

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS
Commentary by Michael Sigler
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God's Wisdom Brings Life

Proverbs 15:21-33

Key verse: "Those who ignore instruction despise themselves, but those who heed admonition gain understanding" (Proverbs 15:32).

To follow God's way, the way of godly wisdom, leads to life at its best. Too often, we think that the way of godly wisdom puts us in an uncomfortable straight jacket of religious rules-keeping. We need to see that God's wisdom, expressed in part by God's commands, shows us the way to *life*. Every command of God is given to align us with how God designed the universe to work! In other words, life works best when we follow God's way—the way of godly wisdom.

With that truth in mind, just look at a few of the *benefits of living God's way* as found in Proverbs 15:21-33. When we follow God's way, the way of wisdom: 1. God helps our plans succeed (v. 22). 2. We experience joy and goodness (v. 23). 3. God defends us when we are most vulnerable (v. 25). 4. We are led in the way that leads to life (v. 27). 5. God hears our prayers (v. 29). 6. We experience rejoicing and refreshment (v. 30). 7. We "gain understanding" (v. 32).

Proverbs 15:21-33 is full of godly wisdom for our lives. Let's look more closely at four of these great proverbs....

1. *"Without counsel, plans go wrong, but with many advisers they succeed"* (v. 22). This proverb teaches the importance of seeking godly counsel, especially when making major life decisions. Opening our lives and our plans to the advice and criticism of trustworthy friends and godly advisers helps us stay in God's will and walk the way of wisdom.

Sometimes, receiving the advice and criticism of others can be difficult, but without such input, we can easily make wrong decisions. Charles Spurgeon, renowned preacher and devotional writer, once said: "Get a friend to tell you your faults, or better still, welcome an enemy who will watch you keenly and sting you savagely. What a blessing an irritating critic will be to a wise man, what an intolerable nuisance to a fool!"

2. *"To make an apt answer is a joy to anyone, and a word in season, how good it is!"* (v. 23). Here and in other parts of the Bible, we are reminded of the power of good and wise words, words sent from God through God's people at just the appropriate time.

Clark Cothorn shared an experience that illustrates the constructive power of “a word in season.” Clark said: “About 40 pastors and denominational leaders in Michigan squeezed into a relatively small conference room to discuss urgent and somewhat controversial matters. It didn’t take long for the discussion to escalate. Volumes increased. Tones grew edges. Observations teetered dangerously close to accusations. Fittingly, lightning flashed through the windows, followed seconds later by thunder heralding a coming storm.

“In the midst of the battle, a distinguished African American pastor stood slowly—intentionally so. As he rose, the noise shrank. Everyone knew him as ‘Brother Rochelle.’ His demeanor commanded respect.

“Brother Rochelle scanned the room for a good five seconds and then, with a voice trembling with compassion, he spoke, slowly and carefully: ‘Oh...my dear...children.’ He stopped—as did the thunder. It was as though Brother Rochelle had paused to wait for the Spirit of God to prepare the ears and the hearts of every single individual in the room. When he spoke again, it wasn’t a lengthy speech. He quoted a single Bible verse many of us had memorized as children in Sunday School: ‘Be ye kind one to another.’ Each word dripped with compassion. ‘Tenderhearted,’ he continued, looking around the room as if to convey just how much he loved every single one of us. ‘Forgiving one another.’

“When he sat down, we all sat in the silence brought about by the power of an aptly spoken word. The storm passed. Attitudes shifted. Peace reigned. The meeting continued in a spirit of brotherly love” (from *PreachingToday*).

That’s the power of “a word in season”!

3. “*Those who are greedy for unjust gain make trouble for their households, but those who hate bribes will live*” (v. 27). This proverb reminds us that, when a person chooses to live in ungodly ways, it’s not only that one person who is negatively impacted. So often, when people make wrong life choices, they say something like: “It’s not hurting anyone but me!” But that is seldom true. Our wrong choices impact others negatively, as well. Here, for example, one’s greed for unjust gain makes “trouble for their households.”

4. “*The fear of the Lord is instruction in wisdom, and humility comes before honor*” (v. 33). Note the connection here between “humility” and “honor.”

This principle is similar to the truth of 1 Peter 5:6 – “Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.” And this proverb also reminds us of the words of Jesus: “whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave” (Matthew 20:26-27).

John Stott, who died in July of 2011, was a pastor, author, theologian, and a recognized world leader in the Christian church. In 2005, *Time* magazine named him one of the 100 most influential people in the world. Rene Padilla shared an

experience from John Stott's life that illustrates the Biblical relationship between *humility, servant-hood, and honor*.

Padilla was traveling with Stott, and observed: "On the previous night we had arrived in Bariloche, Argentina, in the middle of heavy rain. The street was muddy and, as a result, by the time we got to the room that had been assigned to us, our shoes were covered with mud. In the morning, as I woke up, I heard the sound of a brush—John was busy, brushing my shoes. 'John!' I exclaimed full of surprise, 'What are you doing?'

"'My dear Rene,' he responded, 'Jesus taught us to wash each other's feet. You do not need me to wash your feet, but I can brush your shoes.'"

Humility comes before honor.

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