

THE COMPANY WE KEEP
PROVERBS 1:8-33

INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW

My personal involvement with vandalism is limited, but there is a blot on my record. Lynn Markow was wise in the ways of the world. She was an older woman who commanded respect. As I recall, she was seven and I was about five. So when she suggested that we hide in the ditch by my grandfather's house and throw stones at the cars that went by, I found it difficult to say "no."

We took up positions by the road, and when the first car came motoring along Lincoln Street, we let fly with our pebbles. I don't know if we hit anything. But as soon as the car passed us, we retreated to a safer vantage point. The car turned around at the end of the street, and the driver came looking for us. After he came past us the second time, we took off for the hills. My fear of capture at that point was considerably greater than my curiosity. I was also upset with this hardened criminal who had duped me into going along with her devious plot. Fortunately, as far as I was concerned, we eluded capture, and my parents never found out about it.

I was naive, you see, and the temptation was strong. I was susceptible to another's negative influence. At that early age the principle was worked out that the company we keep has a big impact upon our behavior. It is that principle that we are going to consider today as we look at how the Book of Proverbs says it should be applied in our lives.

Last week we began our study of the Book of Proverbs by looking at the first seven verses of the book. We saw that the purpose of Proverbs is to teach wisdom, which I defined as "skill in daily, godly living." I also tried to show that while formal education can be a good thing, it does not necessarily convey wisdom. A highly educated individual can be devoid of skill in daily, godly living, and someone with little formal education can be very skilled in the art of daily, godly living.

We also pointed out that the original setting for this teaching about wisdom was the home. So we are going to find important applications for us who are parents and grandparents, and indeed for all of us who are part of a family. We discovered the theme of the book in v. 7, which says, "**The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge.**"

We also saw that King Solomon, the author and editor of this book, describes three kinds of people who exist in the world. **First**, there is the wise person. This is the self-disciplined person who exhibits skill in daily living. He or she makes good decisions in the daily challenges that cross one's path. This person has a healthy fear of God. **Second**, there is the naive individual who is immature. He or she is open to many

influences they come from the world around us. Children and young people are often naive, but sometimes there are older people who seem to be gullible and have a tendency to believe anything which they are told. Then, **third**, there is the fool. This is the person lacking in common sense, He or she is undisciplined and does not fear God. He tends to be rebellious. The challenge for all of us is to consider the kind of person whom we are and what kind of person we wish to become.

I. A.

In our passage today we find that there are two calls from two different sources concerning two different paths in life with two different destinies. (PROJECTOR ON--- I. THE CALL OF THE SINNERS) In vv. 8-19 we encounter the first call. It is THE CALL OF THE SINNERS. Within this section there are several subcategories. The first is found in vv. 8-10. It is THE PARENTS' WARNING. (I. THE CALL OF... A. THE PARENTS' WARNING)

Verse 7 said that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge. Central to that fear of the Lord in the Old Testament was the law, including the Ten Commandments. The Fifth Commandment says that children should honor their parents. This is the basis of the appeal in v. 8 in our passage for a son to obey the teaching of his father and mother. Notice that mothers are included.

Moses describes another application of this commandment in Deuteronomy #6 vv. 7 & 8. (DEUTERONOMY 6:7). Moses says, "**You shall teach them** [the Ten Commandments listed in the previous chapter and related laws] **diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.** (DEUTERONOMY 6:8) **You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes.**" Parents are to live these laws and take advantage of teachable moments in all of the circumstances of life to instruct their children.

Over the centuries Orthodox Jews came to take this instruction very literally. (TEFILLIN) They put bits of Scripture in little boxes called tefillin or phylacteries and tied them to their forehead and to their arm. (TEFILLIN) Typically these Scriptures include the "Shema," the prayer that begins in Deuteronomy #6 v. 4.

Here in our passage the parents' teaching is described as a wreath and a necklace. In the culture of this ancient civilization a necklace symbolized guidance and protection. (PROJECTOR OFF) In Egypt a wreath was worn only by the religious elite, by priests. It symbolized victory over enemies, and it symbolized life and power. Here the teaching of father and mother is given that same high status.

In v. 10 comes the direct warning: "**My son, if sinners entice you, do not consent.**" I pointed out last week that Solomon probably began collecting and organizing Proverbs for the purpose of developing a curriculum that would prepare young men for government service. So he could be referring to his own son in v. 10 and to other young students.

Verses 20 & 21 speak of streets and the city square. An urban setting, such as that in Jerusalem, must thus be in view. Young men from other parts of Israel were probably among the first people to be exposed to an early collection of the proverbs. Some of these students may have been away from home for the first time. In their training for government service they would now be exposed to the various influences that city life has to offer.

Like me, some of you may have had the experience of going away to school at a public or secular private university, or perhaps you went off to boot camp and military service. All of a sudden mom and dad were no longer around to keep us in line. A variety of influences try to entice us. Some are good. Some are bad: "Come to church with us." "Come to our Bible study." You need to study hard." Or, "Come drinking with us." "You have to at least try marijuana. It's legal. It can't hurt you." "You can have a girl up in your room all night--- no problem. Nobody cares."

The concern in v. 10 is that the young man not consent to "sinners." The form of this word in Hebrew means "men to whom sin has become a habit." We are urged to stay away from them. Don't yield to their enticement. For what we become is determined to a large extent by the company that we keep. With whom will we hang out?

B.

Verses 11-14 go on to describe THE TEMPTATION FROM SINNERS. (I. THE CALL... A. B. THE TEMPTATION FROM SINNERS) According to v. 11, **"If they say, 'Come with us, let us lie in wait for blood;/ let us ambush the innocent without reason;/ 12 like Sheol let us swallow them alive,/ and whole, like those who go down to the pit...'"** Let's get this guy or these guys who have done us wrong, who have disrespected us, who need to be taught a lesson, who have something that we need or want.

According to his father on November 1 seventeen year old Rancho High School student Jonathan Lewis **"was trying to help one of his smaller friends who was being bullied and had something stolen from him and he tried to intervene."** (CNN online, 11/16/2023) Supposedly the issue was a pair of stolen wireless headphones. The details have not yet come out, but it may well be that the call went out to come with us and ambush these guys. **"Come with us, let us lie in wait for blood..."** They may not have planned to kill Jonathan Lewis, but nine or ten boys ganged up on him and proceeded to beat him to death. Not only has one life been destroyed, but at least nine others have been arrested and charged with murder. What a waste! Sinners! Fools!

The promise of v. 12 in our passage is that, as in the rebellion of Korah in the wilderness in the time of Moses described in Numbers 16 when the ground opened up and swallowed the rebels, so too the criminals will commit their crime without leaving behind a trace of evidence. The killers of Rancho High School may have thought that, but there was considerable video evidence that recorded their attack. Such is the danger which comes from listening to the wrong people.

In an article for *Christianity Today* English professor Roy Anker writes, “**Carnage, hurt and dying now form the chief interest in almost all pictures made for children between the ages of 10 and 20.**” He adds, “**Violence is now portrayed as pleasurable.**” Of course, this is also an issue in video games.

In our passage violence is seen as a means to an end. The end, or goal, of the sinners in Proverbs is described in v. 13: “**...we shall find all precious goods,/ we shall fill our houses with plunder...**” The appeal of the sinners is to materialism. In California one can take up to \$950 of stuff from a store and suffer no worse punishment than a misdemeanor. Often these crimes are not investigated and seldom are perpetrators prosecuted.

The additional promise in v. 14 is that the young man can be one of the gang. “**Throw in your lot among us.**” Sinners love company. The temptation is thus not only to choose a wrong course of action, it is also to become part of the wrong crowd. Proverbs #24 vv. 1 & 2 tells us, “**Be not envious of evil men,/ nor desire to be with them,/ 2 for their hearts devise violence,/ and their lips talk of trouble.**” It is these lips of the evil men, the sinners, that make this call to the young man pictured here. What we become is determined to a large extent by the company we keep. The friends whom we choose from an early age determine to a great extent the kind of people we become.

C.

Consider then THE APPLICATION FOR TODAY. (I. A. B. C. THE APPLICATION FOR TODAY) The son in our passage is evidently a young man well into his teens. But there are principles at work here for daughters and for all of us. There are many influences in our world that compete for our attention and for the attention of our children and grandchildren. As in Solomon’s day the peer group plays an influential role in their development, especially as they get older. The choice of a peer group may determine whether our kids dabble with drugs, experiment with sex, toy with crime, or choose positive pursuits. The friends whom our kids acquire have a significant effect upon how they turn out.

When our children are young, we have the opportunity to a greater extent than we ever will have when they get into their teenage years to have a say in who their friends are. The danger is that we will let it happen by default. Simply because a kid lives next door or happens to be a cousin or the child of a friend, we may let them become our child’s friend. That is not always so good.

If the other kid is a little rebel or uses bad language or constantly puts our child down or fights with him, why should we let him or her hang around with our kid and undermine all of the things that we are trying to develop in his or her life? Now no child is perfect. But younger parents can probably all think of certain kids who are especially negative influences upon our own children. We need to minimize our exposure to them, even though it may mean some bad feeling on the part of their parents. Isn’t the well being of our own children more important?

We can also do as Solomon did and help our children and grandchildren to understand the temptations that they face. That requires that we be tuned in to the negative influences to which they are being exposed. Then we need to warn them about what lies beneath the surface. "If you listen to somebody who says, 'Throw rocks with me,' you may hurt someone. You may get caught. You will feel guilty. Your parents will be upset. You will get spanked."

Social media has become a huge issue for us as parents and grandparents. Professor Bryn Austin from the Harvard Department of Social and Behavioral Sciences writes, **"We've known for years that social media platforms... have very harmful effects on teen mental health, especially for teens struggling with body image, anxiety, depression, and eating disorders."** (Harvard School of Public Health News, 10/8/2021) So we have to figure out how to limit this negative impact on our kids.

There is also application for us adults in the friends whom we choose. Our friends affect the way that we act and behave. We need to be wise in choosing friends. Not every Christian is a good friend. Some are not walking with God. Some are negative toward authority. Some are negative about their mates or their kids. Some are complainers and gossips. Some are still angry and unforgiving people. We need to be wise in the choice of our friends. For what we become is determined to a large extent by the company that we keep.

At the same time we Christians want to be influencers for good and for God. In order to do that we have to maintain and develop good relationships with people who are not Christians.

D.

In vv. 15-19 we learn about THE DESTINY OF THE FOOLISH. (I. A. B. C. D. THE DESTINY OF THE FOOLISH) The author says that the people who get caught up with such an evil gang as this are more stupid than birds. A bird can't be trapped by putting a net in front of it. But these guys ambush their own lives. They get themselves caught. They betray one another. They make stupid mistakes. They get caught in their own lies. They beat a kid to death and forget that most teens have cell phones who can record any exciting incident that they witness.

The moral in v. 19 is this: **"Such are the ways of everyone who is greedy for unjust gain;/ it takes away the life of its possessors."** We see this same principle expressed in other ways in the New Testament. "For whatever a man sows, that he will also reap." "He who lives by the sword will also die by the sword."

Though God is not mentioned here, He has so directed life by His control as Creator that evil deeds carry with them evil consequences. The promise and lure of sinners does not mention the consequences that come with evil actions: a guilty conscience, heartache, pain to others, fear of capture, fear of betrayal, danger of physical harm, and lack of contentment.

The lesson for us adults is that not only must we tune in to the negative influences enticing our kids and grandkids, and help them to understand their nature, but we also much show them their consequences. According to *Parents* magazine the average child will see people consume alcohol on TV 75,000 times before he or she reaches drinking age. Ninety-nine per cent of those exposures portray drinking in a positive or neutral light. We need to warn them about the downside of alcohol.

Several generations of us have been exposed to the adventures of 007. He always ends up in bed with a beautiful woman. Seldom does there seem to be a downside. The women never have an unwanted pregnancy, and no one ever gets a sexually transmitted disease. This is not reality.

In our area all of us are exposed to the bright lights and the ads and the inviting structures of casinos. Newspapers sometimes have ads containing pictures of people who have hit the jackpot. Gamblers who spent the rent money and stole from their employers to pay gambling debts don't get as much attention. We pastor types encounter the sad stories of people who lost it all and whose lives, and lives of people around them, were hurt by the lure of gambling. Such are the dangers which we need to present to the category of people called in Proverbs "the naive," or the "simple."

II. A.

In vv. 20-33 we learn about a different call from a different source concerning a different path leading to a different destiny. (II. THE CALL OF WISDOM) This is THE CALL OF WISDOM. We will pass through these verses more quickly. Notice in vv. 20-23 WISDOM'S INVITATION. (II. THE CALL... A. WISDOM'S INVITATION)

The Hebrew word for "wisdom" in v. 20 appears in the plural form, indicating intensity and fullness. This wisdom is described as a wise woman, as an evangelist for wisdom. She is placed in contrast to the sinners in the previous verses. In contrast to the quiet, seductive call of the sinners, **"Wisdom cries aloud in the street,/ in the markets she raises her voice;/ 21 at the head of the noisy streets she cries out;/ at the entrance of the city gates she speaks..."**

Lady Wisdom's cry is loud and bold. She shows up in the busiest places in the city. She invites all who will accept her invitation to choose her as their companion. But there are other voices in the busy streets. There are sinners who urge listeners to just try drugs. You will feel great. There may be teachers who urge you to change your gender. That will solve your problems. You don't have to tell your parents. You can have sex before marriage. No one will know. There is nothing wrong with that.

Wisdom cries out: Listen to me. I represent the Creator. He wants you to have the best life possible. He wants you to avoid hurting yourself. He wants you to have a great life. Don't fall for these short term temptations. In vv. 22 & 23 Lady Wisdom even calls those most likely to reject her offer--- the naive, the scoffers, and the fools.

B.

In vv. 24 & 25 we discover WISDOM'S REJECTION. (II. A. B. WISDOM'S REJECTION)
The problem is not that people lack the opportunity to pursue skill in daily, godly living. They may lack education, and they may come from difficult backgrounds, and they may not have much money. But the biggest problem is identified in the second line of v. 25. Lady Wisdom says that they **"would have none of my reproof."** They don't want to listen to me. They don't want to fear God. They don't want to learn skill in daily, godly living. They don't want to give up short term pleasure for long term gain.

In the same way people do not choose to follow God because there is a lack of evidence for His existence. People do not reject Jesus because the historical evidence for His life, death, and resurrection is insufficient. People do not choose to put their trust in Jesus because they do not want to do so. They want to do their own thing. They don't want to be accountable to someone else. They want to claim that they have the right to control of their own body. They want to be able to do what they want to do when they want to do it.

C.

In vv. 26-32 we are told about WISDOM'S REJECTION RESULTS. (II. A. B. C. WISDOM'S REJECTION RESULTS). According to vv. 26 & 27 calamity will eventually come to those who reject wisdom's invitation. The one who resists her call will end up in jail or with a divorce or with an unwanted pregnancy or with a drug problem or with great debt or with problem kids or with suicidal thoughts. Verse 28 says that then they will call upon wisdom, but wisdom will not answer. Why?

Verse 29 says, **"Because they hated knowledge/ and did not choose the fear of the Lord..."** The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge and--- we might add--- wisdom. Companionship with wisdom involves a relationship that must be cultivated. Wisdom is not instantly available, especially to one who has rejected it for all of his life. It is only by hanging around with wisdom for a period of time that it begins to rub off on us, that we begin to live wisely.

Cynthia Heimel was a columnist and writer for several magazines and newspapers. She apparently knew a number of celebrities. For in one of her books she wrote this: **"I pity [celebrities]. No, I do. The minute a person becomes a celebrity is the same minute he/she becomes a monster. Sylvester Stallone, Bruce Willis and Barbara Streisand were once perfectly pleasant human beings with whom you might lunch on a slow Tuesday afternoon. But now they have become supreme beings, and their wrath is awful. It's not what they had in mind..."**

"The night each of them became famous they wanted to shriek with relief. Finally! Now they were adored! Invincible! Magic! The morning after the night each of them became famous, they wanted to take an overdose of barbiturates.

"All their fantasies had been realized, yet the reality was still the same. If they were miserable before, they were twice as miserable now, because that giant

thing they were striving for, that fame thing that was going to make everything okay, that was going to make their lives bearable, that was going to provide them with personal fulfillment and (ha ha) happiness, had happened. And nothing changed. They were still them. The disillusionment turned them howling and insufferable.” (*If You Can't Live without Me, Why Aren't You Dead Yet?*, pp. 13-14) My analysis would be that they rejected wisdom and the fear of God, and instead chose celebrity and all of the temptations that came with that.

Verse 32 describes the ultimate end of those who reject wisdom: **“For the simple [the naive] are killed by their turning away,/ and the complacency of fools destroys them...”** Bad things tend to eventually happen for people who reject wisdom, who do not have a proper fear of God. (PROVERBS 14:12) According to Proverbs #14 v. 12, **“There is a way that seems right to a man,/ but its end is the way to death.”** Such is the end result for the Rancho High School perpetrators of violence. Such is the danger to us if we reject the pursuit of wisdom.

D.

The chapter concludes in v. 33 with refreshing news about WISDOM'S DESTINY. (II. A. B. C. D. WISDOM'S DESTINY) **“...but whoever listens to me will dwell secure/ and will be at ease, without dread of disaster.”** Isn't that what we would all like to have? Contentment, security, peace of mind, freedom from worry? Solomon says that these things come only from choosing wisdom as our companion. For what we become is determined to a large extent by the company that we keep.

Last week I pointed out that the New Testament says that Jesus Christ was the ultimate personification of wisdom. So the choice to pursue wisdom--- skill in daily, godly living--- as our companion is the choice to follow Jesus Christ. First, we must trust Him by faith, and faith alone, as our Savior. Beyond that we need to regularly submit ourselves to His Lordship. Jesus Christ wants to have first place in our lives.

I became a Christian when I was twelve, but I really did not become serious about my Christian faith until I was in college. That decision to be more committed was intimately tied into not only choosing to follow Jesus but also to choosing the friends that I was going to have. The opportunity was there for me to have committed Christians as my friends. I got to know some of these committed Christians a little bit and found them to be warm, attractive people. But to join them, I had to become committed to their Savior also.

Catholic writer Henri Nouwen described the struggle that we all face in determining the company that we keep. He wrote, **“I love Jesus, but want to hold on to my own friends, even when they do not lead me closer to Jesus. I love Jesus, but want to hold on to my own independence, even when it brings me no real freedom. I love Jesus, but do not want to lose the respect of my professional colleagues, even though their respect does not make me grow spiritually.”**

May God grant us the strength to choose wisdom as our companion, to keep Jesus first in our lives. For the company we keep determines to a great extent the kind of people we will become.