

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS
Commentary by Michael Sigler
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An Ordered Life

Proverbs 29:16-27

Key verse: “One who trusts in the Lord is secure” (Proverbs 29:25).

Unbridled selfishness, uncontrolled words, unchecked anger, pride, and peer pressure—these are some of the issues addressed in Proverbs 29:16-27. As always, this ancient book offers practical wisdom for living today....

Verse 17 – “Discipline your children, and they will give you rest; they will give delight to your heart.” Any parent knows that providing children consistent, fair, loving discipline can be a difficult assignment. Parents grow weary and sometimes wonder, “What am I doing wrong?” or “By disciplining my child, am I making her hate me?” This proverb offers assurance that, if parents do their jobs of providing loving training and discipline, it will pay off in the long run.

The results won’t be immediate, but keep at it because such discipline will reap long-term benefits—for your child and for you. As *The Message* paraphrase puts it: “Discipline your children; you’ll be glad you did—they’ll turn out delightful to live with.”

Verse 18 – “Where there is no prophecy, the people cast off restraint, but happy are those who keep the law.” “Prophecy” here means *prophetic vision*. Whether it is in the family, the business, or the church, vision makes a huge difference. Without it, people lose sight of a common goal and lose direction and focus.

The story is told of the foreman on a building site who asks one of the builders what he is doing. The builder replies, “I’m breaking rocks.”

Another worker is asked the same question, and he answers, “I’m earning money for my family.”

The question is posed to a third worker. With a glint in his eye he responds, “I’m building a cathedral.” What made the difference? Vision.

Again, *The Message* paraphrase of this proverb is helpful: “If people can’t see what God is doing, they stumble all over themselves. But when they attend to what He reveals, they are most blessed.”

Verses 20 and 22 deal with the damage that results from unbridled speech (v. 20) and uncontrolled anger (v. 22): Verse 20 – “Do you see someone who is hasty in speech? There is more hope for a fool than for anyone like that.” Verse 22 – “One given to anger stirs up strife, and the hothead causes much transgression.”

Some have called the Book of James “the New Testament Proverbs” because of the similarities between these two books of the Bible. When I read Proverbs 29:20 and 29:22 (above), I am reminded of a great passage from James: “My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, for man’s anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires” (James 1:19-20). Now, back to Proverbs 29.

Verse 23 – “A person’s pride will bring humiliation, but one who is lowly in spirit will obtain honor.” Does this warning about pride sound familiar? We have seen it before in our reading of Proverbs. But in Bible study, *repetition* of certain themes should alert us to their importance. Pride, unchecked by God’s grace, is at the root of so much sin and brokenness. No wonder the Bible deals with pride so frequently. We should take note.

Esther de Waal shared this observation about pride and humility: “Humility is facing the truth. It is useful to remind myself that the world itself comes from *humus*, earth, and in the end simply means that I allow myself to be earthed in the truth that lets God be God, and myself His creature. If I hold on to this, it helps prevent me from putting myself at the center, and instead allows me to put God and other people at the center.”

Verse 25 – “The fear of others lays a snare, but one who trusts in the Lord is secure.” We often think of peer pressure as a problem for adolescents. But adults too can fall because we care more about what other people think about us than what God thinks.

Pfc. Lynndie England pleaded guilty on May 2, 2005, to mistreating prisoners at the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq. England became a central figure in the scandal after photos emerged showing her and other soldiers sexually humiliating Iraqi prisoners. One of the photos showed her holding a hooded, naked prisoner on a leash. Another photo showed her smiling and giving a thumbs-up, next to nude prisoners.

The judge asked her about the photos. England said that, at first when a fellow soldier asked her to pose for the pictures, she replied, “No. No way! But they were being very persistent, bugging me, so I said, ‘OK, whatever.’ I had a choice, but I chose to do what my friends wanted me to.” (from an article in *The Louisville Courier Journal*, 5-03-05)

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