

## Discernment Is Important

Proverbs 2:9-22 (03/05/17)

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John Newton described the Christian life in this world as full of dangers, toils, and snares. We live in a fallen world. Last week Bryce urged us to vigorously go after Christ based on the first half of Proverbs 2. Now in the second half of the chapter we come to the outworking of what it looks like to follow Christ in this world through those snares and dangers which every believer faces.

Proverbs 2 was written by a father to his son and our Father to us. This chapter instructs us how to navigate through the dangers of this fallen world filled with all kinds of evil, errors, and seductions. We believers want to stay on God's track; we don't want to get off the rails and end in disaster. We need God's counsel to guide us, and that requires humility on our part to admit our need.

That's exactly what Jonathan Edwards was talking about in this quote, *"A truly humble man is sensible of his natural distance from God; of his dependence on Him; of the insufficiency of his own power and wisdom; and that it is by God's power that he is upheld and provided for, and that he needs God's wisdom to lead and guide him, and His might to enable him to do what he ought to do for Him."*

In our text this morning, God gives counsel on how we are to navigate through this world that opposes Him. Here we see four specific things God provides to us: discernment, wisdom, protection, and assurance.

### **YOU NEED GOD'S DISCERNMENT TO MAKE GOD-PLEASING DECISIONS.**

*Proverbs 2:9, Then you will discern righteousness and justice And equity and every good course.*

How do you know what God wants you to do? So many Christians think God leads them by signs and wonders and whispers and just getting the combination right. No, here is how God guides His people. He guides you by His wisdom given in His Word as you aggressively read your Bible every day, asking it questions and building up that stockpile of God's truth in your heart. Never forget that God's Word is living, powerful, transforming. It will give you God's principles and the desire to live to please God. As you internalize the truths of Ephesians, James, Proverbs, the Sermon on the Mount, Romans, Colossians, Psalms and all the rest, God will give you discernment to make God-pleasing choices. God's wisdom is even in Leviticus and Numbers, as our ladies are finding out in their Thursday morning study!

Discernment means to see into something, to distinguish good from evil, right from wrong, or even the better or best choice out of several. Should I do this or that? This job or that job? Should I pursue this young lady or not? God's Word says nothing about dating, but everything about the kind of person you want to look for, and more importantly the kind of person you need to be. Proverbs helps take the rose colored glasses off and talks about your character. Paul prays for discernment for God's people in Philippians 1:9-10, "And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ."

So you need to discern, to see into the issues you face, and make choices that are right and honor God; choices that are just, not cheating or lying. Equity speaks of straight, even choices, not choices that lead you into bigger trouble than you are already in! You're in debt up to your ears; don't go into more debt and drown! Every good course speaks of putting off sinful ways of thinking and doing, and putting on godly ways as you renew your mind out of love for Christ. Romans 12:2, "Don't be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your inner being, so you can prove what God wants you to do." Discernment allows you to make choices that please God and are good for your family, for your future.

What is the result of transforming your mind through God's Word? You will walk through your days discerning God's will. Not that you won't ever blow it. But with God's wisdom from this God-breathed book

in your hands and His Spirit in your heart, He will help you see into the decisions you face. There's nothing magical or mystical here. Sometimes you just don't know the right thing to do. Then you may need to wait and see how things go before making those choices. Discernment will guide you to make God-pleasing decisions. Think of Esther with that King. She saw into the issues with Haman and she chose to do the hard thing, but it was certainly what God wanted her to do! Discernment. What a great Bible word!

### **YOU NEED GOD'S WISDOM TO RULE AND CONTROL YOUR HEART.**

Proverbs 2:10, *For wisdom will enter your heart And knowledge will be pleasant to your soul;*

Remember, the foundation of wisdom is the fear of the Lord. As you grow and follow Christ, as you read and meditate and pray over your Bible, God's wisdom will move into your heart. Your heart is your house, where you really live. Like a turtle who takes her house around with her, you take your "heart house" with you every where you go – the job, the home, school, the mall and the grocery store. As God brings His wisdom into your heart, out go the self-pleasing motivations and thoughts and desires and in comes God's beautiful truth. Colossians 3:16 says, "Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly!" Let them dwell not just in your thoughts, but let them rule and control your inner being. You want God's wisdom to marinate, diffuse, come in and fuse into you!

Proverbs 2 is one of the best passages in the Bible on spiritual growth. What used to rule your heart before knowing Christ, and still does too often? Self! Your own self-serving desires. "Me! Me! I need, I need! I want, I want! Give me, give me!" This is why it is so good to take a verse or passage which fights this selfish attitude and memorize it, meditate on it, pray over it, engraft it into your inner being. Let God's wisdom begin to replace that selfish thinking.

Knowing God's wisdom will be pleasant to your soul! Not a burden. Not a bore. Not a bother. But a pleasure! The word pleasant is used of pleasant land, pleasant friendship, delightful love in the Song of Solomon. God's truth and the knowledge of God becomes a pleasure to God's child. Lost people find no real heart pleasure in God's Word, but God's people do. Do you? Do you look forward to hearing and receiving the Word? This is what I love about our church – this hunger and thirst and growing appetite for God's Word! Man, we're studying it all over the place! We can't get enough. Good.

So the knowledge of God is pleasant to your soul. Do you find as much pleasure in God's truth as in, say, skiing down one of Vail's ski slopes, or playing a good game of volleyball, or letting the surf wash over your tired mind along the beach, or sitting down to a sizzling rib eye with horse radish and salad drizzled nicely with blue cheese dressing? What is pleasurable to you? Is it the knowledge of God? Is knowing, learning, meditating, and worshiping God a pleasure to your soul?

This is an acid test for your heart. If you find God's Word, God's counsel, and God's wisdom in His book a burden, something you don't really want to know and follow, there is something very wrong with your heart. This type of thinking is a huge red flag that your heart has never been changed by the gospel and the Spirit of God, or you've gotten off God's rails and you need some serious soul work.

### **YOU NEED GOD'S PROTECTION TO RESIST THE EVILS IN THIS WORLD.**

Proverbs 2:11-19, *Discretion will guard you, Understanding will watch over you, 12 To deliver you from the way of evil, From the man who speaks perverse things; 13 From those who leave the paths of uprightness To walk in the ways of darkness; 14 Who delight in doing evil And rejoice in the perversity of evil; 15 Whose paths are crooked, And who are devious in their ways; 16 To deliver you from the strange woman, From the adulteress who flatters with her words; 17 That leaves the companion of her youth And forgets the covenant of her God; 18 For her house sinks down to death And her tracks lead to the dead; 19 None who go to her return again, Nor do they reach the paths of life.*

In 2011 Israel built a defense system called the Iron Dome. It was a system to defend the land and people from rocket attacks by her enemies. There is no system like it anywhere in the world in terms of capabilities, speed, and accuracy. By 2014 the Iron Dome had intercepted with precision 1200 rockets

aimed into Israel's territory. This amazing system is always prepared, always on the alert for enemy attacks.

God has a spiritual protective shield for His people from the attacks of the enemy, whether it's the fiery darts of the evil one or the temptations and seductions of bad people in our world. He has two security agents that walk with you through those snares and dangers that are in the way to the heavenly city. Their names are Discretion and Understanding. Discretion means knowing the best course of action to achieve your goal. Satan will work hard to derail you. And Understanding will keep you alert, watching over you. God isn't going to leave you out there on your own as you navigate through this treacherous world. Remember the Lord's prayer, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil!" That's exactly what is happening here. There are tons of temptations ahead and you need God's protection, God's spiritual defense system to knock out every effort to draw you away from the Lord and to destroy your walk with Christ. God focuses on two destructive forces we face along the way.

**The Perverse Man** - You need to be protected from bad guys (vss.12-15). Some think the big temptation here is greed; and true, the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil and many have fallen into that pit. But perverseness is evident in many areas. How many professors have the goal of ripping out the faith of naïve Christians as they sit in classrooms? They scoff and mock God to their captured audience. Bill Nye the Science Guy says he feels sorry for any children being taught creation.

Choose your friends wisely. The fact is that the world delights in doing their own ungodly thing with no fear of God and little to restrain their sin-loving hearts. They actually boast about their evil. They delight in seeing others caving on their convictions. Adoniram Judson just about lost his soul under the influence of an evil man named Jacob Eames at Brown University. Jacob and others did all they could to crush any faith Judson had. Judson was raised in a pastor's home, but disliked the Christianity of his father and mother. As he went to the University, he was enamored by skeptics and agnostics, especially Jacob Eames. One night when traveling from Massachusetts to New York to write for the stage, he stayed at an inn where there was only one room left. All night he heard the sounds of people moving and weird moans and gasps in the room beside his. The next morning he asked about the sick man. "He died." "Who was it?" "His name was Jacob Eames." God used this event to send Judson straight back home and after a short while he was converted and left for Burma as a missionary.

What kind of evil men should we be aware of? Religious ones who deny the Bible! Plenty of preachers and teachers wear the clothes of a saint hiding the heart of a devil. May God deliver us! Then there are the greedy ones who try to lure you into their get rich quick schemes. There are Facebook hoaxes using pictures of needy children and sick puppies to drive traffic to their sites. There are sickos out there! Be careful on every solicitation for your money. When in doubt, check it out! That's why we love investing in Campus Outreach and not some unknown entity out there. Campus Outreach allows us to see God's work right under our noses and in our prayers. We are privileged to invest in these lives for God's kingdom. Other types of perverse men are the worldly ones who make the world look attractive and the immoral ones who pressure you to go with them – "Come on, man! You're missing out."

That word "perverse" speaks of twisting the meanings of things, turning them upside down. These guys turn every idea, every fact, and every truth upside down. They call good evil and darkness light. Do you have people like this around, people who twist words? What about love? Life? Healthcare? Tolerance? Twisting words like caring and loving to mean defending all kinds of vile immorality. Women's healthcare twisted to include murdering babies. Keep your ears up! You'll hear words you thought meant something good that are now used to defend something wicked. But as one author said, "If wisdom has entered your heart, tricky words won't pass the whiff test."

Some of these perverse people used to profess Christianity, but they left God's ways and now are hardened to anything spiritual. Beware. John said, "They went out from among us, because they were not of us" (1 John 2:19). Peter described them as "dogs returning to their vomit and hogs going back to wallow in the mire" (2 Peter 2:22).

**The Strange Woman** Then there's the immoral person who tries to lure you into her lair. A prime example is Mrs. Potiphar, who I'm sure was a sleek and sexy lady. She was forlorn; her husband seemed to always be away. Then in comes this handsome young fellow who caught her eye and she worked hard to seduce him. But wisdom had marinated Joseph's heart, the fear of God was fused into his soul, and he did what any God-pleasing young man would do. He ran! That's the only way to handle immoral solicitations, whether by a woman or a man. Proverbs calls this gal a strange woman. The word strange is the Hebrew word "zur" and is also used in Job 19:17 of Job's offensive breath when plagued with sickness. Have you ever smelled a very sick person's breath? Rotten stench. Remember that smell if one of these loose ladies who has no convictions and is willing to betray her husband sidles up to you and you feel the electricity of warm skin touching skin! Remember Job's smelly breath is where she'll take you and get out of there! Run! 2 Timothy 2:22 says, "Flee youthful lusts!"

Years ago Chuck Swindoll told about being in Canada away from home for a week. He was eating in the hotel restaurant one night and as he walked over to the elevator, two young ladies joined him. He pressed 6 and asked, "What floor for you, ladies?" "Six is good enough for us. Have you got any plans for tonight?" Now that would be a moment of decision for any man. He's away from home, lonely, and with complete strangers. The bait was dropped. Chuck said the first thing that came to his mind wasn't his family or reputation in case of being seen. No, three verses rushed to his mind: Galatians 6:7, "Whatever a man sows, this he will also reap." Ephesians 6:11, "Put on the full armor of God, so that you may be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil." And Romans 6:11, "Consider yourself to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus." Psalm 119:11 urges Scripture memory for times like this, "Your word I have treasured in my heart, that I might not sin against you."

Verses 18-19 of Proverbs 2 paint adultery as a rendezvous with the grave, and it well might be! Anger, hatred, and even murder often accompany sexual sins. Flee as fast as you can away from this barrel of rattlesnakes.

#### **YOU NEED GOD'S ASSURANCES OF HIS BLESSINGS OVER YOUR LIFE.**

*Proverbs 2:20-22, So you will walk in the way of good men And keep to the paths of the righteous.*

*21 For the upright will live in the land And the blameless will remain in it; 22 But the wicked will be cut off from the land And the treacherous will be uprooted from it.*

John Newton in *Amazing Grace* warned us that "through many dangers, trials, and snares we've come and will come." Then he added the good news: "Tis grace that brought us safe so far, and grace will lead us home." God will protect you. He will guard you. His wisdom in your heart will counsel you to make godly choices and keep your heart warm to Christ. Then you will be sure to choose godly friends and walk with good men. You will determine to follow God's ways, the paths of doing the right thing because you have a heart transformed by God to pursue righteousness. And when you fail, you are assured there's forgiveness with God; God's grace extends to the chief of sinners.

Where will your path take you? Are you following the way of God's people? Will you end in verse 21 in God's place of blessing? Or will you find yourself in verse 22, cut off from God because of your wicked, unchanged heart? Only Christ's saving work in your heart and His sanctifying power in your life will make the difference.