all my reproof. So they shall eat of the fruit of their own way And be satiated with

their own devices. For the waywardness of the naive will kill them, And the complacency of fools will destroy them. (Proverbs 1:24-29)”

The father tells his son this as a caution to not be like the wicked. He says, “My son, if sinners entice you, Do not consent. do not walk in the way with them. Keep your feet from their path. (Proverbs 1:10,15)” This means both that the son should not join in with their evil deeds and that the son should not imitate their behavior. You do not repay evil for evil. Instead, the son is to “Make [his] ear attentive to wisdom, Incline [his] heart to understanding...cry for discernment, Lift your voice for understanding...seek her as silver And search for her as for hidden treasures (Proverbs 2:2-4).” The fathers reasoning is this: “the Lord gives wisdom; From His mouth come knowledge and understanding (2:6)”. By seeking wisdom, “you will discern the fear of the Lord And discover the knowledge of God. (2:5)”. Then “wisdom will enter your heart And knowledge will be pleasant to your soul; Discretion will guard you, Understanding will watch over you, To deliver you from the way of evil...[and] from the strange woman (2:10-12a,16a)”. This deliverance will cause you to “discern righteousness and justice And equity and every good course. So you will walk in the way of good men And keep to the paths of the righteous. For the upright will live in the land And the blameless will remain in it; But the wicked will be cut off from the land And the treacherous will be uprooted from it. (2:9,20-22)” Because God will honor those who honor Him, even if your life has been one of wickedness, a truly repentant person can be redeemed by God, just like the sons of Korah – who should have died with their fathers, but were spared by God.

In light of our understanding that Wisdom is a type for Christ, we see that these wicked men were not just rejecting good sense and proper action. Those things were just the instruments by which they reject our Lord because they hate Him. Like Cain, they would rather leave the presence of God, giving up their homes and families and blessings, just for the chance to spite Him. They are not just fools, they are evil. The father knows this and is actively directing his son to act in the exact opposite way as the wicked. This entire section of the book is treatise after treatise of the father begging his son not to follow in the footsteps of the wicked. He focuses his craftsmanship of word and wit to demonstrate to his son that he has everything to gain by rejecting evil and everything to lose by rejecting Wisdom. He knows that his son will do foolish things just as he knows that he has and will make foolish decisions himself. In fact, before you can seek for Wisdom, you must acknowledge that you do not have Wisdom. Just as Agur says, “Surely I am more stupid than any man, And I do not have the understanding of a man. Neither have I learned wisdom, Nor do I have the knowledge of the Holy One. Who has ascended into heaven and descended? Who has gathered the wind in His fists? Who has wrapped the waters in His garment? Who has established all the ends of the earth? What is His name or His son’s name? Surely you know!

(30:2-4)” This is not self-flagellation, it is a deep and serious recognition that we are in desperate need of Wisdom and an accompanying will to seek after Her.

The father spent two treatises telling his son the bad that will befall him if he rejects wisdom and the good that will come his way if he seeks after wisdom and now turns to give his son practical advice on HOW to do this. After all, of what benefit is a warning and promise if we are not given a means to avoid error and walk in righteousness. In his third treatise, the father opens with a template of what it means to seek after wisdom and Fear the Lord. He says, “**Trust in the Lord with all your heart And do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He will make your paths straight. Do not be wise in your own eyes; Fear the Lord and turn away from evil. It will be healing to your body And refreshment to your bones. Honor the Lord from your wealth And from the first of all your produce; So your barns will be filled with plenty And your vats will overflow with new wine. My son, do not reject the discipline of the Lord Or loathe His reproof, For whom the Lord loves He reproves, Even as a father corrects the son in whom he delights. (3:5-12)**”

Just like a child is to trust their earthly father, we as human beings are to trust God. Just like our relationship with our father, we are to mimic God, trying to act like Him. Just as we are to adorn ourselves with the laws and wisdom of our earthly father, we are to adorn ourselves with the laws and wisdom of God. See also that the father does not make any distinction between fearing the Lord and gaining Wisdom because these are the same thing. If you find Wisdom, you will find Christ; and if you gain Christ, with Him will come all wisdom.

This is why the father can conclude with, “**How blessed is the man who finds wisdom And the man who gains understanding. For her profit is better than the profit of silver And her gain better than fine gold. She is more precious than jewels; And nothing you desire compares with her. Long life is in her right hand; In her left hand are riches and honor. Her ways are pleasant ways And all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to those who take hold of her, And happy are all who hold her fast. ...Keep sound wisdom and discretion, So they will be life to your soul And adornment to your neck. Then you will walk in your way securely And your foot will not stumble. When you lie down, you will not be afraid; When you lie down, your sleep will be sweet. Do not be afraid of sudden fear Nor of the onslaught of the wicked when it comes; For the Lord will be your confidence And will keep your foot from being caught. (3:13-18,21-26)**” While the father in Proverbs did not understand the fullness of Christ, since Christ had not yet come, even he knew of the riches of God’s mercy through Wisdom. For, what more could you want other than true Knowledge of God? It is Christ that gives eternal life, which surpasses all earthly goods, and “**This is eternal life, that they may know...the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom [He] sent. (John 17:3)**” In

Matthew's Gospel, we hear Christ give a similar message. To those who have anxiety, our Lord says, "Do not worry then, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear for clothing?' For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. (Matthew 6:31-33)" Instead of looking to this life and its cares, we are to "keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory. (Colossians 3:1-4)"

As the father has been telling his son — and us through the text — our goal is not any temporal or spiritual blessing unto itself beyond knowledge of God and conformity to His Image. When we understand and practice a Virtue or discipline, our goal is not the discipline or virtue itself, but seeking to understand the one from Whom the virtue comes. And unity with Him is worth more than any other wealth we gain from those virtues and disciplines. If we seek God with abandon, building virtue and discipline as a means to understand Him, the gifts we gain along the way will be the means by which God will cover the multitude of our sins. Whats more, they will be the means by which God will keep us on the path to Him. Having died in Christ, and with the vision of our future of being raised with Him and in Him, we set our sights above.

When we read of Wisdom entering our hearts and keeping us from evil and sin — that is Christ. When we read of Wisdom being pleasant to our soul — that is Christ. Because Christ is the natural conclusion of all reality — since all reality was made to speak of Him to us — our diligent pursuit of Wisdom in the small things will still lead us to Christ. If our hearts are tuned to honor Him, He will provide all our needs while making us one with Him. It is for us to "lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and...run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith (Hebrews 12:1-2a)" and it is up to God to provide. This blessing is worth far more than riches because it give us unity with God, as we will share His Image.