

Proverbs 23-12-06a

Greetings, it is the 6th of December, 2023. We're in the book of Proverbs at the threshold of chapter 13. Very fascinating and instructional section for us.

We're going to see in this chapter, as we did particularly in chapter 12, that it is well-planned. It is tightly structured. It's so amazing when you look at the Proverbs and just read them.

They just seem to come like raindrops hitting the windshield in no particular order and no necessarily visible thread that connects them. But A, if we were Hebrew speakers, we would see these connections. There is the use of vocabulary words and concepts to bracket units, to mark them off and to show us where the divisions are.

There are introductory lines, such as we're going to see tonight in chapter 13, verse one, there is paranomasia or punning where similar sounding words or the same word used in two different meanings or semantic ranges will come into play. We're going to see that tonight with nefesh. Nefesh can be translated several different ways.

It's your soul. It's your life. It's your breath.

It's your throat. It's your appetite. All of these are within the scope of one word and context gives us the meaning.

And my favorite example in English is always the word log. Is it a piece of wood? Is it a record of things that happened? Is it a verb? Is it a noun? And so on. So, we're going to see those things tonight in chapter 13, and we're going to find some great personal application in this, something that will help us move forward and grow in our spiritual strength and understanding.

It is going to be pertinent and meaningful, I think, if we take it on board. So let's ask God's blessing on our fellowship and study and we'll begin. Father, it is such a privilege for us to avail ourselves of the wondrous grace that you have granted to us in Jesus Christ.

Not only are we delivered, not only are we transformed, rescued, and given great and precious promises about the present and about the future, but we are given the privilege of entering into your divine counsels and your heavenly plans and purposes, and in the study of your word we find the greater context of our lives, of human history, of events as they unfold, and in them we find the strength to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. What a precious gift, what a tremendous opportunity for us to begin to live the life that we will enjoy in the eternal future even now, to overcome sin, to eradicate the expressions of our fallen nature, to give us strength and patience, joy and peace, the ability to love one another. All of these come to us through your word in the hands of

your Holy Spirit.

We're so grateful for that. And we ask tonight that as we look at this portion of your word together, that the Holy Spirit will minister it to each of our hearts, give us insight, help us to see ourselves clearly, where we can find the obstacles in our own perception, whether they are beams or moats, and by your grace and in your strength, remove them so that we can see clearly how to live our own lives and how to be a blessing in the lives of others. We ask these things in Jesus' name.

Amen. Proverbs chapter 13, let's begin as it's always a good idea to read the passage. And this is an entire section here, chapter 13, verses 1 through 25.

It divides very nicely into subsections. We'll note those. But for tonight, I think we will stop in the vicinity of verse 8. So let's read the first eight verses of Proverbs 13.

A wise son heeds his father's instruction, but a scoffer does not listen to rebuke. A man shall eat well by the fruit of his mouth, but the soul of the unfaithful feeds on violence. That's one of your first occurrences of nephesh in this section, soul.

He who guards his mouth preserves his life, but he who opens wide his lips shall have destruction. The soul of a lazy man desires and has nothing, nephesh again, but the soul of the diligent shall be made rich. Another example, verse 5, a righteous man hates lying, but a wicked man is loathsome and comes to shame.

Righteousness guards him whose way is blameless, but wickedness overthrows the sinner. There is one who makes himself rich yet has nothing, and one who makes himself poor yet has great riches. The ransom of a man's life is his riches, but the poor does not hear rebuke.

We'll look at two more verses here. The light of the righteous in verse 9 rejoices, but the lamp of the wicked will be put out. By pride comes nothing but strife, but with the well-advised is wisdom.

We've been seeing this notion of strife in our Timothy study, where a lack of self-discipline, a lack of perspective and orientation to the purpose that God has. His desire is that all men be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth. We have the desire that all men listen to us and come to a knowledge of our opinion, and that breeds strife.

Even if we're right, even if someone else is egregiously wrong, if they are not seeking, our explications and protestations and arguments and debate points and talking pitch isn't going to change their heart. Heart change, first of all, has to begin with me, and I have to work on my heart change, and one of the first things to recognize is I need instruction. I need rebuke and correction.

Where do those come from? The word of God, and that's why we do what we do. That's

why we're a Bible church. The power for change is only to be found from God in his word and in his spirit.

That is where it comes from. It doesn't come from good intentions. It doesn't come from sincere regret.

It doesn't come from a review of past history. It doesn't come from looking at everybody else's sins and weighing ourselves in the balance. So this is where our section begins tonight in chapter 13, verse 1. Now, this is, as I said, very tightly structured, and these words that introduce this section partake of everything we saw in the prologue to this collection, and you remember at the very beginning, my son, if you will receive my words, what is a wise son? What is a foolish son? The gullible and foolish son is going to be led away by the crafty harlot.

A wise son is going to listen to the words of lady wisdom as she proclaims them. All of those first 10 chapters in particular use this vocabulary, a wise son, heeding the instruction of his parents. We saw this in chapter 10, verse 1. Remember after the nine chapter prologue, chapter 10 begins, the Proverbs of Solomon.

It starts a new section, very clearly demarcated. The Proverbs of Solomon, a wise son makes a glad father, but a foolish son is the grief of his mother. And the parents here in many ways are interchangeable.

We will see this in coming passages, but this idea leads off the first section after the prologue, the second section of the book in chapter 10, verse 1, you see it again in verse 16 of that same chapter. The labor of the righteous leads to life, the wages of the wicked to sin. So you have life, you have sin, you have righteousness, you have death.

Chapter 12, verse 1, the chapter we just finished, whoever loves instruction, loves knowledge. He who hates correction is stupid. It's kind of a harsh word.

We don't like to call somebody stupid, but if scripture says that a choice, a path, a policy is stupid, I want to make sure I understand what it is and not do it and become qualified for that label. Chapter 12, verse 15, the way of a fool is right in his own eyes. We dwelt on this at some length because that's referring to our rightness meter.

We look in ourselves, we look at a subject, a topic, we observe the world, we observe people, we observe situations and circumstances, and we arrive at a conclusion about what is right and what is wrong. I know what's wrong with that person. I know what's wrong with that situation.

I know where this problem came from. And we're very sure that we're right. And we unconsciously trust that feeling of correctness and rightness.

And, well, if I wasn't actually right, I wouldn't feel so right. And that is a lie. The heart is

deceitful above all things and desperately wicked.

And if our heart is telling us that something's right and we are not transformed by the renewing of our minds, if our heart has not been cleansed and purged by God's forgiving grace, if it hasn't been retrained and given new eyes and a new perspective, new light from God's word and God's spirit, we are going to be so sure we're right, dogmatically right, inarguably, unpersuadably, never going to change my mind about this. I'm right. I know I'm right.

Don't bother me with the facts. My mind's made up. And that is so dangerous and it is so tragic because we cannot bear fruit in God's economy.

We can't be productive. We can't be useful. We can't serve.

We can't be a blessing. And we can't be blessed. If we trust that human sense of rightness, look around at the controversies, the acrimonious, spiteful opposition.

There are people who would literally throw themselves on a grenade to keep one guy or another from becoming the next president, for example, who will commit violence against people in the name of defending somebody else's right to perpetrate violence in some far-off conflict. It's just crazy. How can people do that and look themselves in the mirror and look at each other and pat each other on the back and go in swarms and masses with signs and protests and demands? They're trusting their rightness meter and they all can't be right.

It's a logical and material impossibility. Somebody's wrong, but they don't feel wrong. And that should scare us, should scare us severely.

So how do we avoid this? Proverbs is telling us here in chapter 13, a wise son. Notice the word heeds is not there. So if you read this, it's a wise son, his father's instruction.

And you could say, well, it's implied that he heeds it, but this is really cause and effect. If you see a wise son, you know why he's wise? Because of his father's instruction. Wise son, there was good instruction available and he availed himself of it.

This is the expanded translation, the expanded interpretation. A wise son, you know, there was good instruction and that good instruction was heeded. That's how he became wise.

Our wisdom is directly correlated to whether we heed good instruction. You will also notice that in so many of these passages we talked about in the first 12 chapters, you see the glad father or the grief of the mother, but there's the mother and the father, here's the son, there's a father and a mother. And unspoken there is God's blessing on family structure.

There is both a father and a mother in the picture as influences on the child and the young person. It's so often the case that it mentions the father and the mother, and this occurs throughout Proverbs. You have this idea of the wisdom or foolishness having an effect on the mother and the father.

And the father was mentioned in chapter one, verse eight, my son, hear the instruction of your father and do not forsake the law of your mother. In Israel, it was taken for granted that you would have what has come to be known as the nuclear family, meaning a nucleus of parents around which you start populating children and so on. And by extension, it goes without saying that if there's a grandfather or grandmother in the picture, they are still contributing wisdom and guidance in that family setting.

But it's just, it is assumed that they are going to be in the picture. And the Bible takes no account of odd situations. It assumes that this is the norm.

Obviously, there could be widows or widowers, but the community was supposed to come and fill in for widows and orphans, those that didn't have what the Bible considers to be normal and necessary for national stability and growth is a preponderance of nuclear families. Men marry their wives when there are children, then there is training and this is expected and it doesn't even address, well, but what if the man thinks he's a woman or what if there's just a lot of proliferation of children out of wedlock and nobody's getting married anymore? That is so far removed from the divine perspective that it isn't addressed. Like, well, if you find yourself the neglected stepchild of a third marriage, here's what you do.

You press toward the ideal. You do your best to get as close to that as possible. So the wise son, and this is Ben Chacham, and it's an interesting play on words because he is a Ben, a son, Judah, Ben, her is Judah, son of her.

So Ben means son. And so you have Ben Chacham, Chacham is from Chachma, which is the word for wisdom in Hebrew, so he is a son, a wise one. But it can equally be translated, he is a son of wisdom.

You know, you can be a son of Belial, you can be a son of a lot of things, but in the Bible, you can be a wise son or a son of wisdom. It's the same phrase, either way you understand it. And it's designed to be understood in both senses.

And this is why the wisdom is so often pictured as coming from the father, because if you heed the father's counsel and become a wise son, you are a son of that wisdom, even more so than a son of the individual man, you're a son of that which is transmitted and carried along. And a second point about assuming that there is this structured family unit as the basis for the nation is that this is also the primary conduit for wisdom. There was no public school system in ancient Israel.

The wisdom was imparted by the parents. Wisdom and guidance, structure, rebuke, correction, discipline when necessary, was in the family, it wasn't assigned to the society, you know, it takes a village, is not a biblical concept, it takes parents, it takes a home where the parents themselves were once sons and daughters who learned wisdom and responded to instruction. And this is the ideal, of course we're often far from the ideal, but if the parents are not necessarily in the picture in a traditional sense, the wisdom still is.

And so you can have the father's instruction. If the instruction doesn't come from a father, it might come from a father figure, it might come from a mentor, it might come from a coach, it might come from an uncle or a grandparent, it could come from any source. The goal is to be a son of wisdom.

Wherever God chooses to provide the wisdom by way of its source, you want to be a child of that wisdom, someone who responds to its instruction, rebuke, and correction, right? So that's the idea here. It is contrasted with the scoffer in verse 1. What is the primary thing about a scoffer? We've seen this scoffer in many passages, we'll look at it in just a minute, but from 13.1, what is the primary characteristic of a scoffer? Does not listen. This is the bane of discussion, debate, argumentation, differences of opinion that are being expressed, is one party or both parties are not listening to the other party.

It is courteous, it is respectful, it is beneficial to listen, even if it's what you are hearing is very far from what you believe or what you accept or what you think is right. To listen is a virtue, and practicing the art of listening is nowhere more fully developed, nowhere can you flex and build your listening muscles than when something is going on that you just think is incredibly, ultimately, unequivocally out in the weeds. This is self-control, this is love for an enemy, someone who represents an opposite side, and to reign in the tongue that is so often set on fire by the try to digest point after point after point that you think is built on a faulty foundation, but to listen past the words and past the issues and the arguments that are presented and fathom what is it that is going on in this person's heart and soul that enables and induces them to espouse this view, because this is what the Lord Jesus did.

People would come to him and ask a question, but he would look past the question to what was really in their heart, what the genuine problem was. Think about Nicodemus in John 3. So, if we can be like Jesus in that sense, because what is our goal? Our goal is not to find a killer argument that nails the coffin shut on their point of view. What do we really want to do? If we are godly and reverent, as in 1 Timothy 2, what is God's desire? It ought to be our desire, and what is that? That people be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth.

Do I want to win a debate? Do I want to win an argument, or do I want to win a soul? Do I want to represent that which to anyone with even a modicum of seeking heart will be

drawn to the Lord Jesus through us and through the Lord Jesus to God the Father? It isn't about the issue. It isn't about the points. It's not about the social rightness or wrongness or the political or economic benefits or hazards of some particular issue.

When we are discussing anything with other people, the issue is, are we representing and communicating the kind of truth that will enable someone to rise above whatever this immediate circumstance is that has caused this conversation and be thinking in spiritual terms? Spiritual issues, spiritual opportunities, that always has to be uppermost in our mind, and we won't get into rancorous and pointless and futile debates. We will speak the truth in love. It will be a soft answer that turns away wrath instead of grievous words that stir up anger.

But we learn to do that, first of all, by being on the receiving end, and that's what this section is about. The mocker, the scoffer, this word is so interesting because it is the one in Psalm 1.1. Remember Psalm 1.1? Say it with me. Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the, this word, let's, the scornful.

It's this word. Sitting in the seat of the scornful. Walking down a path is one thing, standing is another, sitting is kind of a long-term deal.

You're not walking in the counsel of the ungodly, you're not standing in the way of sinners where you hear more from them than you do of righteous and God-fearing folk. Standing in the way means you're hearing the passing conversations, you're taking it in, you're absorbing the truth. This is bad company corrupting good morals.

But sitting in the seat of the scornful, you're at their house around their table partaking and participating in scorn. And this is dismissive, looking down at, insulting, joking in an unkind manner. And you hear people do this all the time on any side of our politics, on any side of our social issues.

It isn't enough to make points, people have to get personal, they have to mock someone's personal characteristics or appearance, or take jibes at issues in their personal lives or something their kids did or whatever else. Nobody is going to be brought to God through Christ but through our insults and through our mockery of things that we believe according to our rightness meter are wrong. Nobody's brought to Christ that way, nobody comes to the Father by mockery and debasing and insulting people we disagree with.

Nobody, nobody's ever been one to Christ that way. So it begins with us though, before we can be the kind of people that don't do those things, we have to first of all know what it is to be receptive. If we want other people to be receptive, if we want them to be delivered and come to a knowledge of the truth, we first of all have to be people who are delivered and have come to a knowledge of the truth because we practice humility and

we listen.

We listen and as painful as it is and as much as our old nature wants to defend itself with counter-attack and sublimate or in some way shoot the messenger, well that may be true but what about you? That doesn't make progress. If we genuinely want to grow, if we want to be more Christ-like, if we want to reflect more of the glory of the Father, we have to squelch that self-defensive desire and be open to someone pointing out where we failed, where we came short, where we erred. It can't be true that I am never wrong and anytime somebody brings something up they're wrong.

I mean that's just mathematically not possible. There are always going to be some times where we are in fact in the wrong and it's not helpful to create more heat than light. If we are growing believers, if we are healthy, if we are cultivating the presence and power of the Spirit, we will not mock, we will not react in anger against each other.

A scoffer does not listen to rebuke. And this word for rebuke is really interesting. When you look this up, this is a word, it's g-a-r-a, you could spell it g-a-a-r-a-h, there's just kind of a catch in the middle of those first two a's, g-a-r-a.

And it's such an interesting word. It is translated as rebuke or reproof. But this, when you find it, it is moral rebuke.

This isn't, why did you cut the grass that short? Now the sun's going to kill it and it's all going to die. This is in the moral sphere. This is in the, you have done something reprehensible from an ethical or moral standpoint and it is often an angry rebuke.

You have incurred or invoked wrath. This is often God's response to something. So you'll find it in passages where it is operating at a national level and the immorality that a nation represents is rebuked by God.

It denotes, this is from the book, this denotes a protest with moral indignation. So you can look around and see plenty of people that are morally indignant about stuff going on in the world and in our nation. And g-a-r-a would be the word to use for that sort of sense of outrage at the moral wrongness of a thing from the standpoint of the person.

So you'll find a lot of people that are morally indignant about the moral wrongness of a thing from the standpoint of the person who's expressing that attitude, that indignation. Eight times, it's the Lord. Out of the 14 times this is used in biblical Hebrew, 14 times in the Old Testament, over half of them are the Lord himself expressing his moral indignation.

It's also used for nature, things happening in nature. You have a poetic section of 2 Samuel chapter 22 that is quoted or a quote, not sure which way it goes, of Psalm 18 verses 16 or 17 says, Then the channels of the sea were seen, the foundations of the world were uncovered, at the rebuke of the Lord, at the blast of the breath of his nostrils.

And you remember the wicked being like the troubled sea, and God only puts up with that for so long.

And then there is recompense, there is redress. God rebukes and blasts with the breath of his nostrils in the poetic or metaphorical sense, and these things are addressed and put to rest. But this is the idea.

So that makes it harder, doesn't it? Think about it. It's one thing if somebody says, they put their hand around my shoulder and say, Sam, I was listening to the way you were speaking just now, and that wasn't really particularly helpful. In fact, if you think about it, and just sort of gently trying to ease me into, well, maybe you're right.

Maybe I overreact. That's not what's in view here. This isn't a kind, gentle, let me take some time and work my way into it, and try to keep you from throwing up your defenses and setting off your smoke alarms.

Let me just slowly raise the temperature here, and see if you don't jump out of the skillet. That is not it. Gaara is a rebuke delivered with the same strength that God rebukes the stormy seas of evil.

Uh, somebody says you are flat out, out of line. You're wrong. That is unconscionable.

What you just did, and what you just said, or what you just failed to do, or failed to say, or your opinion about something. You're, you're sitting in the corner wearing a hat with a wrong label. You've been beaten with a wrong stick, and all of your pajamas say wrong on them.

You're just wrong every way you can be wrong. And to have the good sense, the wisdom, and the humility to not react at the strength of the rebuke, any more than you react to the content of the rebuke. Gaara is strong, morally indignant rebuke.

How dare you talk that way? How dare you do that without permission? How dare you? You know, these are parents who come home and find out the kids have been playing with matches in the living room floor. Not that I would know anything about that. But this is a strong rebuke, and it is morally justified and morally based.

So, a scoffer is going to react and respond and defend himself, and think that the justification is the strength of his derision, and the strength of his dismissal, and rejection of that whole, you're wrong, and you're way wrong, and you're morally wrong, and we are right to be upset about it. He just mocks and derides it. That's the picture here.

Not to say that there aren't other situations. This is the situation here. And so we have to ask ourselves, when I get negative feedback, there's two components of it.

The content, is it legitimate or not? Does the person understand what really is going on or not? And the strength. And there's an a fortiori principle here. If we can train ourselves to not go into reaction mode at the strength of the rebuke, or the indignation that accompanies it, then it's that much easier to address the content.

I'll ignore that you're shouting at me, and I'll listen to what you're saying, and I'm not going to mock, I'm not going to reject, I'm not going to respond in kind. I'm going to address the content. And having addressed the content, I'm going to think past.

We've got an immediate situation. We've got a cause for this difference of opinion, this error and need for rebuke. But what is going on behind that? This is only possible with the power of God.

Human beings can never get this done. We don't have the inner strength. We don't have the capability.

You might as well ask me to pick up a corner of my house and look for mice. I just, I don't have the ability to lift that much weight. But in God's power, resorting to the wisdom and instruction that come from God's word, and the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, whispering a prayer as we enter into this conversation, endeavoring to have a soft answer.

We, first of all, have to have practice in being the recipient and learning to control our response when others are the conveyance for rebuke to us. Then we can be those who are able to instruct in a profitable and helpful manner. So this wise son who listened to his father's instruction, he's a son of wisdom.

That's the opposite pull from a scoffer who is going to find fault with the way it was delivered, is going to say your argument stinks. Regardless of the rightness or wrongness of the content, it will be dismissed because of its delivery. That's verse one.

And that is the introduction to this section that is now going to detail some of the primary principles that are given in that introductory section. And so we're going to look at the structure and see how each of these tightly constructed, carefully woven subunits makes a point, each makes a point, and those points then tie together to make a larger point. And we'll see that as we have seen so far in the first 12 chapters, there is not a wasted word.

There's not a random element anywhere in here. And it is all designed to help us, to enable us to grow, and to be fitting representatives of God on this earth. It worked for Old Testament Israel when they heeded it, when they became wise children, and it will help us with all of the additional understanding and information and enablement that we have through the Holy Spirit in this age.

So we'll pick up at verse two after the break.

