

Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due,
When it is in your power to do it.
Do not say to your neighbor, "Go, and come back,
And tomorrow I will give it,"
When you have it with you.
Do not devise harm against your neighbor,
While he lives securely beside you.
Do not contend with a man without cause,
If he has done you no harm.
Do not envy a man of violence
And do not choose any of his ways.
For the devious are an abomination to the Lord;
But He is intimate with the upright.
The curse of the Lord is on the house of the wicked,
But He blesses the dwelling of the righteous.
Though He scoffs at the scoffers,
Yet He gives grace to the afflicted.
The wise will inherit honor,
But fools display dishonor.

Proverbs 3:27-35

Before I begin, What are the two greatest commandments?

The book of Proverbs teaches a philosophy that I've summarized in four points:

The first is to 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 the knee smiting that comes with standing before the All Consuming Fire. Remember from our creeds that we have one Lord, God almighty, and He is the object of this fear and also that God is multipersonal. The book of Proverbs explicitly acknowledges two of the Persons of the Trinity: the Father and Son, and I believe indirectly references the third in passages such as when Wisdom says, "Turn to my reproof, Behold, I will pour out my spirit on you; I will make my words known to you. (1:23)" Our fear is to be directed toward all Three 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 - and the Holy Ghost as the Spirit of Life — our inner Light and Guide.

The next step in this philosophy is to seek Wisdom in all that we do.

To do this properly, we have to incorporate our understanding of Who and What Wisdom is, which informs us on how to seek after Her. As mentioned, Wisdom is a Type for Christ — this means that seeking Wisdom is seeking Christ. But also, Wisdom is a practiced habit of action toward a particular end. This means that when we seek Wisdom, and hear the promises Wisdom gives to us, we should know that these are promises from Jesus Himself. This also gives us the “end” to which our practiced habit is to be aimed. Thus, true Wisdom is a “practiced habit of action toward the Fear of the Lord.” To Fear God properly, we must love Him — as we have been repeatedly told — and to quote our Lord, *“If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.”* (John 14:15)” This goes back to our fear of God, but the seeking part here is that we are actively looking for ways to obey God’s commandments. This obedience is to be joyful and thankful. — but not only those.

Note HOW God made us: *“Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.* (Genesis 1:26-27)” And again — *“Then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being. The Lord God planted a garden toward the east, in Eden; and there He placed the man whom He had formed. Out of the ground the Lord God caused to grow every tree that is pleasing to the sight and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil... Then the Lord God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him.” Out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the sky, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called a living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all the cattle, and to the birds of the sky, and to every beast of the field, but for Adam there was not found a helper suitable for him. So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then He took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh at that place. The Lord God fashioned into a woman the rib which He had taken from the man, and brought her to the man. The man said, “This is now bone of my bones, And flesh of my flesh; She shall be called Woman, Because she was taken out of Man.” For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.* (Genesis 2:7-9,18-24)”

There are a few things to notice here. The most pressing is that God made us to Image Him. This is not just what, but is also how. The stuffness of Man is not primarily his body or soul, but is primarily that he reflects the God Who made him. Also, God made man as both male and female. Just as God says “let Us make man in Our Image (Genesis 1:26a)”, God then makes Man as Male and Female. The complete man is a union of both man and woman in marriage. We know this not just because of the language of God when He created man, but also because the creation account ends with “For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh. (Genesis 2:24)”

This Image of God also has authority. This first communication from God to Man is to command Him to take dominion over all things. The word translated as “subdue” here literally means to bring into “bondage, tread down, beat or make a path, and subdue.” The word translated as “rule” means to have “dominion over, rule over, or to dominate.” Note also that this is pre-fall. Lastly, we see that Adam’s response to seeing his opposite — his completion — is to spin a line of poetry. Having looked at every creature in existence and finding all of them wanting, Adam finally sees his other half — she who came from his flank — and says ““This is now bone of my bones, And flesh of my flesh; She shall be called Woman, Because she was taken out of Man.” (Genesis 2:23)”

Our holistic picture here is that Adam and Eve are the complete unit of mankind, and this unit of mankind was made to be like God in dominion, authority, and expression. When God appeals to the love of marriage in our pursuit of Wisdom, he is appealing to the most intimate and sacred bond possible between two human beings — a bond that makes two distincts into one whole, and one He designed to reflect His relationship with His church. So, seeking after Wisdom is not just looking for smart ways to act, it is seeking to fully take on that Image with which we were created. In other words, we are striving to become fully human.

Our greatest obstacle is the same obstacle that man has faced since the Fall, and that is our own sin. God described this conflict first between the men and women “To the woman He said, “I will greatly multiply Your pain in childbirth, In pain you will bring forth children; Yet your desire will be for your husband, And he will rule over you.” (Genesis 3:16)” — and then to Cain “If you do well, will not your countenance be lifted up? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it.” (Genesis 4:7)” In both places, the same words were used for “desire” and “rule” or “master” respectively, meaning there is a parallel between the way that man and woman interacts and how a man interacts with his own desires and sin. If we notice how the promises of Wisdom are directed at this conflict, our insight into the father’s teaching will become more clear. In the imagery of Proverbs, the son is being told to look for a

wife. This is something a son naturally does because he has a built-in desire for that kind of completion. However, there are two women in view who are being contrasted. One is Lady Wisdom and the other is the foreign Harlot. Lady Wisdom represents the best kind of completion, as we have seen so far, and the Harlot represents an incomplete completeness, one of internal conflict and strife. These are righteousness and wickedness; the way of the upright and the way of the wicked; Wisdom and Foolishness. All of this is collapsed into the metaphor, and the father is using these devices to command his son to seek Wisdom as he would a lover. This is the clause of the second greatest commandment: to love yourself.

This self love is not indulgent or accommodating. In fact, it is exacting. This self love is a constant reminder to ones self that God's Law is our source of happiness, life, health, and peace precisely because it aids us in becoming like God. That is — we will better embody the image which we were created to have. To do this — and to love wisdom — our goal in life is to understand God's law and be practical and prudent on how we exercise it in everything that we do with the end of being like God. These are the things we are to actively and intentionally seek out as a means of self improvement. This self improvement is then honed to a craft, consisting of a life of humble repentance, both from our grievous sins and the small, stupid actions we perform daily. The classic example to demonstrate this process 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.

Since being Human includes relationship, and the natural result of that relationship results in children, we are told to Honor our Parents.

Embedded in the very structure of the book of Proverbs is the idea of heeding your father and mother in their advice and obeying that advice. 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 and symbolically represents the teachings, both of God and of our earthly fathers, guiding our thoughts and actions. Additionally, this mirrors the first element of the philosophy of Proverbs. Honoring your parents parallels the way in which we Honor God, it is a way of practicing our honoring of God, and it is the most healthy and correct relation from a child to a parent. Just as Paul acknowledges that “even some of [the Greek] poets have said, ‘For we also are His children.’ (Acts 17:28)” and the one Who they “worship[ed] in ignorance

(Acts 17:23)” they “understood through what has been made (Romans 1:20)”, we see that God has woven into the tapestry of Nature this parallel so that we will better understand Him and Wisdom. Since God is removed from us in a fashion, He has given us parents so that we can have a readily seen analogue to our relationship with Him. Additionally, being a father or mother gives you practical insight into God’s perspective of His relation to us.

Just as Wisdom is so related to God that rejecting one is rejecting the other, we see the parallel between rejecting our fathers and rejecting God. Just as Cain is known for his stubborn idiocy in scoffing at God and his line results in a man who boasts before the Lord while violating his marital covenants, Seth was in the image of his father and his line results in a man whose hope was in God. Christ then uses this contrast 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, as a wicked son, 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.

The Law given to Israel by God immediately after the ten commandments is a set of case law. Included in this law are two commands, punishable by death. ““He who strikes his father or his mother shall surely be put to death. (Exodus 21:15)” and “He who curses his father or his mother shall surely be put to death. (Exodus 21:17)”. While honoring your father and mother includes these things, we can turn to the saying in Proverbs to see what other ways we can honor our fathers:

- “A wise son makes a father glad, But a foolish son is a grief to his mother. (10:1)”,
- “He who gathers in summer is a son who acts wisely, But he who sleeps in harvest is a son who acts shamefully. (10:5)”,
- “A wise son accepts his father’s discipline, But a scoffer does not listen to rebuke. (13:1)”,
- “A wise son makes a father glad, But a foolish man despises his mother. (15:20)”,
- “Grandchildren are the crown of old men, And the glory of sons is their fathers. (17:6)”,
- “A foolish son is a grief to his father And bitterness to her who bore him. (17:25)”,
- “A foolish son is destruction to his father, And the contentions of a wife are a constant dripping. (19:13)”,
- “He who assaults his father and drives his mother away Is a shameful and disgraceful son. (19:26)”,

- “Cease listening, my son, to discipline, And you will stray from the words of knowledge. (19:27)”,
- “Do not move the ancient boundary Which your fathers have set. (22:28)”,
- “Do not move the ancient boundary Or go into the fields of the fatherless, For their Redeemer is strong; He will plead their case against you. Apply your heart to discipline And your ears to words of knowledge. (23:10-12)”,
- “My son, if your heart is wise, My own heart also will be glad; And my inmost being will rejoice When your lips speak what is right. (23:17-21)”,
- “Listen to your father who begot you, And do not despise your mother when she is old. Buy truth, and do not sell it, Get wisdom and instruction and understanding. (23:22-23)”,
- “The father of the righteous will greatly rejoice, And he who sires a wise son will be glad in him. Let your father and your mother be glad, And let her rejoice who gave birth to you. (23:24-25)”,
- “Give me your heart, my son, And let your eyes delight in my ways. For a harlot is a deep pit And an adulterous woman is a narrow well. Surely she lurks as a robber, And increases the faithless among men. (23:26-28)”,
- “My son, fear the Lord and the king; Do not associate with those who are given to change, For their calamity will rise suddenly, And who knows the ruin that comes from both of them? (24:21)”,
- “Do not forsake your own friend or your father’s friend, And do not go to your brother’s house in the day of your calamity; Better is a neighbor who is near than a brother far away (27:10)”,
- “Be wise, my son, and make my heart glad, That I may reply to him who reproaches me. (27:11)”,
- “He who keeps the law is a discerning son, But he who is a companion of gluttons humiliates his father. (28:7)”
- “He who robs his father or his mother And says, “It is not a transgression,” Is the companion of a man who destroys. (28:24)”,
- “A man who loves wisdom makes his father glad, But he who keeps company with harlots wastes his wealth. (29:3)”

As we can see, honoring our fathers and mothers has much more to do with the holistic way in which you live your life and less to do with any individual action. Honoring your father and mother does everything from helping them rest at night to helping them respond to someone who tries to reproach them.

In our modern day, we have been acclimated to the idea that we can reject our parents if they annoy or offend us enough, and that we are our own person individually, per se. What we are seeing in all this is that honoring your parents is not optional and is included in the command to love yourself. If you honor your parents, you — being an iteration of those parents — are honoring yourself. This train of honor goes back all the way to the first father of mankind, and his father

– who is God. Even with adoption, you are taking on a line of family that traces itself back to the first father.

This leads us to the final element of this philosophy, which directly enables all the ones mentioned already – Teach Your Children.

Corresponding to the second element of this philosophy, you are to pass on what you learn to your children, with the end in mind that they would 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 and it is the primary factor that enables them to live that life out. Entailed in this element is the expectation that you will be wise enough to be able to pass on wisdom and be honorable enough to cause your children to listen. This is the command that God gives Moses, Who gives a line of transmission from Himself to Moses, to the Nation, to the fathers, to the sons and grandsons. This command is, just as the rest, 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.

We see the father taking all this time to construct a narrative on how to teach and what to teach. We see his appeals to the son, we see how he models his discourse on the way Wisdom reaches out to us, and we see how desperate he is to model what God told Moses to teach to Israel. Just as children are to honor their parents by taking wisdom from them and using it as the model for action and thought, parents are to gain virtue, learn wisdom, and then go out of their way to teach it to their offspring. By teaching your children, you are loving yourself, as they are iterations of you.

So far in our studies through the book of Proverbs, we have been dealing with the first commandment – To Love the Lord Your God – and a clause in the second – To Love Yourself, but we have yet to deal with the major part of the second commandment, that is: Love your Neighbor. If you remember, the first two principles in the Philosophy of Proverbs is to Fear the Lord and Seek Wisdom and, throughout these three treatises, the Father’s argument has been “if you love wisdom you will gain her and her bounty, but if you reject her, she will take everything from you.” Notice that this argument is not “Love Wisdom because it’s the right thing to do” – although it is – or “Love Wisdom regardless of what happens to you” – though you should. Even when the son will face the greatest of hardships and deprivations, having no earthly benefit to loving Wisdom, the Father points further back to the still greater reward that comes from Wisdom – being like God. We see this in the comparison between the best and worst situations, “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 reproveth, Even as a father corrects the son in whom he delights. (3:9-12)” The father makes the case that in bad times you are being chastened by the Lord as a Son, implying the reward from heeding that correction — that is, the growth you experience as a result of God’s chastisement — is worth more than what you lose in your suffering, and in the best of times — when you are tempted to think that you do not need God — you should honor God from the best of what you have because still more will be given to you. In both cases, you are told to Fear the lord because He will Reward you.

In the first treatise, the Father argues that rejecting wisdom will cause wisdom to reject you, resulting in a degradation and degeneration into sin and depravity. In the second treatise, the father argues that embracing Wisdom as a lover will cause you to be righteous, since Wisdom will enter your heart and keep you from evil. In the third treatise, which we are dealing with today, the fathers treatise has three complementary arguments:

- The first of the three is in verses 1-12 where he demonstrates How to fear the Lord
- The second is in verses 13-26 where He speaks of who Wisdom is and her bounty,
- And the third is this final section where he pivots to how we are to treat others.

The father says: “Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, When it is in your power to do it. Do not say to your neighbor, “Go, and come back, And tomorrow I will give it,” When you have it with you. Do not devise harm against your neighbor, While he lives securely beside you. Do not contend with a man without cause, If he has done you no harm. Do not envy a man of violence And do not choose any of his ways. For the devious are an abomination to the Lord; But He is intimate with the upright. The curse of the Lord is on the house of the wicked, But He blesses the dwelling of the righteous. Though He scoffs at the scoffers, Yet He gives grace to the afflicted. The wise will inherit honor, But fools display dishonor. (3:27-35)

While at first glance, this passage seems to pivot completely away from everything that has been established thus far, but what he has given before this passage is the backdrop to what the father is teaching. While you could take this one passage and teach from it, this teaching does not come from a vacuum and is not disconnected from the rest of the chapter. This section sets the basic rules for dealing with others — that is, how to love your neighbor. This relation you have with your neighbor is established by way of contrast with what a man does for himself and his own, and is followed by the same promises given in the previous sections of the treatise. Also, by way of comparison, these admonitions loop back

to chapter 1, repeating the same advice to not be like the wicked — with the same promises and curses — only with more detail.

Most importantly for this sermon, however, this section is a natural outflowing of the kind of heart being cultivated since the beginning of the first treatise. In keeping with the father's focus on the son's introspection, he is giving another barometer by which the son can see, positively, if he is growing in Wisdom. For, if the son is truly loving wisdom, he will be avoiding these things, just as if he truly fears the Lord, he will be following the principles laid out in the first part of this treatise.

The first two commands deal with avoiding sins of omission: “Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, When it is in your power to do it. Do not say to your neighbor, “Go, and come back, And tomorrow I will give it,” When you have it with you. (3:27-28)”. The second two commands deal with avoiding sins of commission: “Do not devise harm against your neighbor, While he lives securely beside you. Do not contend with a man without cause, If he has done you no harm. (3:29-30)”. The final command is the opening admonition that shows the curses and the blessings from God: “Do not envy a man of violence And do not choose any of his ways. For the devious are an abomination to the Lord; But He is intimate with the upright. The curse of the Lord is on the house of the wicked, But He blesses the dwelling of the righteous. Though He scoffs at the scoffers, Yet He gives grace to the afflicted. The wise will inherit honor, But fools display dishonor. (3:31-35)”.

While the New Testament expositors the Christian code of conduct in great detail — and in my next sermon I will delve into that — my main focus today is that this way of dealing with others is the outworking of a heart already in tune to wisdom. Dealing rightly with others is not a matter of just doing what is right regardless. That relationship you cultivate with others affects how others see you and God. The backdrop of our love for others is our goal of accurately being like and sharing with others the Character and Way of God so that others would see God as He is. To do this, we must first Love and Fear Him, and then let that light shine before men. Love for others, modeled after the “self-love” shown above is widening the scope of our affections and admonitions. Instead of simply doing good and acting like God, we tell others to do good and to act like God. Just like the father models himself in such a way that his children would learn from him, so too are we Christians to model ourselves so that the world would learn from us — so that when we preach the word, we preach not in vain.

In his epistle to the Thessalonians, Paul focuses on this before he deals with Christian conduct by saying, “Finally then, brethren, we request and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us instruction as to how you ought to walk and please God (just as you actually do walk), that you excel still more. For you

know what commandments we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus. For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God; and that no man transgress and defraud his brother in the matter because the Lord is the avenger in all these things, just as we also told you before and solemnly warned you. For God has not called us for the purpose of impurity, but in sanctification. So, he who rejects this is not rejecting man but the God who gives His Holy Spirit to you. Now as to the love of the brethren, you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another; for indeed you do practice it toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia. But we urge you, brethren, to excel still more, and to make it your ambition to lead a quiet life and attend to your own business and work with your hands, just as we commanded you, so that you will behave properly toward outsiders and not be in any need. (1 Thessalonians 4:1-12)”

The father in Proverbs is making the same case: If you Fear the Lord, and your heart truly loves wisdom, and you live a life in honor to God, you will act rightly toward others. This begins with your father and mother, then your children, then those outside your own — but it all stems from your Fear of God and Love for Wisdom.