

Godly Living – Prov. 3:7-10

New Year, 2012 #2

When she was in her early years of teaching, an elementary teacher asked her students to write down a statement that they would consider to be wise. The answers were so fascinating that she continued this exercise year after year. Before she retired, she compiled these words of wisdom from the elementary students whom she had taught down through the years. Here are some of the golden nuggets she had received:

*9 year old Rocky – “Wear a hat when feeding seagulls”

*8 year old Stephanie – “Sleep with your clothes on so you’ll already be dressed in the morning”

*10 year old Lamar – “Don’t flush the toilet when your dad’s in the shower.”

*12 year old Joel – “Don’t pick on your sister when she’s holding a baseball bat.”

*9 year old Alyesha – “When you get a bad grade at school, show it to your mom when she’s on the phone.”

*10 year old Heather – “When your dad is mad at you and asks, ‘Do I look stupid?’, don’t answer him.”

*11 year old Scott – “Don’t spit when you’re riding a roller coaster.”

*12 year old Hank – “Never tell your little brother that you’re not going to do what you mom told you to do.”

*11 year old Philip – “Never dare your little brother to paint the family car.”

*7 year old Chelsey – “Listen to your brain. It has lots of information.”

Wisdom is important to us because it can lead us in the best life direction. Last Sunday, we began a series looking at 12 New Year’s Resolutions from the wisest man who ever lived. These are found in Proverbs 3. We already have seen the 1st three: to become a more loving and faithful person, to grow in our faith and trust in the Lord, and to not be overconfident or wise in our own eyes. Now let’s refresh our memories as to the text and pick up with resolution #4. READ Prov. 3:1-10:

PR 3:1 My son, do not forget my teaching,

but keep my commands in your heart,

PR 3:2 for they will prolong your life many years

and bring you prosperity.

PR 3:3 Let love and faithfulness never leave you;

bind them around your neck,

write them on the tablet of your heart.

PR 3:4 Then you will win favor and a good name

in the sight of God and man.

PR 3:5 Trust in the LORD with all your heart

and lean not on your own understanding;

PR 3:6 in all your ways acknowledge him,
and he will make your paths straight.

PR 3:7 Do not be wise in your own eyes;
fear the LORD and shun evil.

PR 3:8 This will bring health to your body
and nourishment to your bones.

PR 3:9 Honor the LORD with your wealth,
with the firstfruits of all your crops;

PR 3:10 then your barns will be filled to overflowing,
and your vats will brim over with new wine.

Resolution #4 & #5: Fear the Lord and shun evil.

PR 3:7 Do not be wise in your own eyes;
fear the LORD and shun evil.

Now we often think of a righteous life only in terms of the good practices that a person does. But a person who is truly righteous is also aggressive in avoiding evil and wickedness. A balanced and proper view of God is critically important for us to have.

The Hebrew word for fear in this verse has the idea of recognizing the awesome power and authority of God and, therefore, being terrified of his wrath or anger. It actually reflects a very natural response that we all have to be apprehensive of those who have certain power over us.

*A student has a measure of respect for that teacher who has the authority to pass or fail him in the class.

*A worker has respect for his boss who has the power to either give him a raise or fire him from his job.

*We all have respect for a policeman who has the authority to give us a ticket for a traffic violation

*It is natural for us to respect those who have authority and power over us.

Now when we realize the power that God has over us, the ultimate control that he has over our very existence, and the fact that the Bible clearly tells us that we are accountable to God for our actions and one day will stand before him and answer for the way we lived our lives, it should be a natural response on our part to fear him, to respect him. And this fear of God should cause us to obey his commands and shun evil, stay away from wicked practices in our lives. Nothing can hurt a young person more quickly than giving himself over to a wicked lifestyle. But a proper fear of God that results in avoiding sinful practices becomes a great blessing to him for this is the greatest deterrent that he has.

As our society has drifted away from a recognition of God, we have seen a corresponding decline in respect for God as well. There is very little fear of God in our world today. Comedians joke about God. Workers take his name in vain on a regular basis. God has practically been removed from our daily lifestyle.

An illustration of this process can be seen in the way that we dismiss ourselves from people. Back in the reformation days, when God was at the center of all society, the most common expression that people used in England when they parted company was "God be with you." Believers and unbelievers alike all used this phrase. It was the accepted form of departing in society. And it was not only in England, but the French and the Spanish also had parallel expressions. Adieu and Adios both have the same idea- may God watch over you, may God be with you. But as time went on, and the impact of the reformation became less on culture, the expression "God be with you" also changed. By the time of Shakespeare, "God be with you" had become shortened to "God bye". It still had God in there, but now it didn't really mean anything- "God bye"- what does that mean. So it wasn't long until God bye become Good bye. Today, we often say "good bye" to people. Few recognize that the original meaning of that phrase was "God be with you."

It was in the 60's, in a hedonistic California environment, that another popular departing phrase was coined. Having publicly declared God to be dead in our liberal seminaries, and having welcomed in the philosophy of existentialism with open arms that focuses all attention on the present, on the now, a new departing phrase was coined that reflected this change in societal thinking- "have a nice day". Little smiley faces were drawn to connect with this phrase "have a nice day." The focus was completely on the here and now and the enjoyment of present pleasures. Now there is certainly nothing inherently wrong with the phrase "have a nice day" and I have often used it myself. But there is quite a difference in the message between "have a nice day" and "God be with you".

I wonder how long it will be before "have a nice day" becomes compressed like God be with you did in the phrase good bye. Have a nice day. . . Handy. Don't be surprised if people depart company 50 years from now, and one raises his hand and says, "Handy".

What has happened in our culture as the recognition of God and the fear of the Lord has declined? Have not all kinds of evil and wicked practices multiplied?

Trusting in the Lord is one of the best resolutions that we can make for a New Year, for without faith it is impossible to please God. And having a proper fear of God that leads to avoiding evil practices is also very important, for this gives to us the ethical foundation that is so critical in the making of decisions of what is right or wrong in our lives.

PR 3:7 Do not be wise in your own eyes;

fear the LORD and shun evil.

It is interesting to note how the Bible describes Job. 3 times the same 4 part description is used of him. Job 1:1 opens with this introduction:

JOB 1:1 In the land of Uz there lived a man whose name was Job. This man was blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil.

Then when God introduces Job to Satan in their conversation, He says:

JOB 1:8 Then the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil."

Finally after Satan had tempted Job by taking away all that he possessed in 4 disastrous events, God reminded His enemy of Job's character again:

JOB 2:3 Then the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil. And he still maintains his integrity, though you incited me against him to ruin him without any reason."

3 times it is said of Job that he was not only active in his obedience to God, but he was also committed in his aggression to stay away from evil practices as well. It was both his fear of the Lord and his shunning of evil that made Job a model believer that God could use in His argument against His enemy.

So it must be in our lives as well. Along with our resolve to fear the Lord, the resolution to shun evil is also a most worthy and necessary one.

We have a clear illustration of this principle in the Scripture reading that we read earlier. The 20th chapter of Exodus gives the account of God giving what we commonly call the 10 commandments to the nation of Israel. This must have been one of the most terrifying experiences that any group of people have ever witnessed and survived. Can you imagine being crowded around the foot of a mountain with 3-4 million other people and watching as fire consumed the top of the mountain? Can you imagine being almost blinded by the lightening bolts that were striking the top of that mountain and being deafened by the claps of thunder? No wonder that Bible says that the people trembled with fear. No wonder the Bible says that the people pled with Moses that he not make them go any closer to the mountain. Why did God orchestrate such a dramatic event to reveal his 10 commandments to his people? God didn't have to do any of this. He didn't have to have the spectacular light and sound effects. God could have just as easily revealed his 10 commandments to Moses in a dream or vision just like his normal practice was in revealing his word to his prophets. Why did God reveal his law in such a dramatic and terrifying way? The answer is clearly stated at the end of the passage we read, isn't it? Moses told the people that God had acted in such a fashion that "the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning." You see, God revealed his power to his people in such

a visible and dramatic way so that they would fear the Lord and avoid evil. And it worked – for a while. The people were terrified; they didn't want to go near that mountain; they told Moses that whatever God wanted them to do, they would do. The problem was the length of their memory. After Moses acquiesced to their wishes and disappeared up into that cloud on the top of the mountain for 40 days and nights, receiving the rest of the law from God, the people thought that he was gone for good. With the fire and lightening and thunder now just a memory and only the innocuous cloud remaining, they quickly forgot their recent terrifying experience. By the time Moses descended back down the mountain, they had built a golden calf and were dancing ludely around it. The fear of the Lord had dissipated and they were no longer avoiding evil. Moses had to remind them of this God whom he had been with for the past month by melting that calf down and making them drink it sprinkled in water.

Now lest we be too critical of these ancient Israelites, we need to be reminded that this same process takes place in each of our lives over and over and over again each month. We tend to think that if we had the same experience that the Israelites had seeing the glory of God on top of Mt. Sinai, we would be permanently filled with a proper fear of the Lord. But we all know in our hearts that this wouldn't be the case. Because we are reminded of God's power and glory. Sometimes it is through a Scripture passage that grips our hearts. Sometimes it is through a dramatic turn of events in our lives where God just steps in and delivers us or redirects us. It might even be through a sermon that we hear or a book that we read. And we make commitments with the best of intentions. But how quickly we can forget. How quickly we can build our little golden calves and turn our eyes away from the Lord.

We each need to resolve to live our lives with the fear of the Lord continuously before our eyes. This can be one of the best New Year's resolutions that we can make. For it will not only enable our relationship with God to grow and deepen, it will also be the best deterrent to keeping us from the sinful practices that can so easily derail our lives. The wisest man living in his day wrote, "Fear the Lord and shun evil for this will bring health to our body and nourishment to our bones". This is good advice for each of us. It's good advice for our physical health; it's good advice for our emotional health; and it's good advice for our spiritual health.

Resolution #6: Honor the Lord with our wealth.

PR 3:9 Honor the LORD with your wealth,

with the firstfruits of all your crops;

PR 3:10 then your barns will be filled to overflowing,

and your vats will brim over with new wine.

Webster defines the verb honor in this way: to respect greatly, to regard highly; to esteem; to treat with deference and courtesy; to worship; to exalt; to ennoble.

God is pleased when we honor him, when we worship him, when we exalt him, when we regard him highly in our lives.

Now there are many ways to show God honor. The specific way that is referred to in this passage is by giving our wealth to God. The picture is the agrarian one of the agricultural society. The Jewish family would go out onto the land that had been given to them by God as part of their family inheritance, and they would plant their seeds. Those seeds would nestle into that fertile ground that God had made. The seeds would feel the warmth of the sun that God caused to shine and would be fed by the spring rains that demonstrated the goodness of God according to Acts 14:17. In time, those tiny seeds grow into fruitful plants. And eventually, the harvest season would come, and the entire family would celebrate the reaping of the crops. It was a joyous time of celebration. The men would often camp out in the threshing area, and the grain would be harvested and the chaff separated from the wheat. Of course it was hard work. But the work was a delight as everyone pulled together. And there was an atmosphere of celebration as the fruit of months of labor was finally enjoyed.

After the harvest, there was the pilgrimage. In the warmer Israeli climate, there are 3 growing seasons. In the O.T. law, God set up 3 times during the year when every Jewish man 20 years old and older would be required to make a journey to the temple in Jerusalem- Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles. Each of these times of pilgrimage came directly after a harvest season. Passover came right after the barley harvest; Pentecost came right after the wheat harvest; and Tabernacles came right after the harvest of the fruits. And often, the entire family would journey to Jerusalem for a great time of feasting and celebration. Part of the celebration was the giving of the firstfruits back to the Lord. As the firstfruits were given to God, the family was recognizing God to be the giver of all the blessings that had been reaped in the harvest, and in doing that they were honoring God.

Now we don't live in an agricultural society by and large today, but the principle that is being referred to here is still just as valid. Most of us work in offices or in plants or in our houses or in stores. But we work with the health and strength that God has given to us. We think with the mind that he has created for us. And when we receive the monetary reward for our labors, we need to be careful to give to the Lord the firstfruits of our labors. As we lay aside first of all our tithes (the 10th of what we earn) and other special offerings that we might want to freely give, we are honoring God- we are recognizing that he is the ultimate giver of all blessings in our lives. If we fail to give the firstfruits to God, we are practically saying to God that we have accomplished all of this in our own strength, by our own efforts, with our own ingenuity. We are honoring ourselves rather than God.

Let me ask you a very soul-searching question. You don't have to answer publicly. How do you pay your bills when you receive your paycheck? Do you give the Lord the firstfruits? Is that first check that is written a check honoring God and recognizing Him to be the giver of all blessings? Or do you pay all of the other bills first, and then give God some if there is money left over? And if the cash flow is short this month, does God's tithe get cut back to 7% or 5% or maybe even nothing at all? Have you ever stopped to think of what some of those bills might say to God? One of these bills might be something that you impulsively bought with a credit card while shopping at the mall. Or one might be that car payment that is due. Or one might be a utility payment. Yes, these bills need to be paid. There is no question about that. But when we pay for something that we impulsively bought or pay for comfortable transportation or pay for home conveniences before we think about honoring God, what does that say to God?

We live in a day when many families are living under great financial pressure. Christian families are not exempt. Many Christians are living under terrible financial pressures. While we recognize that much of this is due to the economic recession that we have been suffering through as a nation, I am convinced that many of these pressures we might also bring on ourselves because we are failing to honor God in the area of our finances as we should. Solomon told his son to honor God with the firstfruits and he would never have to worry about his family finances- his barns would overflow with grain and his vats spill over with wine. God blesses those who honor him. This is a lesson that is critical for all of us to remember as we enter this New Year. It is important for young people to remember as they set up patterns for living. And it is also very important for older people not to forget this principle of honoring God with the firstfruits of their finances.

Imagine the surprise that a newspaper editor received when he read this letter that was sent to him just about 100 years ago now in response to an article that he had written criticizing religious organizations for soliciting money for their projects. Let me quote part of the letter: "Yes, I tithe and I would like to tell you how it all came about. I had to begin work as a small boy to help support my mother. My first wages amounted to \$1.50 a week. The 1st week after I went to work, I took the \$1.50 home to my mother and she held the money in her lap and explained to me that she would be happy if I would give one-tenth of it to the Lord. I did, and from that day week until this very day I have tithed every single dollar God has entrusted to me. And I want to say, if I had not tithed that 1st dollar I made, I doubt if I would have tithed the first million dollars that I made. Tell your readers to train their children to tithe, and they will grow up to be faithful stewards of the Lord." Signed, John Davison Rockefeller.

6 worthy New Year's Resolutions given by the wisest man who ever lived:

*become a more loving and faithful person

*grow in faith and trust in the Lord

*don't be overconfident or wise in our own eyes

*fear the Lord

*shun evil

*honor the Lord with our wealth

These are resolutions that are worthy for a New Year; these are resolutions that will bring true physical health, prosperity and peace into our lives.