

SO MANY VOICES
PROVERBS 1:8-19

By Pastor John Carlini, D.Mn

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□ Last week we opened the book of Proverbs by saying our attitude towards our Christian walk should be that of a learner. The book of Proverbs can help us along the way. We are to discipline that if we do not, we will be foolish. Each day, teach the most out of yourself, through the book, we must be humble enough to ask ourselves, "What kind of fool am I?" Am I lacking in information? Am I lacking in experience? Am I being stubborn? And, am I being rebellious or arrogant? In other words, we are to put ourselves in the learner's role as we study each proverb.

This morning we will encounter some parent's role-playing with their children. Their goal is to try to help the children avoid looking for security, fulfillment, and love in all the wrong places. Wisdom will help them avoid some very serious mistakes.

Our culture has taught us to grab at everything we can get. The more material things we obtain, the more secure and successful we feel. In fact our whole economic system is built to function on personal greed. I am sorry to say that this attitude has even crept into the church.

When I went to college and seminary, I hung around with some real characters. These guys used to sneak into the bathroom stalls and write on the toilet paper, "When the rolls are called up yonder, I'll be there." These are the type of guys I hung around with.

One day, when we went to lunch, there was a large bowl of Red Delicious apples placed in the front of the cafeteria line. The staff thought they were clever and put a sign in front of the bowl. The sign read, "Please take only one. God is watching." My friends attached a note to the tray of peanut butter cookies at the other end of the line that said, "Take all you want. God is watching the apples." All I have to say is that I am thankful that their prankster attitudes did

not rub off on me.

Last week, the proverb informed us that fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom and only a fool would despise wisdom. This week he follows up on that theme by informing us that there are many voices calling out to us in life. We become wise when we can distinguish where the voices are coming from. The main idea is, **THERE ARE MANY VOICES CALLING OUT TO US EACH DAY. IT TAKES GOD'S WISDOM TO DETERMINE THE SOURCE OF THESE VOICES. THERE ARE ONLY TWO SOURCES FOR THESE VOICES, GOD'S OR THE DEVIL.**

We are told what is beautiful, desirable, and valuable by television, magazines, radio, by our friends, and by our culture. In general, the world is fleshly and under the control of Satan.

On the other hand, those of us who are fortunate enough to come from Christian homes, have our parents, church leaders and teachers, Christian friends, the Bible and the Holy Spirit to lead us to the truth. Let's get into this passage and examine some of the voices that call out to us every day.

I. THE VOICE OF LOVE (Vs. 8-9)

GOD HAS PROVIDED US WITH PARENTS AND CHURCH TO HELP US MAKE WISE CHOICES.

In verses 8-9, we can hear the voice of love. **GOD HAS PROVIDED US WITH PARENTS AND CHURCH TO HELP US MAKE WISE CHOICES.**

A. A WISE OFFER (V. 8)

Verse 8 is a plea that seems to be addressed from a father to a son. It describes a wise offer and has both a positive and a negative command. It starts out, "Listen my son," and then again says, "Do not forsake." There will be several proverbs that must be translated in the

masculine form. For example, the young lad is warned not to go visit a female prostitute. However, many of the proverbs are meant to address both genders. Here, we could translate the word son like the NLT does, "Listen, my child." Here the child lacks both knowledge and experience and the child is encouraged to take this teaching very seriously. So if we are going to put ourselves into this child's shoes, we are going to be looking for how we can grow both intellectually and in experience. We are going to be asked to respond to this wise offer that is also addressed in verse 8.

We are asked to make a wise choice. The author does something that we often do with our children. He role-plays. For example, he will speak as a father and mother, and then he will take the role of a sinner. The next week he will speak from wisdom's perspective. But here in verse 8, the author speaks as an outsider, encouraging the young person to listen to his parents.

B. A WISE CHOICE (V. 8)

There are two things here. First of all, notice that both parents are teachers. This can refer to the literal, biological parents. However, it can also be used in the relationship between wisdom teachers and their students. Hillary Clinton, quoted an African proverb saying, "It takes a village to raise a child," and that really is true. It is a blessing to have Godly parents. Oftentimes because of their age, they have much broader experience than young people. It is always a good idea to listen to the advice of parents. In fact, if you are in school and living at home, the Bible is even more emphatic that you are to obey your parents.

In church, we are an extended family and we truly are a 'village.' Depending on our age and relationship we should fulfill the roles and address one another as grandma, grandpa, aunt, uncle, older sister, older brother, younger sister, younger brother, or nephew. We in the

church family should regard one another like that. The Apostle Paul makes it clear that the elders should look out for the younger and we should take seriously the counsel of one another.

Now that puts a huge responsibility on parents, teachers, and mentors. The Apostle Paul who wrote, "Children obey your parents," was the same apostle who wrote, "Parents, do not frustrate your children." That means that we who teach or have authority in any way, better make sure the instruction we give is sound, biblical, and mature teaching. That in turn means that we are mature ourselves.

I want to address parents and church leaders for a moment. Before we give advice to our children or followers, we have to be sure that the advice is not to fulfill our own agendas in life. We are not to be driven by culture, or anything but a mature biblical theology. It is our job to help those who come under our care to find their place in God. We should shudder to think what an awesome responsibility that is. Bad advice and bad motives will not only drive our children away from the church and us, but it can actually drive people away from God. I repeat, what an awesome and frightening responsibility teaching is. So if we can hear the teachings of wise offers, and if they are based on the love and wisdom of our mentors, we will make wise choices.

C. A WISE OUTCOME (V. 9)

Verse 9 describes a wise outcome. I want all of us to think for a moment what advertising is about. Do advertisers sell things by focusing strictly on the qualities of the product we are going to buy? No! They try to sell an image of who we could be. For example, when selling Nike shoes or Gatorade, they never say, "This shoe is made of 10% rubber, 60% canvas, and 30% polymers. It was cross-stitched for durability, and comes in three colors." They never tell us that Gatorade is made up of salt, sugar, and other nutrients. How do they sell

Nike and Gatorade? By showing Michael Jordan flying through the air. Or, they will show people doing incredible athletic events such as running, push-ups, playing tennis, etc. Somehow, we magically place ourselves into these roles and we buy the products, because we feel they match who we are, or the image of whom we are. We do not buy clothes or accessories because of the quality we buy them because we feel cool, and part of the beautiful in-crowd. The advertisers sell us images of who we are when we are dressed in this particular outfit, driving this particular car, or drinking this particular drink. What we find out later is, that it was a waste of time and money. It was chasing a lie.

The proverb reminds us that true beauty comes from who we are within, not a perfect body, fancy clothes, or expensive accessories. If we obtain Godly wisdom, we will exhibit true beauty. Your heart will make you look as good as anybody wearing the latest Nike hat or diamond necklace. If you want to be beautiful, then pursue holiness and be filled with grace. Here is the voice of love. It says, **GOD HAS PROVIDED US WITH PARENTS AND A CHURCH FAMILY TO HELP US MAKE WISE CHOICES.**

II. THE VOICE OF THE WORLD (Vs. 10-14)

SINCE THE WORLD IS UNDER THE CONTROL OF SATAN, IF WE LISTEN TO WORLDLY VOICES WE WILL MAKE POOR CHOICES.

The next voice is almost louder than the voice of love. In verses 10-14 we are alerted to the voice of the world. Here is what we have to remember about this voice. **SINCE THE WORLD IS UNDER THE CONTROL OF SATAN, IF WE LISTEN TO WORLDLY VOICES WE WILL MAKE POOR CHOICES.** Since we were all created from the same stuff, we all basically look for the same things in life. It doesn't matter if we are male or female, young or old, rich or poor. As verse 10 points out, we are all on a quest for the searches in life. We all need to feel a sense of security. We want to feel safe and secure and we want to feel a

sense of power over our own destinies. In addition to being secure, we want to find meaning in life. We want to know that our lives count for something. And finally, we have a deep desire to feel loved. Those are natural, God-given desires. The problem is that most of us, most of the time, try to fulfill these needs with worldly things and in worldly ways.

A. THE SEARCHES IN LIFE (V. 10)

In verse 10 the young person is strongly warned not to be fooled by the world. It says, "If sinners entice you, do not fall for their lines." The author does not pull any punches. He calls these people sinners and their weapon of choice is enticement. The word enticement comes from the same root word in verse 4 for the simple. In other words, their prey is the naive and they will try to lure them and trick them. So what the author is telling us is this, we all have need for security, meaning, and love. Satan and his demons have lived and ruled in our world a lot longer than we have been around. So basically, we are naive when it comes to these things. We will have to be on our guard to not let society, television, friends, movies, music, or magazines define for us what is desirable. We have to admit right up front that we are not as smart or clever as we think we are. We must be on guard to understand and analyze what is shaping our desires. The world will entice us, but we must stay close to wisdom in order not to be fooled. That's why it helps to be closely connected to a healthy Christian community. We need the Holy Spirit and one another to fight off these worldly ideas.

B. THE SEARCH FOR SECURITY (Vs. 11-12)

First, let us deal with our search for security in verses 11-12. You may overlook these verses and say, "I'm not in danger of killing anyone." Have you ever gossiped about someone? Have you ever held a grudge against someone? Have you secretly hated someone or wish that something bad would happen to him or her? Have you ganged up on anyone or treated

someone as an outcast? Jesus said these things are equivalent to murder.

Look, the truth is that we have all blind-sided someone at some time. In our own little in-crowd, we have excluded others and made fun of them. I was fortunate, because of my involvement in sports, almost always put me in the in-crowd. It was exclusive, not inclusive. And to tell you the truth, I did not give much thought or concern for those outside the group. Have you ever been in that position? Did you ever ask yourself, "Why did I act like that?"

Well the reason is this. We all want to feel secure. We want to surround ourselves with people who think like us and act like us. We feel safe in the context of this group. We live in a dangerous world, and we live in danger from terrorists and gangs fighting over turf. We live in an economy that could leave us destitute at any moment. For the most part, many of us live in fear.

So how do we answer this need for security? How do we overcome our fears? Well the wisdom writer informs this young person that he will be tempted to join gangs and to join up with people who demonstrate power. One of the reasons young people today join gangs is that it gives them a sense of power and security to belong.

Those of us who are more sophisticated put alarms on our houses and on our cars. We lock our valuables in safe deposit boxes at the bank. We buy insurance to cover every possible loss we could face. But in the end, there is no insurance to cover hearing the words, "You have cancer. You have three months to live," or, "I don't love you any more. I want a divorce." We will all have to come face to face with real life situations that are beyond our control. No gang can save us. No investment banker or insurance broker can save us. No doctor or medicine can save us. The fact is that since we are sinners, living in a sinful world with other sinners, life is out of control. Life really is dangerous.

I think if you read through the Bible, a phrase that comes up over and over again, usually spoken from God or an angel is, "Fear not." That demonstrates to me that God understands exactly how we feel. Yet He commands us to not let fear take hold of us. Why? If we are believers, then God is always with us. Jesus said that we are in His hands, and He is in the Father's hands. Further, the Holy Spirit lives in us. There is never a time when we are absent from God.

We just finished studying the book of Romans, in which Paul said that there is nothing in this world, or the supernatural world that can ever separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. Our security is to be placed in God and God alone. We will all face traumatic experiences in life. We will all find ourselves on the outside looking in. We will all face sickness and death. Our only security lies in the knowledge and experience of learning to rest in God's love. Our personal relationship with God is the only thing that can bring us true security.

C. THE SEARCH FOR MEANING (V. 13)

Verse 13 describes our search for meaning. When I went to school, the only thing I really disliked was busy work. There was many times the teacher's assigned homework -- just for the sake of doing homework. It was boring because it had no purpose. We all have had to do menial jobs that are boring. Why do we dislike these things so much? Because they have no meaning and we all have this deep desire to do something meaningful. We want to make a difference. We want to know that our lives count for something. Young people try to make sport's teams, cheerleading squads, the honor role, or getting on the social A-list in school. As adults we try to climb the corporate ladder, buy homes in the right section of town, buy fancy cars and dress in power suits. We have come to think that making money, being successful, having the right job, buying the right toys gives us meaning in life. The sad thing is, we all find

out ultimately that these things don't bring permanent satisfaction. In fact, even though they may bring us immediate gratification, we find ourselves emptier, and always craving more.

Look at verse 13. The wisdom teacher tells his students that the world will tempt them with wealth and possessions. And the world does not much care how you get them. Once you are rich, you are on top. This is also what lures young people to join gangs and sell drugs. They think it is an easy way to wealth and the good life. That's the lure that entices business people to cheat, to embezzle, and to steal. There are no morals in the business place.

We have just finished a five-week series on finding our meaning and purpose in life. We were created to be in a personal relationship with God. Our expression of love to Him is called worship. We were created to care for one another's physical, emotional, spiritual and material needs. The Bible calls this fellowship. We were created to identify our spiritual gifts and use them to build up the church. We identified this as ministry. The theme of Proverbs is that we grow in our walk with Christ and that we help others to grow in their faith as well. The New Testament calls this discipleship. And finally, because we know that Jesus is the only way to be reconciled with God, we tell others about Him. This is called evangelism. We will be studying through all of these, again during Lent. God defines the only purpose we have in life. We find meaning in life through worship, fellowship, ministry, discipleship, and evangelism. There is no other way to find lasting fulfillment.

D. THE SEARCH FOR LOVE (V. 14)

Verse 14 states the obvious. We all search for love, we want to love and be loved and we want to belong. It is ironic that these sinners, who are enemies of the community, are offering community to this young naive person. It is tragic today that gang's who are enemies of the community, are offering community to lonely, unsuspecting young people.

Young Christian men and women are engaging in all sorts of sexual acts in hopes of finding love and intimacy. The world says that if you want to keep that person, and you want to experience love with that person, then you have to be involved sexually with him/her. But, the Bible says we are to be sexually pure. I can hardly believe the statistics I read about how many pastors and church workers are involved in illicit sexual affairs and how many are addicted to pornography. It never ceases to surprise me to see how many Christians are dating and planning to marry non-Christians. I am stunned to learn that the Christian divorce rate is the same as the non-Christian divorce rate.

Where have we failed as the church? How is it that young people can find love and acceptance in a violent gang, but not in a loving church? How is it that Satan has tricked Christian men and women into substituting sex for love and intimacy? I do not know. But I do know this: and this is extremely controversial and narrow, no one can be a true lover unless they have first experienced the love of God through Christ Jesus. It is impossible to express love to another unless you are in a right, loving, personal, and intimate relationship with Jesus Christ. Think about the descriptions of love in the Bible. Let me name a couple for you, "For God so loved the world, He gave His One and Only Son ... God demonstrated His love for us by this, while we were still sinners, He sent Jesus to die for us ... We love because He first loved us."

The world has many definitions of love. Some of them are even noble. But true love can only come from being in a love relationship with God first. God offers us everything we are looking for: unconditional love, being in a right relationship with Him, being accepted into His family, and the promise that He will be with us forever. He sealed the promise by creating us, redeeming us, and indwelling us. God is freely offering us everything we are looking for in love. All these things that we write and sing about in love songs, poems, and stories, are things

we can never live up to and promises we cannot keep. Only God can love us the way we need to be loved.

So the wisdom teacher is telling us that the world will tempt us to look for security, meaning, and love in all the wrong places. The world will make their options look very appealing, but in the end, they only bring emptiness, dissatisfaction, loneliness, and death. Remember Jesus said that Satan comes to steal, kill, and destroy. We cannot afford to be naive when it comes to these things. Remember, **SINCE THE WORLD IS UNDER THE CONTROL OF SATAN, IF WE LISTEN TO WORLDLY VOICES WE WILL MAKE POOR CHOICES.**

III. THE VOICE OF TRUTH (Vs. 15-19)

AS BELIEVERS, WE HAVE THE HOLY SPIRIT WHO GIVES US THE WISDOM TO MAKE WISE CHOICES. THERE ARE SEVERE CONSEQUENCES FOR THOSE WHO CHOOSE TO REMAIN FOOLISH.

But verses 15-19 remind us there is always the voice of truth. The wisdom teacher really does speak the truth in love here. **AS BELIEVERS, WE HAVE THE HOLY SPIRIT WHO GIVES US WISDOM TO MAKE WISE CHOICES. THERE ARE SEVERE CONSEQUENCES FOR THOSE WHO CHOOSE TO REMAIN FOOLISH.**

A. KNOWING WHERE TO WALK (Vs. 15-16)

In verses 15-16 we learn that it is important knowing where to walk. Verse 15 warns us not to walk in the world's direction. In fact do not even set foot on the path. Why? Because once they get you walking on their path, it will not be long before you are running with them to sin. We could do this with any sin, but let me use sex as an example here. The nature of physical relationships is that they have to escalate. If holding hands satisfies you today, it will not satisfy you tomorrow. It will take kissing to satisfy you, then touching, and petting, and

finally sexual intercourse.

For those who get interested in money, at first a little money satisfies us, then we need more and more and more. It is like that with all sins. We get lured to sin at a very low level, but then the sins escalate so quickly that they get out of control.

In wartime, it is important to know where to walk. If you step on a land mine, you will be killed and the others around you will die as well. So it is important to know where to walk every day.

B. KNOWING WHERE TO STOP (Vs. 17-18)

Verses 17-18 remind us that it is important to know where to stop as well. Here is a true proverb that has all the qualities we have come to look for. It is a short pithy saying whose meaning is clear, ... or is it? Let us read it. It says, "How useless to spread a net in full view of all the birds!" I think that makes relatively good sense. In other words, it is kind of stupid to set a trap in front of the birds. If they see you setting the trap, they will not fly into it and you would be setting the trap in vain.

Now let's add verse 18 to it, "These men lie in wait for their own blood; they waylay only themselves!" Oh, now this is a little more interesting. If we go with our original interpretation of the parable, then what we are saying is that these wild birds are smarter than the stupid sinners. The birds were smart enough to recognize the trap and avoid it. Those who follow the world are so stupid that they get caught in their own traps. But let us think of the parable this way. The birds see the hunter setting the trap and then baiting it with all sorts of food. When the hunter leaves, the birds are no longer wary so they fly down to eat the food because they cannot distinguish between bait and food, and therefore they get caught in the trap.

These sinners cannot distinguish the trap in the lure of the world for excitement, for love,

and for adventure from the trap. Satan sets the trap, but then he withdraws into the background while we see beautiful bodies, faces, clothes, cars, and toys. We see exotic places and people having fun, but since we are naive to Satan's trap, we get snared.

And how about a third option? Let us again say the birds are smart enough not to get caught. This time, let's apply this to us the learner. Hopefully we will learn from the wisdom teacher and Satan will not fool us. Those people who want to live a worldly life and tempt us will only tempt us in vain. They are the only ones who will be trapped by the world and Satan. All of these meanings are possible, and being a great proverb, probably all three are meant. Can you feel the explosion of its logic hit you?

C. KNOWING THE END (V. 19)

Verse 19 reminds us that knowing the end is important. Here I am using the word end as our fulfillment. Only being in a vital relationship with Jesus can bring true satisfaction to life. We can only find happiness as we worship Him, fellowship with one another, grow through discipleship, minister to others and evangelize the lost.

If we get sucked into accepting the world's values and we start to think of success and happiness in worldly terms, we become easy marks for Satan and we will end up very unhappy.

AS BELIEVERS WE HAVE THE HOLY SPIRIT WHO GIVES US WISDOM TO MAKE WISE CHOICES. THERE ARE SEVERE CONSEQUENCES FOR THOSE WHO CHOOSE TO REMAIN FOOLISH.

Let me remind all of us this one more time. There are many voices out there calling us. Hollywood calls to us. Music entices us. Magazines, friends, society, and people we are around every day will lure us. But God is consistently whispering to our hearts, minds and souls. It is imperative that we listen to the right voice. **THERE ARE MANY VOICES**

CALLING OUT TO US EACH DAY. IT TAKES GOD'S WISDOM TO DETERMINE THE SOURCE OF THESE VOICES. THERE ARE ONLY TWO SOURCES FOR THESE VOICES, GOD'S OR THE DEVIL.

I think this story illustrates nicely what this particular proverb has in mind when it warns us to not be greedy and the consequences of following the world.

"One winter day not long ago a man returned to his car from shopping at the local neighborhood mall. He noticed a rather foul odor from under the hood. He checked the engine. In the compartment he discovered a dead cat rather mutilated from being caught in the fan belt. The poor cat had sought shelter from the snow and cold and didn't realize the dangers of resting on the engine block. The man proceeded to scrape, pull, and push the remains of the cat into a plastic bag. He closed the hood and went to wash his hands. As he was returning, to take the bag from the hood of the car, he saw a woman walk by, look suspiciously in both directions, grab the bag, and hurry off into the mall. 'Well this is too good to be true!' the man thought as he laughed at what the woman had done. He decided to follow her and see what would happen next. She went into a restaurant and surveyed her bounty. She screamed and fainted when she looked into the bag. An ambulance was called and as she was about to be carried away the man couldn't resist. 'Hey lady!' he shouted, 'don't forget your package!' And with that he gently laid the plastic bag on the woman's chest, just as the ambulance doors were closing."

I think that this nicely illustrates what we are trying to say this morning. If we look for security, love, and meaning in life in places where the world directs us, we will get exactly what that lady got in her ill gained shopping bag. Therefore, we would be wise to listen to good Godly advice.