

Chapter Seventeen
Sermon #17
January 18, 2015

Great Advice

**A wise son hears his father's instruction, but a scoffer does not listen to rebuke.
(Proverbs 13:1 ESV)**

I was a young pastor caught in a jam. I was 27 years old in a church where the elders and deacons were much older than me and also were community leaders and politicians. I was outgunned in every category. These men had me on the ropes because I was young and inexperienced and had never done battle with elders who were also county commissioners who were used to getting their way and intimidating the bajeebees out of young pastors like me. The church had grown to a point where the new people outnumbered the old-timers and an old-fashioned wild-west-type of showdown was looming. The new-timers were solid as a rock Christians and the old-timers were living a double life pretending to be Christians. One was having an affair with the Sunday School superintendent, one was into pornography and his wife was having an affair with the principal of the grade school where she worked and the meanest of them all was an old codger who simply didn't want anyone else but this sinful group of leaders running their church and of course bowing to him personally. Maybe he had the goods on the other leaders and that is why they listened to him but one thing was for sure, I was in a heap of trouble.

I couldn't win no matter how nice or logical I was. Either I preached too long or I preached too short. Either I visited the shut-ins too much and wasn't in my office enough or I was in my office too much and not visiting the shut-ins enough. Even though I took a pay cut of 17% from my associate pastor's pay in Portland and went from 18,000 dollars to 15,000 dollars a year, I was getting paid way too much, according to the leader of this group. Board meetings went on until midnight many nights. These were knock-down dragged-out bitter hours where I was getting beaten up by men who had done this before to every other pastor they had before them. As soon as some of their sins were discovered and the rookie pastor became aware of them, the heat would turn on just like this until he resigned and they could get another pastor to replace him, especially one outside the denomination so they could bypass denominational oversight.

After spending seven years preparing for ministry and another two years apprenticing before I received my ordination, I was looking at throwing all nine of those years away or seeing it all being thrown away because this church was definitely going to end my ministry years. Can you imagine going to college and grad school for 7 years and realizing it may all be for nothing? I didn't know what to do. There was no class in seminary called "How to survive your first church when all the leaders are immoral." It should have been taught, but the school was in official denial that any such churches existed out there in the real world, the world outside of seminary walls where everything was idealistic and make believe. Not that the president and professors were unaware of such churches, they simply did not want to discourage future pastors from paying tuition and quitting early, so they were silent when it came to dealing with the down and dirty of ministry life.

In my desperation I made two phone calls. One to the executive minister of our denominational district whose name was Doug Baltz and another to my father-in-law Jerry Giles. Pastor Doug was a lifesaver. He called me once a week to steer me through the mine-field of pastoral war and church conflict and encouraged me to enlist the newcomers who had recently become members of the church to perform church discipline on the old-timers, at least their clandestine leaders, and so I did. But I still had board meeting after board meeting to get through. How was I going to deal with every accusation in those meetings, especially those that were ambiguous and subjective? That's where Pati's wonderful father and practical mentor came through with fantastic advice. Here's what he said. "Number 1) don't argue, in fact if at all possible remain absolutely silent during the meetings. Number 2) take a legal pad and pen and write down every statement made exactly as they were uttered. Make sure you do not add or subtract from what they said. When they ask you what you are doing tell them that since your memory is not always 100% you are recording on paper every accusation against you, precisely so that you may share this with your executive minister and get his feedback for your growth." When I asked what good that would do, his response was, "wait and see".

I took dad's advice and with a small yellow pad wrote down every accusation against me they had trumped up or at least I started to write them down. When they asked me what I was doing, I responded just as dad suggested, without any anger or attitude. In less than a minute, the meeting was over. They could not afford to have their false and ambiguous accusations recorded to see the light of day. In that simple exercise, I took all their bluster and power away. When they realized I could not be intimidated and that with the denomination's help, the process of church discipline would go forward, they knew they were cooked. Final score: Satan 0, Jesus 1. The church still exists without those immoral leaders and continues to serve Christ in that part of Iowa. I am so glad my father-in-law lived only 120 miles away and that I could sit in his study and receive his experienced wisdom, otherwise I would not be in ministry today.

You will face crises in your life that will stump you. You will not have an answer for the situations you are in. You will not have the experience necessary to deal with the powers against you in a way that is Christ-exalting and Satan disarming. You will be looking at the prospect of either a promotion if you handle it right or a pink slip, that means a firing, if you handle it wrong. Where do you go to find the advice you need that will get you out of those ethical jams you will find yourselves in? Proverbs 13:1 will tell you. It says: **A wise son hears his father's instruction, but a scoffer does not listen to rebuke. (Proverbs 13:1 ESV)**. Your fathers will have many years on you studying and absorbing God's word so that they will know instinctively what it is you ought to do in a certain situation. When you are tempted to cut corners or use your own wisdom in those situations, you will discover that listening to an elder who has gone through the same situation you are in or a very similar one will save you a ton of heartache, and maybe even your job.

In today's chapter (sermon) I want to share a number of pieces of advice that come from the wisest man in the world. You say you already know who that is? Super, it shows you have been listening and paying attention.

Let me start with a topic and a situation each one of you will face very soon. Let's talk about drugs and alcohol use. Satan will use every angle he can to get you to experiment with drugs at the earliest age possible. Someone is going to invite you soon to smoke weed and later to try meth. But before that, they will attempt to get you to drink at a party, starting out with a beer and eventually they will spike your drink with the hard stuff, usually vodka. Here is one very bad way to handle this temptation. Say to the person offering you the drink, "I can't, my

parents won't let me." Believe me, if you say that, you know what will happen next don't you? "What?" They will say. "You do everything your parents tell you? Are you really that lame?" Guess what, where do you go from there except hiding in the bathroom and waiting for your parents to come and pick you up. First of all you shouldn't be at a party where there are losers like that. But if by chance you have lied to your mom and dad and assured them it is a safe place to be where there won't be any alcohol or drugs, or you didn't know there would be, now what should you say? Try this on: "Thank you, but I prefer drinking beverages at parties that don't cause me to act stupid like _____ is acting right now", nodding your head in the direction of the girl that is laughing super-hysterically at a dumb joke no one else is laughing at because she is a happy drunk. That should do it for you. But if by chance the person offering you a drink is pressing you even further, there must be some reason they want you to get drunk, like taking advantage of you sexually. Perhaps at this point you might try this tactic, "Thank you but I prefer to drink beverages that help me keep my pants on at parties if that happens to be the reason you are so strongly encouraging me to have that spiked punch you are offering me." Then you have your grandpa's permission to accidentally elbow his drink offering as you turn to talk to someone else and cause it to soak his shirt and be very, very apologetic about your clumsiness. Better to have him wear *it* than you to regret whatever it is he had planned to do to you that night. Now it is time to get your car keys out and head for home and eat popcorn and watch "Sarah Plain and Tall" on the Hallmark channel.

Did you notice the difference between the two approaches? The first implies what your parents want you to do and what your parent's values are. The second approach indicates those are your values and you are choosing not to drink because you value your virginity primarily, and you value your dignity secondly, two things that are easily lost by getting drunk. Having your values settled long before you are tempted causes you to have an internal moral compass that makes it simple to make your decisions about things such as drinking. If you value your person highly as God does, why lower yourself to do things others tempt you to do that will destroy the person you want to be? It makes no sense. One drunken night can result in an unwanted pregnancy and a host of other complications that go along with it. Nothing against babies here, but as Pati said they need to come in the right order. Marriage first, babies second.

Solomon says: **Wine is a mocker, strong drink a brawler, and whoever is led astray by it is not wise. (Proverbs 20:1 ESV)**

This verse is implying that wine and vodka have personalities all their own. Once inside of you they tend to take over and wine will laugh at you or mock you because it (or him) is making you do stupid things and say stupid things. Surely you will have more respect for yourself than to allow a substance to make you look like an idiot? Of course you do. Worse yet, once vodka (or whiskey, bourbon, rum, take your pick) get inside of you and you start getting a buzz, you are not far from losing control of your emotions and if someone around you says the slightest comment that offends you, you will, especially if you are a guy, come out swinging. Won't be long after that and you will start feeling a different sensation, that of handcuffs being placed on your wrists behind your back and the smell of the inside of a squad car taking you for a ride.

Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has strife? Who has complaining? Who has wounds without cause? Who has redness of eyes? Those who tarry long over wine; those who go to try mixed wine. Do not look at wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup and goes down smoothly. In the end it bites like a serpent and stings like an adder. Your eyes will see

strange things, and your heart utter perverse things. You will be like one who lies down in the midst of the sea, like one who lies on the top of a mast. "They struck me," you will say, "but I was not hurt; they beat me, but I did not feel it. When shall I awake? I must have another drink." (Proverbs 23:29-35 ESV)

Here I thought Pati was sarcastic at times. Nothing however like Solomon in this passage. Who has woe? In other words, who is the one who lost their job and got a DUI on their record? The one who drinks to get drunk. Who has sorrow? The one whose marriage is destroyed because they couldn't handle drinking without getting drunk and it ruined their marriage. Who has strife? The contentious drunk who is offended by even the tiniest tease. Who has complaining? The one suffering from a hangover. Who has wounds without cause? The stone-cold drunk who fell half a dozen times on their way home from the bar and did not know in the morning why their face is all bloody with dried blood. Who has redness of the eyes? Certainly not any beauty queen I know! Solomon says do not look at wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup and when it goes down smoothly. If you took him literally here you couldn't look at red wine but go ahead and look all you want at white wine. No, Solomon doesn't want to be taken literally in that sense. He wants you to think like a drunkard would think, or like an adulterer would think looking at a pretty girl. Those who can't handle their addictions can't hardly look at a bottle of wine without getting all excited that someone might serve them a glass. It is to them intoxicating, even the appearance of the bubbly. Drunkards are so out of it they become oblivious to what is going on around them. They can be in a fight and get their lights punched out but have no idea who did it or when it happened or even care that it was happening when it was happening. In the morning all they will care about is where the next drink is coming from.

It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine, or for rulers to take strong drink, lest they drink and forget what has been decreed and pervert the rights of all the afflicted. Give strong drink to the one who is perishing, and wine to those in bitter distress; let them drink and forget their poverty and remember their misery no more. (Proverbs 31:4-7 ESV)

World leaders must control their drinking even more carefully than anyone else because they cannot afford to even get close to getting drunk. Getting drunk is not like riding a teeter totter, where all of a sudden the weight on one side of the plank is heavier than the weight on the other and the fulcrum tilts. No, it is more like a slide. The closer one gets to the bottom the more uncontrolled he will be but that does not mean that his faculties are not impaired long before he reaches the bottom. It is a sliding scale a leader must contend with in terms of drinking. If one drink is a limit he must stop at one. If he starts thinking unclearly at 2 drinks, it is too late. He might say something that is dangerous and an underling may hear what he said and act on it. In other words, lives are at stake at 2 drinks or more. What is true of kings is true for everyone. Imagine running a business and a subordinate hears you say after several drinks, you wish a competitor would lose an account and that you would get it. That might be enough of a motivation for that underling to start a rumor about your competitor online so that they indeed did lose the account and you got it. Do you want that responsibility on your head?

Do you know why our government will not allow children under 21 to drink? It is because adolescents are not able to process alcohol in the same way adults can. Here are a few facts:

- Alcohol abuse in adolescence, during a developmentally sensitive period, poses a particular danger to the emerging brain faculties of executive functioning and long term memory.
- Adolescents are more likely to be more vulnerable than adults to both subtle brain damage and long-lasting cognitive deficits following alcohol exposure.¹
- And, adolescents do not have the emotional maturity nor physical capacity to handle even small amounts of alcohol.

Should you drink alcoholic beverages before you are 21? Sure you can if you want to disobey the law, and disobey the Lord, and hurt your body. Should you drink after you are 21? Wine is a gift from God, but like anything else in his creation, if it is abused it will become a curse. Learn how to enjoy all of God's creation with moderation and never ever let anything in His creation control you.

One of the reasons teens drink is to be popular. They do not want anyone making fun of them or their pride will get hurt. But what's so bad about bruising your pride? Solomon has great advice about humility. He says:

The fear of the LORD is instruction in wisdom, and humility comes before honor. (Proverbs 15:33 ESV)

We do things we don't want to do because we fear people and their attitudes about us, just like I said above. We want to be popular, we want people to like us so we give in and do what they want us to do so that they will like us. Please, do you think so little of yourself? Thinking like this makes you a slave to people's opinions. I'd rather be God's slave and fear what he thinks of me than fear what other people think of me. I know I'm His creation and I belong to Him so there is no room in my life for pride, thinking I belong to me, or fear of people thinking I belong to them. God loves a humble heart. He will honor you if you humble yourself before him and destroy your idolatrous pride. Here are some of his promises to those who fear him:

By steadfast love and faithfulness iniquity is atoned for, and by the fear of the LORD one turns away from evil. When a man's ways please the LORD, he makes even his enemies to be at peace with him. (Proverbs 16:6-7 ESV)

If we humble ourselves before God and fear Him, he will continue to show his steadfast love and faithfulness to us. That means He will continue to forgive us when we sin against Him when we are willing to acknowledge our sin and ask for his forgiveness. When we walk in the fear of the Lord and walk in His ways, somehow those who are angry with us, even if it is for our righteous behavior, will end up being at peace with us and reconciling.

Blessed is the one who fears the LORD always, but whoever hardens his heart will fall into calamity. (Proverbs 28:14 ESV)

Why do people harden their heart and end up making a disaster of their lives? Pride, pure and simple. God hates braggarts, brats, and know-it-alls, because they are an absolute offense

¹ <http://www.ias.org.uk/Alcohol-knowledge-centre/Underage-drinking/Factsheets/Health-and-social-impacts-of-underage-drinking.aspx>

to His glory. God is the only one who knows-it-all and everyone else who pretends to know-it-all is stealing God's glory. Anyone who brags is saying they are doing something in their own strength and power when in reality they are borrowing God's strength and power to get it done. Besides this behavior is downright ugly. Beauty in God's eyes is a humble spirit that recognizes God is everything and we are nothing. Here is more of Solomon's advice:

Better to be lowly and have a servant than to play the great man and lack bread.
(Proverbs 12:9 ESV)

This means it is better to drive a 10 year old car with a 100,000 miles on it and live on 70% of your 200,000 dollar salary which allows you to hire a maid than to drive a Porsche and live on 120% of your \$60,000 income and wonder if there is enough cash in the checking account to buy a Big Mac. Get the point? It's all about being humble and unpretentious. That's what this next verse says as well.

One pretends to be rich, yet has nothing; another pretends to be poor, yet has great wealth. (Proverbs 13:7 ESV)

Here is more advice about being humble and the benefits it brings to a person of wisdom. A proud person will be an argumentative person. If there is a lot of arguing going on in your home, somebody's pride is in the way. A humble person will not want to argue because it will hurt someone they care about and humility means putting other people's needs and desires above yours. Solomon says:

Whoever troubles his own household will inherit the wind, and the fool will be servant to the wise of heart. (Proverbs 11:29 ESV)

How often do you find yourself arguing at home? Is it often? Are you at odds with your mom and dad and argue about what is the best time to get up in the morning, or what you decide is best for you to do after school, or who you think your good friends should or should not be? Maybe you argue about chores and responsibilities assigned to you. Perhaps you argue about the movies you want to see or about the video games you want to play. Perhaps you argue about your curfew and what time you are expected to be home or what time you are expected to show up cheerfully for dinner. If this sounds like you, then you are one who is troubling his own household and you will inherit the wind. Have you watched a tornado in person? I have. It is massively destructive. I have seen oak trees swirling around on the top of the funnel of a tornado and later looked at the path of destruction that tornado caused as it mowed down an entire 200 foot swath of oak trees and homes for miles and miles. Strife in a home will lead to a life that is destroyed by pride and anger. How? Because there is no humility. And when there is no humility, you will think you are always right and no one can teach you anything and you have to get your way all the time. Listen to Solomon's warnings about strife.

The beginning of strife is like letting out water, so quit before the quarrel breaks out.
(Proverbs 17:14 ESV)

Whoever loves transgression loves strife; he who makes his door high seeks destruction.
(Proverbs 17:19 ESV)

Solomon says that if you love to fight and argue you set yourself up for everyone else's anger and revenge. A person may win lots of arguments but in the process he is losing lots of friends. Is it worth it? The phrase, "He who makes his door high seeks destruction" means a person who tries to add to their own reputation is setting themselves up for a rude awakening when people do their best in every possible way to see that person fail. They will succeed. The door in this passage refers to a gate of an Israeli farm or plantation. The higher the gate the more successful the farm and the greater need to keep others out. It is a picture of a person trying to add to their own reputation by being right all the time.

Don't do this. Humble yourself and follow Solomon's advice:

The vexation of a fool is known at once, but the prudent ignores an insult. (Proverbs 12:16 ESV)

Deceit is in the heart of those who devise evil, but those who plan peace have joy. (Proverbs 12:20 ESV)

I listened to my father-in-law. I kept quiet. I humbled myself. I didn't try to defend myself or win any arguments. I let those immoral church leaders bury themselves in their own false accusations. It not only saved my ministry and allowed me to pastor other churches, but it also saved that church from closing and turning their church building into a floral shop or something else. A few years later I received an apology letter from the one man who was righteous but had turned against me because he listened to the others. His apology asked for my forgiveness and he admitted that I was right and what was done to me was wrong. Yes, it took a few years to be vindicated but in the end God came through. He wins every time.