

Sermon 92, Character: Why You'll Need It, Proverbs 27:11-27

Proposition: Character counts in our Father's world, and you'll need it because life is loaded with problems.

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Introduction

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, we are nearing the end of the book of Proverbs. Today we finish chapter 27, leaving us with just 4 chapters to go. We're going to make it. Today we are reminded of yet another of Proverbs' main points: Character counts, and you're going to need it because the world is loaded with problems. You will need solid character, because the world is bad enough as it is.

I. The Character the Father Wants, vv. 11-13

Our passage opens with yet another call to the son to be wise and make a glad Father. The point of wisdom is to please your Father! And similarly, to fail to be wise is to severely displease your Father, to disappoint Him and let Him down. In this particular verse, it is mentioned that a wise son is a trophy of sorts, someone a father can brag on and hold up as a shield against taunts. Now, how does that work? Well, generally if kids turn out badly public opinion will blame the parents. We all think that way until our own kids turn out poorly. Then we realize that parenting may not have as much to do with it as we thought when judging other people. Anyhow, when a Father can point to His wise son and say, "Have you seen my servant Job?" He feels a certain amount of vindication. This is not urging us to live vicariously through our children. Rather, it is

reminding us about the Lord Jesus Christ, the Wise Son who makes His Father's heart glad and who is the Father's answer to every last one of the world's problems. When someone has a problem with the way the world is run, when someone complains about evil in its various permutations, all that God has to say is "Look at my Son. He's dealing with it."

Jesus is dealing with it! He is the Word who expresses all that is in the Father's mind, and thus He is also the answer to all of the world's problems and to every charge laid against God. Brothers and sisters, do you believe that? When you want to complain about something, do you look to Jesus as the Word of the Father, the Word that is the final and satisfactory answer to every last criticism you could possibly mount against God?

So parents, this verse is not recommending that you train your children to fear God so that you can throw their godliness in the face of anyone who criticizes you. "Well, my kid reads the Bible every day, unlike your little brat who watches Marvel every day. So there!"

Not at all. The point of this verse is to say that Christ is God's answer to every complaint. You think the world is rotten? Jesus suffered the depths of its rottenness. You think the world is unfair? Jesus suffered from the greatest act of unfairness in human history. You think the world needs to be improved? Jesus is busy improving it with all the resources at the command of omnipotence. Folks, at the end of the day our own children, however godly and wise they turn out, are a poor answer to criticism of our own morals, habits, and attitudes. But the Wise Son is a great answer. He is the Father's perfect answer. Trust Him. Believe Him. Love Him. And listen to him as the answer.

A. Wisdom, v. 11

That said, what other character qualities does the Father want to see? He wants to see wisdom. He wants to see you walk in the fear of God and thus gladden the heart of your earthly Father and your Heavenly Father. We have talked dozens of times about wisdom as fearing God in your daily life, having an awe of His mighty rushing energy and being afraid to mess with Him.

B. Shrewdness, v. 12

But wisdom doesn't end with that aspect. Another aspect of it is shrewdness. The Father wants to see a son with some ability to read the future. What sorts of evils are coming our way? How can we take steps to avoid those evils? Whether that looks like parking money offshore, keeping your children out of public school, limiting time and intimacy with the television, making sure that at least two people always handle the money belonging to the church, or not sharing your location with all and sundry — these things are aspects of wisdom. Those who can't perform these tasks of wisdom will suffer for their inability.

How do you gain shrewdness, the ability to see moral, physical, and financial hazards coming and to evade them? You gain it by experiencing God's world — but only if you experience that world in the fear of God. If you fail to fear God, you will get stupid. You will think that porn is realistic. You will think that non-existent things are dangers and that obvious dangers are actually good things that will be a blessing to your family. Let's talk about this in more concrete terms. Shrewdness says "Letting my children be educated by a homosexual person

is dangerous.” Folly says “Letting my children be educated by a homosexual is good and will broaden their minds and make them more accepting and charitable.”

Shrewdness says “If I expect politics to perfect this world, or vote for candidates who expect politics to perfect/save this world, then I will contribute to making the world worse.” Folly says “Politician A promises that he will save you name it — jobs, education, healthcare, the middle class, the poor, the Christians, America, world peace, world climate, and so on — and so I should vote for him, not the other one who hasn’t promised to save anything.”

Shrewdness says “If I let my teenage daughter dress according to the standards of the world, she’s going to believe that the standards of the world are acceptable.” Folly says “If I fight with my teenage daughter about dress standards, I will lose capital that I desperately need to win the bigger battles.”

Shrewdness says “Others care about themselves and their problems more than about me and my problems. Therefore, if I make the conversation about me and my problems all the time, others are going to lose interest.” Folly says “I’m tired of hearing about my friend’s life. I want to talk about my life.”

Brothers and sisters, are you constantly scanning for the outcome? Are you looking five minutes, five years, and five decades into the future, asking what the outcome of this decision will be? Do you make your decisions with an eye to preventing foreseeable evils? Do you ask yourself “What could possibly go wrong?” and then guard against those consequences? Are you in it for the long haul? Or do you prefer the simple-mindedness of going about your business until foreseeable disaster strikes?

C. Toughness, v. 13

Well, the final aspect of character that the Father wants to see is toughness. I almost called this pugnacity or being hard-nosed. The proverbs rarely use imperatives. They say what’s going to happen rather than telling you directly what you should do. But this is an imperative. And what does it say to do? It says to collect the collateral. Just go ahead and put a lien on that property. Go ahead and hang onto the title to the car. Go ahead and demand that your ex’s wages be garnished. Don’t be nice. Be intransigent. When the risk of loss is profound, there is nothing wrong with the child of God muscling in and claiming the collateral.

In short, be tough! The world doesn’t need any more namby-pamby Christians. It doesn’t need any more Christians who wouldn’t hurt a fly, who wouldn’t drive away a wolf, who wouldn’t harm a snake. It needs more of the other kind. Now, of course, it’s still imperative that we use due process to determine who is actually a snake and wolf. But when that has been settled, don’t be nice! There is no command in the Bible to be nice, but there is one right here to not be nice. No one would accuse Jesus Christ of being nice. Intense is a much better word to describe Him.

So do you have this character? Do you fear God? Do you scan for every foreseeable evil? Do you exercise toughness and courage in the service of God? That is the kind of wise son that the Father wants to see. That’s the kind of son who can serve as an answer to enemies.

II. The World the Father Made, vv. 14-22

Aside from making the Father glad, why do you and I need to be this kind of son? Because we have to deal with a very mixed-up world. In this world the principle of sowing and reaping is at work. You are going to get more of whatever you plant. This principle works two ways in this fallen world. It works for blessing, yielding blessing to those who sow righteousness. And it works for cursing, yielding cursing to those who sow evil. Proverbs has talked about this all along. You need to be a wise son who plants righteousness. If you aren't and don't, the evil you plant will grow up and choke you.

Creational goodness is still present in this world. If you latch onto that goodness and cultivate it righteously, you have every reason to expect much of your life to go well. But if you latch onto the fallenness, the brokenness of this world, and cultivate it with evil practices, you have every reason to expect that nothing in your life will work right.

A. Fall: The World Is Backwards, vv. 14-16

We see the men of Hezekiah highlight first the reality that the world is backwards.

1. Blessing Can Become Cursing, v. 14

A greeting — we say “Hello” but they said “Blessings!” — can become a curse if it's done wrong. Get up too early and say it too loud, and you will have them at your throat. This verse is a favorite one for many Christians to quote, and if you have ever had a child bounce into your room an hour or two before you were ready to get up, you know what the verse is talking about. Why is this proverb here? It's an illustration that the world is backwards. A blessing can become a curse, even when you didn't do anything truly evil or mean any harm.

2. A Wife Can Become Water Torture, vv. 15-16

My cousin Zach says to everyone who tells him that they just got engaged, “I guess you're tired of being happy.”

Brothers and sisters, the best things in life can be corrupted! You have as much chance of shutting down the perpetual nag nag nag of a nagging wife as you do of grabbing a handful of oil or locking the wind up in a box. It ain't gonna happen! This world is messed up. Good things can become bad things.

What's the solution? To give up?

B. Creation: Character Counts, vv. 17-21

No. It is to pursue the trustworthy character of a wise son. The world is a mess, which is why you and I need to be wise and have the character to live in it. How do we pursue this character, and what is it good for?

1. People Can Sharpen Each Other, v. 17

Continuing the theme of friendship from last week, we find one of people's favorite verses from Proverbs. You have doubtless heard your Christian friends quote this verse. Probably very few of them knew that it was to be found in Proverbs 27, but I bet most of them knew it as Proverbs. The point: People can sharpen each other. Your friends are a sharpening agent that helps your character be more like what the Father wants to see.

2. Labor Brings a Reward, v. 18

So pursue character by cultivating friendship. And then know that good character brings a reward. The one who keeps the fig tree eats the fruit. The one who honors his master will be honored. We don't guard God, but we do honor Him. The second half of this verse is paraphrased here in the American West as "ride for the brand." Do you do that for Christ and His church? Do you do your best to guard their good name? Or do you indulge in the secret sins that will prevent you from having a fruitful life and a rewarding afterlife?

3. The Heart & Praise Mirror the Man, vv. 19, 21

Your heart is a mirror that reflects who you are. The praise people give you is a mirror that reflects who you are. Again, we see the principle of sowing and reaping. You sow actions and reap a character; that is, your character flows from what your heart desires and does. You accept or generate certain kinds of praise. That shows who you are just as truly as the words that come out of your own mouth. Praise tests you like the furnace and crucible test gold and silver.

C. Fall: The Tenacity of Folly, vv. 20, 22

But though creation has this principle of sowing and reaping built into it, we must simultaneously reckon with the reality that folly is extraordinarily tenacious.

1. A Rotten Character Is Never Content, v. 20

Human desire is never satisfied any more than Hell and Destruction are satisfied. They have no built-in limits. Chaos wants to swallow all that exists. And human greed wants to do the same. How can you and I learn contentment? By looking to the wise Son and taking Him as our portion. If Jesus isn't your all in all, then you will find that the world is not enough.

2. Physical Pain Can Never Eradicate Folly, v. 22

Physical pain will never eradicate folly. You can beat a fool until you're blue in the face, until your arms are tired, and he's a bunch of tiny pieces — and he'll still be a fool. Don't look to asceticism or beating to make you holy. Don't look to spankings to make your children wise. They won't. Only the Holy Spirit can do that, for He is the Spirit of Wisdom.

D. Creation: The Reward of Tending Your Flock, vv. 23-27

The final portion of our passage highlights the creational goodness that God has built into the world, and teaches contentment with work and the produce of the earth and the animals that God has placed on it. The principle of sowing and reaping is at its best here, in working the earth that God has given. Pay attention to your flock, and it will take care of you.

Character counts. If you have it and use it to work, you can expect to live well. But if you don't have it, or don't use it, then calamity will strike swiftly. Do you want to live with the character that pleases your Father? Or do you want to sow corruption and reap pain? The choice is yours. Choose wisely.