

Proverbs 23-08-23b

We're ready now to continue our study. We're looking at this idea of counselors and what is the nature of the Bible's guidance of God's instruction for us when it comes to counsel? Well, it sort of goes without saying that you want the quality of your counselor to be such that you can trust them. And the idea in 1522 with the word sowed that this intimate counsel, this familiar inner circle and somewhat secret meeting is with people who can be trusted.

And this ties back to our theme in chapter 11 with who is trustworthy? Who is the person that does not act as a tail bearer revealing secrets? He who is of a faithful spirit in verse 13 conceals the matter. And this resurfaces when you get to chapter 15. And if you go to someone for counsel, are they now going to tail bear and say, well, you know, so-and-so came to me and they were wondering what to do about X and isn't that a problem? And you wanna be able to trust someone to keep a confidence.

This is why you have attorney client privilege. They allow people to go to a counselor of some kind, a psychologist or psychiatrist and that's privileged communication that they can't be forced to reveal under normal circumstances. And even our law recognizes that people ought to be able to trust the Catholic priests traditionally maintain the confidence of the confessional.

And if somebody goes in there and says, I did X, Y, and Z, the priest normally doesn't just go running out and saying, well, guess what so-and-so confessed. But these are peripheral examples of a principle that there should be opportunities to plan, to receive advice and counsel, whether it is formally on behalf of the people or of a village or of a family or whatever it might be, that is kept in confidence by those who are involved in producing that advice, devising that plan. And this requires on the part of us, if we are going to apply this in the first blush in the literal application to select characters carefully, those whom we choose to entrust with sensitive information.

This is the part of wisdom to not go saying more than we should around people who cannot be trusted to keep that in confidence. Well, I had no idea when I told you that you were gonna post it on Facebook. Well, that's your fault for being indiscreet in choosing with whom you share that information.

It is on us. And the guidance here in Proverbs is choose your advisors and those with whom you share a confidence and desire advice and counsel, choose them carefully. If you want wise counsel, choose wise people, those who are not tailbearers, those who can keep a confidence.

You tell them something and it dies with them, it doesn't go any further. And they may know things for years and they may take it to their grave because they are not tailbearers. They have the self-control that is a fruit of the spirit.

That's in the realm of literal application. But going a step further, because this is in this Yahweh section and going back to chapter one, this is advice and counsel and proverbial wisdom for those who want to live their life in a way that pleases the Lord. Where do we ultimately go for counsel? Our counselors are the prophets.

Our counselors are the apostles. Our counselors include the Lord Jesus himself. And those who have communicated divine truth and in the hands of the Holy Spirit, this is our counsel.

This is our guidance. This is our advice. This shows us the better path.

And that's one of the reasons we're studying Proverbs is this very book is dedicated to describing and illuminating the better path for those who want to not only negotiate human life, successfully, but want to have a spiritual life that pleases God. Old Testament and new, the Holy Spirit was and is available. Old Testament and new, the word of God is available.

And in cases where it wasn't available in writing in Old Testament days, God would supernaturally reveal it in dreams and visions and angelic visitations and communications. So in this day, that which is in part has been done away because that which is complete has come and we can resort to the scriptures. And when we find ourselves in a situation and we need advice and counsel, we can pray.

We can ask for wisdom. God may choose to use those who can speak the truth to us in love, those who are not only good at negotiating circumstances and offering good counsel on how to proceed, but those with whom we have that family bond, that sowed connection that is the inner circle. This is a family matter within the body of Christ.

And we find those within the body who we can trust because they share an understanding of how these things should work. So all of this is wrapped up here in verse 14 of chapter 11 to which we now return, where there is no counsel, people fall. But in the greatness of a counselor, there is deliverance.

One good counselor is enough. How many prophets did God have to send to King David to deliver the parable of the man who had a visitor and took his neighbor's lamb and slew it to feed the visitor? It was just Nathan the prophet. That's all it took was one wise counselor, one prophet to deliver the word of the Lord.

And in so many cases in the Old Testament, there is a single prophet. It is Ezekiel by the river Kabar. It is Isaiah talking to Hezekiah.

It is Joel or Amos or Daniel advising the king in the greatness of a counselor, someone who can communicate the truth of the word of God and provide that counsel so that God can work directly through His Holy Spirit with that word to confirm it. It isn't, you know, the secular world says, well, the more opinions you get, you know, it's common business

practice that if you need something fixed, you go get three estimates and compare them and try to take the best estimate in terms of not just cost, but also quality, guarantee, experience, reviews, whatever it might be. And we think, well, the more estimates we can get, the more advice we can get.

You know, I should take my car to six or seven mechanics and see what each of them quotes by way of, well, why is my car acting this way and how should it be fixed? Isn't it great when you have one trustworthy mechanic that you've used before, you know, they're fair, you know, they're honest. They've given away work in the past. When you said, I think I need to do this, they say, you really don't need that.

I can save you money here. Let me just fix this over here. And you trust them.

And one trustworthy, one great counselor, one great person to go to for the solution to a problem is in many cases, preferable to shopping around. The more people you ask about a problem, the more people know about it, the more people are likely to start talking out of turn and out of school and sharing information that you don't want shared, that revealing things you don't want revealed. So this multitude of counselors idea has been tragically misunderstood.

It is their greatness, both here and in 1522. It is the greatness of a counselor or the greatness of those who are coming up with the plan that ensures its success. We continue now in verse 15.

He who is surety for a stranger will suffer, but one who hates being surety is secure. This is posting bond. This is granting assets to someone and saying, if they won't pay you back, I will.

Posting surety, co-signing a note. Could you imagine a stranger coming up and saying, well, you know, I'm borrowing \$15,000. I know you don't know me, but you're a Christian, I'm a Christian, so if you'll co-sign this, it'll really get me back on my feet.

And they are a stranger. This is put for, this is in the community of Israel in the Old Testament day and to be prevailed upon. Why would somebody do this? Why would somebody be surety for a stranger? Why would they do that? Out of the blue, somebody coming up and knocking on the door of your domicile and saying, hey, I want to take out a loaner and I want you to co-sign.

It is understandable that people would say, well, sorry, I don't know you. So why would somebody do it for someone they don't know? What situation can you imagine? If others come to you and say, I know Ahab over here and trust me, he's a good guy. And you're taking it on the advice of someone else.

His family comes or people say, he's fallen on such hard times and he can't get anybody to go his bond to post surety for him. All he needs. And so why is this juxtaposed with

the greatness of a counselor? Nobody would post surety for a stranger except at the behest and on the advice of others.

Somebody is cajoling, pleading, begging. You've got a cousin who says, my neighbor here is really, I know you've got the assets. Can you do it on my advice, on my counsel? What does this scripture tell us? If you are going to do something by way of financial support or financial guarantee for someone, you need to have firsthand knowledge.

Not hearsay, not second or third hand testimony. Firsthand knowledge. We're back to the cardboard sign man at the intersection.

Do you have personal knowledge? If you are going to, somebody says, I'm out of a job. God bless. Here I am with my cardboard sign.

And you don't have firsthand knowledge of that person's situation. It is all the same. You are risking assets that God has placed under your control as a part of your stewardship at risk of wasting and actually sponsoring, supporting and becoming complicit in bad behavior because you don't know.

The sign doesn't tell you anything. Is it true or is it a lie? What about supporting a charity that you haven't investigated and you don't know? What portion of a dollar actually goes to the alleged intended target? And what portion of it gets soaked up in infrastructure and advertising and the very ads that you see on TV are being paid for by contributions that were intended to go to starving children in Africa or kids suffering from various forms of malady. And you see advertisements all the time for large institutions and entities that purport to be helping children or purport to be helping those who are disadvantaged in some way, returning veterans or children of disabled and fallen officers and so on.

You get a phone call from somebody and they say, well, I'm calling on behalf of these officers that have been killed in the line of duty and I want you to give money to support their widows and orphans. Do you know the person on the other end of the line? Do you know anything about that organization? Do you know if the money you contribute is gonna go anywhere near a fallen officer's family? If you don't, you fall afoul of this scripture that says the part of wisdom is don't engage in financial investment, financial guarantee, financial promises of any kind with someone you don't personally know. This is the word of God.

People say, oh, but charity and won't God bless it? Maybe I'll just love them into the kingdom. No, the word of God says, don't be surety for strangers. Don't make a financial promise, a financial investment, a financial entanglement of any kind with those you do not personally at firsthand know.

It's the word of God. He who is surety for a stranger will suffer. One who hates being

surety is secure.

The word secure here is *batak*. And *batak* is a word that means trust, confidence, boldness, something that is trustworthy, something that is solid, something that inspires confidence. You can be bold and you can be secure.

You're on solid ground because you know that you are doing the right thing. You're doing the right thing by not doing what somebody else says is the right thing. It is trust, trustworthiness.

Over a hundred times, *batak* is translated trust. And, but it means to be, oddly enough, it means to be sure of a thing. You're operating in the realm of certainty, not doubt.

You're not gambling that someone is gonna pay off their own debt so that you won't have to. You're not gambling that somebody isn't gonna misuse the money that you're giving them. You're not dealing in the realm of ignorance.

You have confidence, trustworthiness. So these two verses are interrelated. Having confidence, confidence in those that give advice and confidence in those with whom you have dealings, whether it is financial or any other kind of investment.

So when you get to verse 16, now we have a man-woman pairing here. The first one is the woman. A gracious woman retains honor.

Ruthless ones retain riches. It says ruthless men because this is a masculine plural word that is translated as ruthless. And it is a word that means powerful in the sense of being oppressive, oppressive.

So a gracious woman retains honor. She actually lays hold of it. It says retain, but this means to lay hold of and keep hold of.

So by being gracious, a woman becomes honorable and remains honorable. And this idea of honor, this is our old friend, *kavod*. Women might not wanna be gracious if they know the primary meaning of *kavod*, which means to be heavy.

But this is the heaviness of reputation, the solidity and the quantity of honor that is held. And so a woman who manifests grace in her life lays hold of honor and retains it. But oppressive men, they lay hold of, and this is a different word.

This is a *tamad*. This is not to lay hold of and retain. This is to grasp and to hold up or support.

You want to waive your riches. Even a gracious woman, and the patriarchal society, they said, well, it's all about the men. What is their reputation? What are their accomplishments? What is their lineage? What is their level of prosperity and so on? But even a woman, by being gracious, lays hold of and retains honor.

But oppressive men are grasping and waiving riches. Which one is preferable? Do you want a grasping, ambitious man trying to get a reputation by his riches that he's grasping and waiving in your face? Or who do you admire more? Say, well, traditionally we admire the men and the women are subordinate. But the Bible says a gracious woman far outstrips a grasping oppressive man.

When she has honor versus a man who is trying to get his accomplishments, riches, whether it's riches of reputation, riches of accomplishment, riches in the literal sense. He is going to, that's all he's got. What he's grasping in his hand, which is going to soon dissolve.

And then the companion verse there is the merciful man. And this word for mercy is chesed. This is the word that's translated grace or loyal love, chesed.

The mercy or kindness, loving kindness is an often used translation. Loving kindness, chesed. And the chesed man does good for his own soul.

The word here is gamal. And it has the idea of dealing bountifully with yourself. You improve yourself.

You bountify yourself by this chesed. Chesed. But the one who is cruel, and this is a different word.

We had the previous cruelty that had the idea of oppressive power. And this is just outright meanness. This is cruelty for its own sake.

A cruel man troubles his own flesh. This is to disturb, to stir up, to bring calamity. And this idea of the attitude, these are attitudes toward others.

It takes in the same way that to do love one another, there has to be some other there to love. Loving kindness or cruelty is in the horizontal realm. There is somebody there that is a victim of this.

It can be family, it can be friends, it can be associates, it can be customers, it can be those with whom you have a neighbor relationship. But the way people treat others, it's a variation on the golden rule. If you do unto others as you would have others do unto you, well, if you are kind to others, you are being kind to yourself.

If you are cruel to others, you are bringing cruelty and trouble on yourself. There is an intrinsic power in the principle itself that the way you treat others is what you end up doing to yourself. It's along the lines of judge not lest you be judged, for the judgment with which you judge others will be the judgment that falls on you.

And our treatment of others will rebound and return to us. It is a principle of scripture. And that is the idea here.

So if we are gracious, a gracious woman retains honor, but oppressive, those who use their power in a destructive way against others, they waive riches at you. They waive their short-term gains. But it isn't gonna last because of the next verse.

As you go to verse 18, the wicked man does deceptive work, but he who sows righteousness will have a sure reward. Deceptive work has its own bad consequence. This word that's translated deceptive basically means vain.

It is a sheker, S-H-E-Q-E-R. And it is false, lying, vain, deceitful. It partakes of a lie and deception.

And so it comes to mean a disappointment. It is a betrayal. It appears to be one thing, but it turns out to be something else.

You get the idea of embezzlement, where somebody purports to be doing work in a company, but they're actually stealing funds and aggrandizing themselves. It's deceitful, it's false, it's harmful. So this is what the wicked man does.

His work ultimately benefits himself and not others. But he who sows righteousness, and this word for righteousness is tzedek, tzedekah. Will have a sure reward.

The word for reward means wages. Deceptive work is gonna come back on you with results you did not expect. But sowing righteousness.

The thing about sowing righteousness is, and this word means to plant as a seed, to plant righteousness. What happens when you plant a seed? You can't see it anymore. You stick it in the ground, and the result is going to happen later.

You think about, be not deceived. God is not mocked. Whatsoever a man sows, that shall he also reap.

He who sows to his flesh, shall of the flesh reap destruction. But he that sows to the spirit, shall of the spirit reap life everlasting. But when you sow, it is with a future expectation.

It doesn't say if you go out into the field full of fruitful plants or fruitful trees and pluck. Sowing means you're not gonna get the reward for some time to come. You plant, you water, you cultivate, you weed, you protect.

And in due time, you receive the reward, but it's down the road. And those who say the Old Testament doesn't have an expectation of resurrection really aren't looking. Because to sow righteousness means you are going to reap a reward in the future.

So that's the idea here. Sowing righteousness, you will have a sure reward. And this is the word emeth, which means truth.

It's often translated truth. It is the reward of truth and a true reward, a true reward. Verse 19, as righteousness leads to life, so he who pursues evil, it is to his own death.

It leads to life or it leads to death. These are not just go along to get along. These are not, well, these aphorisms, if you follow them, you'll have more success and less failure.

You'll have more opportunity and less restriction. You'll have more good opinion of others and less reprobation. It's life and death.

These things trend toward life or they trend toward death. And this is metaphorical death. It is also literal death.

Life eternal, life in its fullness, life in the quality that God can grant or death. And we think, well, but okay, I heard Proverbs, but I've got a life to lead. I've got a job to do.

I've got my opportunities, my hobbies, how I spend my spare time, my chores, my tasks, my projects. And okay, Proverbs is here. These guiding principles of pursuing righteousness in our conversation, pursuing righteousness in our dealings with others, pursuing righteousness and wisdom in our sharing of information with others and seeking counsel and making plans and devising purposes with others.

This is the grist of daily life. This isn't occasional. This is every day.

Are we pursuing wisdom and truth and good character? Are we seeking out and cultivating contact with others who are on a similar path? That tends toward life, blessing and fulfillment in this life and blessing and fulfillment in eternal life. Sowing righteousness. Even if I don't see a benefit at the moment because I did what was right, that's a seed planted in the ground.

It's gonna grow and bear fruit later. I have the promise of God for that. If you pursue evil, you hurt yourself now and there is death later, death of your inheritance, death of your future opportunities, death of the potential to be used by God in this life and in the next.

Death in terms of healthy and vibrant and fulsome relationships that have a spiritual component. They may seem great, but without that investment of wisdom, without the activity of God's counsel, God's power, God's wisdom, they will wither. They have shallow roots.

They cannot help but be so. And it trends toward death. That's why when you get to verse 20, which is the end of our section, those who are of a perverse heart are an abomination to the Lord.

Perverse in what sense? Not amenable, not positive, not receptive, not accepting of God's word and God's way, God's purposes and God's plans, God's organization and furtherance of human life. I don't want to follow that path. I'm not interested in what he's

got going on.

I've got an agenda. I've got things I want to do for myself. So I will oppress and push and elbow people out of the way when I need to.

I will pursue riches and try to wave them in the face of others because that's my standard of success. I will tell tales out of school because that hurts them and helps me. I will be a perverse person.

I will trample the advice and the godly wisdom that is being offered to me here because I'm not really interested in the way of the Lord. I'm interested in the way of fill in my name here. It is the way of death.

Those who are of a perverse heart are an abomination to the Lord. We saw this in verse one, false scales, dishonest scales are an abomination to the Lord. And we went back and looked at the penalty in Israel for abominations was what? Death.

Death, stoning for those who commit abominations in Israel. They were to be stoned to death by the community. If it is an abomination to the Lord, is this going to end well? People didn't commit abominations because they wanted to be stoned to death.

They thought they could get away with it. They figured they could perpetrate it and it would be to their benefit and there would be no consequence. But there is.

There is no escaping the observation of the Lord God in heaven. And if being perverse is an abomination to the Lord, that is only going to end one way. And that's badly.

But the blameless in their ways are His delight. What a wonderful place to be. What a wonderful status to occupy to be the Lord's delight.

We are to delight ourselves in the Lord so that He can bring His will to pass in our lives. But can you imagine the joy we can feel when the Lord in heaven looks at us and takes delight? That's one of mine right there. Look at the faithfulness.

Look at the pursuit of wisdom. Look at the quick confession of sin so that they can be blameless. None of us are blameless until we are cleansed of what we are blameworthy for.

It is one thing to confess, to be cleansed of all unrighteousness, but we also have to repent and mend our ways so that we don't continually soil ourselves. We don't continually wind up reflecting perversity. If we stray, we fix it.

If we fall, we get up by God's grace, claiming God's promise. That is what makes us of a pure heart and a contrite spirit, availing ourselves of God's mercy and God's cleansing and forgiveness. Now we are of a pure heart.

Now we are blameless because the blame has been removed in Christ by the blood of Jesus Christ that cleanses us from all sin. It has cleansing power. It's not just an example of people being mean.

The blood of Jesus Christ has cleansing, atoning, salvific, restorative, redemptive power. That central truth of our faith is under attack, vicious, fulsome, widespread attack in the modern day. We know it and we avail ourselves of it.

We go to the throne of grace for help in time of need and we are cleansed and we are restored to the status of blameless. That's what verse 20 is talking about. Perverse heart, abomination.

The blameless in their ways are his delight. Notice the ways. If our ways begin to reflect a pattern or a consistent deviation from the will and the purpose and the word of God, that's a way.

You can err. You can step off the narrow road. You can trip over a rock.

We can get a momentary infarction in our thinking and sin, but sin should not become a pattern. It should not become a way. Our ways should be pleasing in God's sight, the pattern of our life, the normal behavior, blameless in our ways, in our habits, in our priorities, in our goals, in our values that we reflect as a climate in our life.

You can have a spell of bad weather, but what is the climate? What is the preponderance? What is the thrust and the average and the normal state of things? It should be blameless. And if there's something that is blameful in our ways, we have got to change our mind and purge that out, cut off the hand that offends, pluck out the eye that offends so that we can enter into life, ways of life and not ways of death. Well, these are powerful words, powerful admonitions, powerful encouragements to avail ourselves of the wonderful grace of God that has been made possible for us because of the Lord Jesus Christ in this day in particular, never more fulsomely, never more powerfully than now.

Pale shadows in the Old Testament reflected here. How much more from those to whom much is given, much is expected, much is required, and that's us. Well, certainly food for thought, great basis on which to analyze our ways and endeavor to clean up and make them blameless and ensure that we are on the positive side of these promises and these proverbial observations from Proverbs chapter 11.

We'll continue here and move forward, finish chapter 11 and get into chapter 12 next time. Let's close here in a word of prayer. Father, we are so grateful that we are not left to figure things out for ourselves and blindly stumble through life.

You have shined a light on our path, the light of your word. And not only have you shown us the way that is right, but have given us the enablement to pursue it and to

successfully achieve it. We pray that as we reflect on our own lives in the light of your word, that God, the Holy Spirit will be our great counselor, bring to our minds and hearts, the words and the works of the Lord Jesus.

And that in so doing, we will find the encouragement and the means by faith of laying hold of righteousness, pursuing our hope, reflecting our love, preparing ourselves for service and function now and in the ages to come. We pray it in Jesus' name, amen.