

Proverbs 4:10-19

Sunday 3/16/2014

If you have your Bibles this morning, I want to invite you to turn to Proverbs 4. As you should be well aware of by now, we have been coming through the book of Proverbs verse by verse, and it has been a great time for all of us, I think. I know I have certainly enjoyed it, and from the feedback I get from many of you, it has made a lot of difference in your life and helped you with things.

I. The Problem of Unreceived Instruction

Last time, I showed you how we were going to break Proverbs 4:10-19 down into two sections. We looked at section one last week, verses 10-13. Hopefully, you saw the value in the first part of this section, which was the value of taking God's instruction in the form of wisdom and understanding.

I showed you last time the number one issue of why God's people—and this is so true—can spend their whole lives in church, yet you will see that their families, their marriages, their kids, their lives, their whole world, and everything in it is just a total disaster. It never ceases to amaze me, all the years that I have looked at that and seen it.

We also saw the aspect of how, because God does love us, He will, in many cases, try to get our undivided attention by bringing trials into our lives that fully force us to look back toward the Word of God and to Him. The cause of all this is simply one little phrase found in verse 10. This is why people can go to church all their lives and go to thousands of church services, yet nothing ever changes. Their families go down the tube, they lose their kids, they lose their marriage, they lose all the things in their life, simply because they hear the Word of God but are not willing to receive the Word of God. That means application into your life.

In Matthew 13, we have the great parable of the sower, one of my favorite parables in the Bible. It is a picture of sowing the Word of God. The Bible says a sower went out to sow, and the seed he sows is a picture of the Word of God. When you read that, you find a great illustration of three ways the Word of God gets rejected when someone hears it.

He talks about some seeds falling by the wayside. Of course, that suggests to anyone who has dealt with people for any length of time that there is always a carelessness with many when it comes to the Bible. You see it when you try to win people to Christ. They do not see the urgency of it. They will talk about, "Well, I am still young. I have the rest of my life to live. I do not want to think about dying and going to eternity yet." Yet the first man who dies in the Bible is a young person. People do not see that. They take a careless approach: "Well, I am not ready yet, preacher. I am just not ready to live it, and I am not ready to commit to it." We see it all the time.

That is true of Christians too, because I have seen Christians who get saved and are thankful that God saved them, but they just want to keep part of their life to themselves. They never, ever get to the point where they see the urgency of why God saved them. So, some seeds fall by the wayside.

Then it talks about some seeds falling on ground where thorns sprang up and choked them. Of course, the thorns in that particular story can be a picture of your own problems in your life that you are not willing to turn over to God. But let us face it, it can also be the people you hang out with and associate with. You hear me say it a thousand times: you are who you hang out with. You see in that great story that this is why some people never grow. You are not willing to make the break with the people you need to make the break with. The devil knows that in your life and my life, in many cases, if not all cases, if we do not make that break, we are not going anywhere. It just becomes a problem where the thorns choke the Word of God right out of your life.

Then it talks about the stony places. That will be your heart, your hardened heart, where the Word cannot penetrate because of your heartache. When we think of someone with a hardened heart to the Word of God, we actually think we are talking about someone like a three-headed monster with a hunched back that sloths around in the darkness. But I want to tell you something: some of the sweetest, dearest people I have met in my life over the years, some of the nicest, sweetest people you ever met, have some of the hardest hearts you ever found when it comes to the Bible.

It is not just about wicked people. Some of the people I have met with hardened hearts have been in church all their lives. They claim to know a lot about the Bible, but you cannot teach them anything. They come to a point in their life where the Bible is not for them an offense to take to people. The Bible for them is a defense where they can build a little wall around themselves. That is what they do, and they just will not receive it.

So, they cannot take it. The Word of God will never take root in their life, as it says in Matthew 13:6. That is why things never change. That is why you find people who go to church, they are Christians, they talk about God, they have a Bible, they even read their Bible, but they lose their marriage, they lose their kids, they lose their families, they lose everything, and their life is always in turmoil. It simply goes back to that simple, fundamental principle that it is not about hearing the Word of God; it is about receiving it and applying it.

II. The Biblical Definition of "Receiving"

I did not do this last week, but I had some things I wanted to say in the time I had. I want to show you a Bible definition of receiving. I think that is important for you to get.

For a moment, I want you to turn over to 2 John 1:10.

2 John 1:10

If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed:

All my ministry, all my life, I have had people come up and ask me about that verse, asking if when Jehovah's Witnesses or Mormons come to your house, you should let them in. They are afraid that they are violating this principle by letting them come in the door and stand in your house. Whether you let them in or not is up to you. I think you can deal with them very well on the front porch without getting them in. Not that they are probably going to do anything, but it is

always easier to chase them off your porch than it is to chase them out of your house. I have a few techniques that will get them out of your house so fast you will not know what happened.

That is not what it is talking about. All my life I have heard, "Well, the Bible says you should not receive people into your home, so when the Jehovah's Witnesses come, I will never let them in the house because I do not want to violate that principle." Well, that is not what it is talking about.

In the Bible, a couple of good examples show that when you receive somebody into your house, your house becomes their house. "Make yourself at home," we say. "Can I get you something to drink? Are you hungry? Would you like this or that?"

A great example of that is Genesis 18 with Abraham. When the two angels and the Lord show up there, he brings them in, kills the fatted calf, does everything before them, and brings them all the stuff that they need. It is very obvious that he is holding nothing back; he has received them into his house.

We see it again in Philippians 2:25, where Paul gives the admonition to the church there at Philippi for Epaphroditus.

Philippians 2:25

Yet I supposed it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, and companion in labour, and fellowsoldier, but your messenger, and he that ministered to my wants.

Paul commands him to this church, and in verse 29, he says to the church:

Philippians 2:29

Receive him therefore in the Lord with all gladness; and hold such in reputation:

So, receiving the instructions of the Word of God and getting them into your life is a lot the same way: you receive it with gladness. When you receive somebody, it is not the fact that you are letting somebody into your house that maybe you do not agree with, or on your front porch, but it is receiving it with gladness based on your relationship with God.

In the Bible, you need to understand that when it talks about me receiving you into my house, or me into your house, it is basically, "Sit wherever you want. If you want something to eat, good. If you need something to drink, whatever. Mine is yours." You receive that person with gladness. When you receive the Word of God, which the Bible says you received "not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God," you just receive it with gladness and you do something with it.

III. The Contrast of Paths: Righteousness Versus Wickedness

Now let us go back to Proverbs 4. I am going to read the whole passage again just so we get a context of what we did last week, but our message this morning will pick up in verse 14.

Proverbs 4:10-19

10 Hear, O my son, and receive my sayings; and the years of thy life shall be many.

11 I have taught thee in the way of wisdom; I have led thee in right paths.

12 When thou goest, thy steps shall not be straitened; and when thou runnest, thou shalt not stumble.

13 Take fast hold of instruction; let her not go: keep her; for she is thy life.

14 Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men.

15 Avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away.

16 For they sleep not, except they have done mischief; and their sleep is taken away, unless they cause some to fall.

17 For they eat the bread of wickedness, and drink the wine of violence.

18 But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.

19 The way of the wicked is as darkness: they know not at what they stumble.

Father, thank You for this great passage today and the great lessons that are found herein. May we develop them today and not just hear it, but apply it to our own hearts and our own lives. Lord, we will love You and thank You now and praise You for all You do. In Jesus' name, we ask it. Amen.

What we have here in this passage is a contrast. That is one of the great ways that God teaches us the Bible. One of the single greatest attributes that God uses in the Bible to teach us is by contrast. You do not go very far in the Bible before you see that it is light versus darkness. That is a contrast. You do not go very far before you see it is good versus evil. That is a contrast. You do not go very far before you see it is God and the devil. That is a contrast.

In our Christian life, you do not go very far before you find out that it is a life with Christ and following God's instructions versus a life without God's instructions and following the world. That is a contrast. That is what He is doing here. Verses 10-13 is one contrast, and verses 14-19 is another. One is a life of principles and God's instruction that leads us to wisdom and understanding, versus a life of doing it our way and all the things that get added to it that wind up causing us so many problems and destroying us.

Now, look at verse 14. It says, "Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men." How many times growing up have we all heard the phrase, "the path of life"? I can remember when I graduated. May and June are always our graduation months. Tens of thousands of kids will graduate from high school and college. Even in high school and college, they have what they call commencement exercises. All the family comes there, everybody goes up and gets their diploma, and then they have a speaker. That speaker preaches on the commencement and what is going to take place. What he does, almost without a doubt, you can bet on it, is that the commencement service and the speaker will always be about the path of life. It will be about,

"Where do you go from here?" It will be about the success that you want to make of your life. It will be about the goals that you should set. It will be about the careers that you should follow and pursue. It will be about attitudes that you have going out into the workforce or going to college, or about the motivation that it takes to succeed.

Many times, the person who speaks will be somebody who made his own life and made his own way. They use them as motivational speakers to really try to get young people coming out of high school and college and give them a direction on the path of life. I have looked at that many, many times and thought about it over the years. In reality, there may be many different jobs and careers and things that we all can do that make it look like there are a million paths of life, and that is what the devil really wants to do. But the truth of the matter is, there are only two paths in life, really. Only two. From a Bible standpoint, there is a path of righteousness, and then there is a path of unrighteousness. That is all there is.

In life, no matter what you decide your career is going to be, no matter where life's journey takes you, you will simply be on one path or the other. Last week, I told you about the two choices that man has. An unsaved man only has two choices: he is going to choose to go to Heaven or he is going to choose to go to Hell. When a saved person makes that choice to go to Heaven, then he has two choices. We are all faced with it, and it is simply, "I am going to go God's way," or "I am going to continue to go my way."

You might go God's way for a little while once you get saved, but then you will learn how to play the game. There are things in your life that you do not want to go past, but yet you still want to be a Christian. You still want to go to church. You still want to pretend with everybody. So, you learn how to play the game. But there are certain areas in your life that you know you are not going to go past, and God knows that. Everybody else knows it too, but it is like a little secret. In life, no matter what your career is or where life's journey takes you, you will simply be on one path or the other. Life is only about choice, and there are only two.

In the Bible, there are certain numbers that mean certain things. I know you can prove anything with numbers, and I am certainly not one of those guys who gets to the point where everything has a meaning and you try to plot the whole world out based on a numeric system. But I do know that in the Bible, there are certain numbers that do mean certain things, and you would be well to learn those. In the Bible, the number two always stands for division.

The first time you find that in the Bible is Genesis 1:4. It is the first time you find the word "divide."

Genesis 1:4

And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness.

From that point on, the number two in your Bible is going to be about division. In Genesis 2, when God wanted to take Adam and give him a wife, He divided his side and brought out the woman. This is a picture of Christ dying on the cross and the church coming forth. You see it in everything you do. When you got saved, before God could ever give you eternal life, do you know what He had to do in your life? He had to divide you. He had to divide your soul from your

flesh. Before God could ever give you eternal life, He had to divide. That is pretty true down through the whole Bible and the concept.

As a Christian, before God could ever do anything in your life, He has to divide you from the world. It is just that simple. After you get saved, God divides your flesh from your soul, as in Colossians 2. Now you are a schizo. You are a psychiatrist's dream. You have an old nature and a new nature. You have two people inside of you. One wants to do right, one wants to do wrong. Do you know what those two natures try to do? They try to divide you. That is what they do. It is just the way it works in the Bible.

Jesus Himself said in Luke 12:51:

Luke 12:51

Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather division:

Truthfully, there will be no peace in our life until some things get divided out. Remember in Genesis 18 and 19, when the two angels went down there to Lot? Do you know what they did when they showed up? They divided Lot from his family. Sometimes the Word of God will divide you from your family. Sometimes it will divide you. That is what it does, because the Bible says, "How can two walk together, except they be agreed?" You cannot. You cannot. That is why it is so vital that when you marry somebody, you do not marry an unsaved person. You are already into a divided scenario that will never work.

The book of Proverbs itself, which we have been studying, is about a wise man and a foolish man. You will never get those two together; they are divided. The book of Proverbs is about a virtuous woman and a whorish woman. They will never get together. Do you know why? Because God divided them. So, when a Christian chooses to take the path of righteousness, he gets divided from the world. At that point, he should cease to follow the world's instruction and now follow God's instruction by receiving it into his heart.

Now look at the last part of Proverbs 4:14: "and go not in the way of evil men." Remember last week, I told you about the key word there, the word "way," as in "the way of wisdom" in Proverbs 4:11. I told you that the word "way" was a complete, total lifestyle, a living by the principles of the Word of God, a way of life. I ran it back to the Old Testament nation of Israel and showed you the example of how their culture was. It was a way of living by the principles of the Word of God that will affect and impact every area of your life.

Now look at Proverbs 4:14, "the way of evil men." When you will not take God's instruction and you start to take somebody else's instructions, in time you will have a totally corrupt lifestyle of the world's way of life. Yet you may stay in church all your life. I have found that the worst kind of corruption is not the outward corruption. The worst kind of sin is not the outward sins. The worst kind of sins are the inward sins, the ones that we harbor inside and pretend are all right. Those are the ones that come back and get us.

Psalms 1, one of my favorite passages, the first four verses, but I will just quote the first verse for you.

Psalms 1:1

Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.

I have told you before that that is a progression. The moment you stop walking with God, you start walking with the world. The moment you stop growing forward, you start going backward. When you stop taking your instructions from your preacher, the Bible, and God, then you are going to start taking your instructions from somebody else. When it is not in the Bible context, then it is going to be in the world's context, and there is going to be a progression.

You start out walking with them, then you start standing with them. Now you are in the way; it is a lifestyle being developed. You started to get into their counsel and listen to them instead of what is being preached to you. Now it has affected you to the point where you are not just walking with them; now you are standing with them. Then the last thing is, "nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful." Now you are sitting among them.

That is the answer why so many of God's people can start out loving church, going to church, loving the Bible, loving you, loving everybody, and then wind up hating everybody in church, hating the church, and hating the Word of God. It is a process. You are either going forward or you are going backward, but it is a process. Just as you do not stop growing spiritually the right way, when you start going backward, you do not stop growing spiritually the wrong way.

You do not just get to the point in your Christian life when you are growing right that you say, "Okay, I made it now." It is always moving forward. We think because we get out of fellowship and do not do what is right, that we are just over here in left field someplace, and we will stay in left field. That is just where we are at. No, you are wrong. Just as you move forward spiritually, you are going to move forward backward unspiritually. You are going to find that it becomes a way of life for you. Just like the Christian life becomes a way of life, a life in the world becomes a way of life for you. It compounds. Just as you grow and get all the blessings of God, if you do not grow, you regress, and you get all of the crap that goes on in the world. It is called compounding.

I have had people—I think of one kid in mind that for about four or five years, and this has been probably, oh, I would say I have not heard from him for probably six years, but I would say probably before that he would call me almost every year for about four years running. Every year he would have a mental, spiritual breakdown that he knew he was not doing right. He was into drugs, he was into alcohol, he was into all of those things. He would call me up, and it would always be a Saturday night sometime, around 10 or 11 o'clock. He would be boo-hooing all over the place, talking about how bad his life is and how he needs to get back, and he knows he is not doing what is right.

I would try to help him, and it would last for about a week, two weeks, maybe three weeks. Then next year it would be all again, and then next year it would be the same thing. I think it went on for two or three years. I have not heard from him now for probably six years. Do you know why? Because he does not care anymore. Before, it was something that bothered his conscience; now it

does not bother him anymore. Before, it was something that he struggled with; now it is something that he enjoys. There was a time when he knew that the other way of life was the right way. Now he has completely lost that concept, and the way of unrighteousness is now his way. He does not call anymore. Both his parents were Christians, been in church all their lives. Do you know what happens? The longer you stay out on that path of unrighteousness, the more it compounds in your life.

Every three months, if you have any kind of investment, you get that big statement from the investment company. It will tell you what you started with the last quarter, and it will tell you what you have this quarter. It is better off if you just burn them and then wait and find out when you retire, so you do not get a heart attack. But you open that up and you want to see, "I had \$6,000 last time it closed. I got \$9,000 now." The money that you invested, somebody out there took and made the right investments and compounded the thing, and now you started with five, you got nine. Hopefully next quarter it will be 12. That is what sin does, just in the reverse.

You get a quarterly statement from God. That quarterly statement will show you how sin has compounded in your life. Now it just is not this anymore; now it is this with about 20 other things added, except you are going the wrong way. You are making the wrong investments. It starts out walking with the counsel of the ungodly, and then standing in the way, and then pretty soon you cannot tell a child of God from the world.

Yet many times, all my life, I have heard them justify it. "Well, who are you to tell me what is right in my life or what is not?" I have heard them say, "Well, you do not know my circumstance or my situation." I have heard their mom and their dad make every excuse for the worldly kid you have ever heard in your life. I have heard them just list them off. I could sell you the answers so when your kids grow up and do not know what is right, you do not have to look for them. I have heard all my life the baloney that parents put out trying to justify the sins that their kids are in. Everybody will justify it, but I have news for you.

Proverbs 14:12

There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.

It may look good to you. You may want to paint it off as being good, but it is going to catch up with you sooner or later.

You have heard me say so many times about association and the people who we hang out with, and I am sure many of you are sick of it. But you must take heart, take note that I only preach on it when it comes up in the Bible. It is not my fault that it keeps coming up in the Bible, because I am going to tell you the number one issue for you and me as a child of God is: you are who you associate with.

I do not get it. I do not get parents today. I really do not. I do not get it. I see parents who have kids that are 8, 9, 10, 11, and they go to school someplace or in their area, and there are kids that those parents will not let their kids associate with. That little girl, your little daughter, will come up or the boy will come up and say, "Mommy, can I spend the night over at so-and-so's house?" And you will say, "No, I do not think that is a very good idea." You do not want your child going

into that association with what is going on in that family. I get it. I understand it. There are kids—when our kids were growing up, there were certain people our kids could not associate with, and they could not be part of, and I understand that.

But my point is this: what makes you think it is any different when you become a new baby in Christ Jesus? I am going to tell you something, kids, there are some people out there that will hurt you. Saved people. They will hurt you. You expect it from the world. You expect the world to hurt you. You expect the world to deceive and lie to you. You expect the world to live in sin. The problem today is that 95% of God's people, you cannot tell them from the world. So, a young Christian gets into it, sees people out there, and they think, "Wow, they must be Christians. They must be great," just like your kid sees all the kids that are his age and says, "Because we go to the same school, they must be okay," when they are not. I am telling you.

IV. Six Admonitions for Avoiding the Path of the Wicked

Now look at Proverbs 4:14-15.

Proverbs 4:14

Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men.

Proverbs 4:15

Avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away.

God has given us here—I do not know how you look at things in the Bible—when I first saw that years ago, I thought, "Wow, that is a great sermon!" There are six great admonitions here that form great points for all of us. If you want to learn how to keep sin out of your life and stay on that path of righteousness instead of the path of unrighteousness, if you want to learn how to do that, these six things will do it for you if you just receive them.

1. Enter not into the path of the wicked. Let us just take "enter not." All sin will be a door of opportunity. I am 63 years old. I cannot think of one time sin ever snuck up on me. I cannot think of one time in my life that sin ever just surprised me. I cannot think of one time in my life that I was just the innocent victim and sin just descended on me. Every time in my life, I saw sin as an opportunity, as a door. I think when you get into the Word of God and you learn the principles of the Word of God, you will understand that sin always presents itself as an opportunity. Just as we should learn to recognize the doors of opportunity that God gives us, we need to learn to read and see the opportunities that sin presents to us, and then "enter not in."

As I said, there has never been a time in my life that I did not know what I was about to do, even while I was doing it. I think the great example of that is Adam and Eve. We talk about how the Bible says that she was deceived, and she was, but the deception was not a total deception, was it? Because she had already been told by God what He told her about that tree and about that fruit. It was not like the devil just snuck up and she never had the truth. I do not know how long they were in that garden. If you want to make a stab at it, I would say probably three and a half

years, but that is just my wild guess based on what I know a little bit about the Bible. But I know this: no matter how long they were there, I know that they had Bible studies with God every afternoon in the cool of the day.

So, I know she heard it over and over again. When the devil showed up to try to get her to do what he wanted her to do, he did not deceive her totally. He just presented an opportunity to her that was different than the opportunity that God had given her, and she walked right through the door. All he had to say to a woman is, "Babe, you take this, and you will know," and she bought into it. It was a conscious choice.

I know she was deceived because she was the weaker vessel. I understand all that, but it was not like he just descended on her. She had heard the truth, and she made a conscious choice when she heard the devil lay it out: "With this, you are going to be like the gods." He appealed to everything that she should have known was an opportunity to sin based on what God had told her.

Then Adam. The woman was deceived in a partial thing, but Adam walked in there. He says, "Eve, what happened to you? You are kind of red-brown. You are not snow white anymore. You got a poison apple? Who are those seven little guys I saw running out of here? Were they the seven dwarfs? Eve, you are not snow white anymore. You are red-brown. What happened?"

She says, "Well, I ate of that fruit." He says, "You ate the fruit?" She says, "I did." She says, "Honey, but God told us not to." "Yeah, but I met the most beautiful stranger down on the road down there, and he told me what it all was, and I will tell you what, I just could not help myself. This was the greatest stuff in the world. He told me. I told him what God had, but he told me that that was not what the original said, and a better rendition would be..." Then Eve looked at her and said, "And I brought some for you." Adam looked at her, looked at God, looked at her, looked at God, looked at her, looked at God, and said, "I will see you, God," and he chose the arm of opportunity.

Sin is always going to present itself as an opportunity. Your job and my job, through the Word of God, is to recognize the opportunities that God gives us to serve Him, and then recognize the opportunities that sin presents to us, and then "enter not in."

2. Go not in the way of evil men. Now, the next one will be "go not in." Here is the decision-making process: when you see the opportunity, you do not go through the door of opportunity to not do right. It is a great thing. I teach you guys about responding and reacting. The greatest example I can show you about this is one that guys will all understand if you are married, and that is when you have a fight with your wife.

Something happens and you get into a conflict. The easiest scenario is probably the most common scenario. Maybe your wife is having a bad day, maybe you are having a bad day, maybe you are both having a bad day, and you come home and you say something to your wife. She does not say it back the way you thought she should, or you say, "Why do not we do this?" and she kind of throws you under the bus a little bit. At that point in time, at that very second in time, Mr. Spiritual Leader, you have a choice.

You can now respond to the situation and realize, as the spiritual leader, maybe she is having a bad day. You say, "Well, I am having a bad day too." Well, good leaders, spiritual leaders, are not allowed to have bad days. Put it in your back pocket, put it in your knapsack, put it upstairs someplace, I do not know, but you are not allowed to have it because you are supposed to lead. You cannot afford to have a bad day.

But there you are. There I am. There I have been. Right there, that line, you are standing there. You said something, you had suggested something, you laid something out, and you got thrown under the bus, nastily. Now you have a choice. You either respond to it biblically by applying the biblical principle, not going through that door of opportunity she just gave you. No, no, no, no, no. She just—you went up with the nicest intentions, she is having a bad day, she dumped on you, and now here you are, you have two things to do. There is a big door just open. You can respond to it and say something like, "Yeah, you know, it is okay, it is all right, no problem." Or you react to it.

You react to it by various different ways. None of them are going to turn out good. None of them. But you look for ways to get back at it. You say, "You are getting a little weight, are you not? You are getting killed every time." That is World War III now declared. You react to it.

I use that as an illustration because obviously this morning everybody knows what I am talking about now. Sin in your life is the same way. It will present you an opportunity, and you have to respond to it or you have to react to it. Whether you respond or whether you react is whether you enter it or not. You go in; it is just that simple. He says, "go not in."

This is where the Bible principles come in. He says:

Psalms 119:11

Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.

Respond versus react. The principles overcome that whole slap in the face. I have been in Bible study, not so much here all the time, but there are times in Bible study that I know somebody is saying—not any of you people, somebody is a visitor—I know he is saying something or she is saying something, trying to get onto me, and I will be smarter than that problem. Because I know my first, honestly, my first reaction is to rip the throat out. Believe me, I could do it with the Bible without ever laying a hand on them. But that is my reaction. My response would be totally different. It would be giving them, coming at them from a different aspect. Many times you can disarm somebody that way better than going in and trying to kill them.

But it is the principles that guide you. One time somebody tried to divide me and my father-in-law, Mel Subaca. He went to Mel and he said, "Mel, do you know what Bob is saying about you? He said this, this, this, and this." Do you know what old Mel said? He said, "Well, if Bob said it, it is probably true." Where do you go with that? What do you do?

The Bible says, "go not in the way of evil men." This is the decision process. At that point, when the opportunity is presented to you, you have to either respond or you have to react. This is why I hammer you with the aspect of learning biblical principles in everything that we do. When you

receive and apply the principles, when the door of opportunity presents itself to enter in, then you do not.

I have a GPS in my car that, when you put on a deal there, it is one of the more modern ones that can actually—I do not know how it knows it—but it sets what the speed limits are. When you are driving down the road, if you have the voice up on it, you are going, and you get five miles, ten miles—you can set it for how much you want it over. If you set it for like eight miles over, so you are pretty safe there, when you accidentally forget about eight miles over, they do not give you a ticket, Bob, unless you are ten miles over. Well, you live in Parkville, over there in Kansas. I mean, they do not let you get anything over there. Everything is illegal in Kansas.

A little voice will come on and say, "Warning, warning, warning, warning," and you know that you have a decision to make now. You either listen to that little voice, or a little lady in there—I think somewhere in this world there is a 90-year-old lady that just does that, makes those recordings. But she says, "Warning, warning, warning," and you know to slow down. But you have a decision. One decision, you slow down if you are smart. The next decision is if she annoys you so much, turn her off. Oh, that would not be a great button to put on a wife.

You basically, you either listen to the warning or you do not. But let me tell you something: when you hide the Word of God in your heart, and biblical principles are what you put into your life, when that door of opportunity presents itself and the opportunity is there for you to go in, do you know what the principles do? "Warning, warning, warning, warning!" Except you cannot shut that button off. That is how it works. That is why I hit you with biblical principles all the time. You listen to the warning; you do not go in.

Do you know what Friday night and Saturday night are really to the world, and many Christians too? The big weekend. It is parties, it is get-togethers, it is happy hours, it is clubs, it is places you go late in the night and in the mornings. It is a hunt. It is a hunt on the prowl for an opportunity to enter into the path of wickedness, because "men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil."

3. Avoid it. Here again, avoid some things. Avoid the people, avoid the places, avoid putting yourself in a compromising situation. The importance of getting new friends once you get saved. In some cases, some of you had to get whole new families. Get around people who will edify you and not drag you back into the world of sin that you came from. You will get out there and you will try to hang out with your friend now that you are a Christian, and you will go someplace, you will try to do what is right, they will make fun of you, and you are not strong enough to put a sharp stick in their eyes, so you will bend and you will go along with it. I know how it works.

This is why so many people do not make it. This is the total package of our church. Most people never see it. I had a sweet girl last night, and she is a nice girl, and this is no reflection on her because she is a very nice girl. She is very impressed with our athletic program and what we do. She does not go to our church, and she pulled me aside last night and she said, "Man, how did you get all this started? How did all this come about?" She said, "My church only runs about 200 and 250," and she is thinking our church is 1200. I said, "Our church only runs about 250.

Everybody in the same place can hold a gun on them." I said, "So it is a thing where we are about the same. We are about the same."

She, bless her heart, and I love her to death. I understand where she is coming from. She thought just because you had a bunch of people and you went out and ran in a gym that you could produce what we produce in our athletic ministry, or in our softball, or in our volleyball. It is not just about that. It is the whole package. You have to design it so that when people are trying to get out of the world, they can come to a place where they can meet some wholesome people that will love them, that will edify them. This is why I push new people to get into this, and that is why I try to get them to come to all the things that we do, and try to come to Thursday night and Sunday morning. I get them involved in volleyball, get them involved in discipleship, and Sunday morning, and one-on-one, and softball, and going over to Jason's Deli afterwards.

It is not about the fact that we are going to eat. It is the fact that we have got people who have come and tried to get out of the world that need new friends. They need somebody to sit with that is going to be wholesome for them. They need somebody in their life that is going to be edifying to them, not somebody that is going to drag them back. I will be honest with you, when somebody does not do that, they always go back to the world. I have had them not last three or four weeks and go back because they simply will not make that break, because you become who you hang out with.

When you hang out with good people who edify you and strengthen you, you have a chance. When you avoid your old friends and avoid their old places, your spiritual life will depend on it. I have heard every excuse. "Well, I hang out with my old people because I feel sorry for them." That is a sure-fire thing: you are going back to the world. You have to make the break. Do not think for a minute you are smart enough or strong enough to flirt with the old lifestyle; you will lose every time. I have seen people that were on drugs. I have seen people who were deep in alcohol. I have seen people who were caught up in gambling and all of those things. You have to follow the book of Judges: it is totally forsake and completely obey. You have to follow what the Word of God says.

4. Pass not by it. Stay out of the neighborhood. One of the greatest stories in the Bible that illustrates this is found in Judges 14 and 16, in the story of Samson. Samson is one of the great characters in the Bible. I do not know if you know it or not, as screwed up as his life was, he is a picture of a Christian, and believe it or not, he is found in God's Hall of Fame over there in the book of Hebrews. But boy, he was a mess. He reminds me of so many of God's people I see today. He was a he-man with a she-weakness. He was somebody that went around flexing his muscles and thought he was something, but in reality, he was very weak.

Let me give you a little background. Samson was set apart for the Lord's service. In the Old Testament, they had a thing called a Nazarite vow. A Nazarite vow was something a man would take when he had a task to perform for God. All the time that he would follow that vow, he would put himself under certain things that he could not do. This Nazarite vow is found in Numbers 6, and it talks about these are the things you have to do to maintain your separation to the Lord.

First thing, he could not have anything off a vine tree: no grapes, no figs, no nothing off a vine tree. No grape juice, no nothing. Second thing is, he could not cut his hair; he had to let his hair grow out. That is why Samson's hair got so long. And the third thing that he could not do, he could not touch any dead body. I wish I had time to just take those three to show you how they fit into what we should not be messing with, but I do not have time to do it.

One day, Samson—now he is a Nazarite, got his hair growing pretty good, and he has got to follow the line—but Samson was like so many of God's people. Samson is always going to do it his way. The first words out of his mouth in the Bible are, "I have seen a woman." This is because he had problems with women, and do not let that discourage you. Whatever problem you have, you can replace what his problem was. It is showing us that Christians have a variety of problems in their life, just typified by Samuel 1.

One day he goes down to see his woman. He is bopping down the road, cannot wait to get there. It is a long way down there, and so he sees across the way that he can take a shortcut and save probably a half hour off his travels down there, and of course, he is in love with this woman. You know how the song goes, "When a man loves a woman, he will take every shortcut in life."

So, he is bopping down the road, and he sees a shortcut through the vineyard of Timnath. So, he starts to go through that shortcut because he is going to save some time. And lo, meeting him in that vineyard is a lion. Well, that lion is no problem for Samson. Samson takes that lion and rips him apart, kills him. Ah, now we have a problem. In killing that lion, Samson touched a dead body. Now he has broken the vow of the Nazarite.

The moral of the story is simply this: now that he has touched a dead body and broken the law, he has got to go through a whole thing, but he does not do it. Samson's life now is an absolute disaster personified. But it all started with this right here. The moral of the story is simply this: the lion would have never been an issue if he would have passed by the vineyard. He was told not to have anything to do with anything off a grape. When you think you are smart enough, strong enough that you can flirt with the things that God says you cannot, that is where the lion will always meet you. Pass not by that former lifestyle. Stay out of the neighborhood.

5. Turn from it. Now, the real aspect of biblical repentance that you will use all your Christian life is this concept. But here is the problem with most churches and most pastors: they will preach to their congregation to turn from the world, but they do not have anything to offer to replace the void when you give it up. This is why so many people fail. It is easy to stand up here and for me to tell you that you need to give up the world. But if I do not have something for you to replace what I am asking you to give up, it is not going to work. They are stupid enough to think that just because you go to church and listen to them preach that everything will be okay.

Listen, if you have an addiction, whether it be drugs or alcohol or whatever, you have to completely turn from it. The modern thing today in churches and Christian counselors is that they are all condoning social drinking. Preachers and counselors talk about the fact that it is okay. They classify drinking alcohol into three categories: users, abusers, and alcoholics. The Christian pastor today, most of them, and the Christian counselors today, almost all of them, will

say a lot of churches are really legalistic out there about this. The bottom line is, if you just be a user and never become an abuser and alcoholic, there is nothing wrong with that.

May I throw in my two cents? It is going to be a quarter. In 45 years of ministry, dealing with people into alcohol at all levels, I have never found an alcoholic drunk bum who was a souse, who could not control anything about it, and it was a bona fide alcoholic. I have never found one who did not argue with me that he was not just a user. You give human nature that door, brother, and you are in trouble.

You have heard me talk about long term and short term, have you not? Let me ask you a question. How stupid pastors are today? Okay, if it is okay to socially drink and you just become a user, how come when they legalize marijuana, is it going to be okay just to be a user of that as long as you do not become an abuser? How are you going to get up and say you can take one drug but you cannot take another? You see the hole you dig yourself in?

I am going to tell you something, folks. You are just better off to stay with what the Bible says instead of trying to get creative with things. Just take it for what it says. Whatever a person's problem is—if it is drugs, if it is alcohol, if it is whatever it is—you will never get past it until you, one, see it for what it is biblically, and then two, you hate it as much as God hates it, or you will never get through with it. Until you do that, you will never turn from it. You have to fill the void with the things of God 24/7. Put new people in your life. Put new programs in your life. Put everything in your life to fill that void. When you will not do that, you will burn out like most of them do in two or three weeks.

6. Pass away. Pass on it. People ask me all the time about work situations. I get them all the time, and I appreciate them because they are sincere people. But they work someplace, and all the co-workers will invite you out after work on a Friday to go out, and they all just kind of go to a bar someplace and have a social time, and you are part of the workforce, and you do not want to be a snob, but yet you do not want to drink, and so you find yourself in that kind of situation.

I always tell them, "Well, now you have two opportunities." They invite you out. If you decide to go, and somebody is there, because you know what is going to happen. You are going to sit over here and not drink, and everybody else is going to be drinking. You know that the big spotlight that they have for the floor show is going to suddenly come over on you, and they are going to say, "How come you are not drinking?"

At this point, you have an opportunity. You can do one of two things. You put your tail between your legs, be the coward, and say, "Well, I am a recovering alcoholic, and I just do not drink." That will get you by. Or you can simply say, "You know what, that is just not my lifestyle. I love you folks, and I have a great time, and I am here to be with you, but drinking never leaves anything in my life, and I never really wanted it. When I got saved, I got a new—it is not the fact that I do not like spirits, I just do not have the same spirits that you are having. You are filled with one spirit, I am filled with the other spirit."

But I am telling you, you have got to get to that point in your life where you pass it away.

Romans 13:14

But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.

Ephesians 4:27

Neither give place to the devil.

2 Corinthians 5:17

Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.

It is passed away. It is gone. Pass on it. "Why do you not do that?" "Because it is passed away in my life, that is why." You see, I do not want to make a mess. They are not going to like you anyhow, unless you become one of them. You might as well get it off quick and get it going.

The Bible is filled with great examples of these six admonitions. Paul says in 2 Timothy 2:22:

2 Timothy 2:22

Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart.

Joseph, back there in Genesis, when he was faced with Potiphar's wife, made the same decision. He decided not to go through with it. Daniel, when he was down in Babylon in the book of Daniel, had the opportunity to—nobody would have known, he could have justified everything he did—but Daniel 1:8 says:

Daniel 1:8

But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank: therefore he requested of the prince of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself.

My favorite one is in Genesis 14:22-24, when Abraham is out there and they are having a battle. The king of Sodom—the king of Sodom and Gomorrah, we know what that is—the king of Sodom comes out to meet Abram and offers all kinds of gifts to Abraham. Do you know what Abraham says? He says:

Genesis 14:22-24

22 And Abram said to the king of Sodom, I have lift up mine hand unto the LORD, the most high God, the possessor of heaven and earth,

23 That I will not take from a thread even to a shoelatchet, and that I will not take any thing that is thine, lest thou shouldest say, I have made Abram rich:

24 Save only that which the young men have eaten, and the portion of the men which went with me, Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre; let them take their portion.

He knew what Sodom was. He did not want nothing to do with the world.

V. The Consequences of the Wicked Path

Look at Proverbs 4:16.

Proverbs 4:16

For they sleep not, except they have done mischief; and their sleep is taken away, unless they cause some to fall.

A couple of things here. In other words, the party really does not begin until about one or two in the morning. No sleep until they have sinned to the fullest. Then they can go to sleep and sleep like a baby. Do you know why? Because that is a mark of a seared conscience. That is why.

1 Timothy 4:2

Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron;

They cauterize their conscience. Nothing bothers them anymore. That is why God's people can do what they do, live a lifestyle year after year after year. We sit there and say, "You come to church, you hear this, you hear that, your parents are saved. Why does nothing penetrate you?" Because you have seared your conscience. It does not bother you anymore.

Titus 1:15

Unto the pure all things are pure: but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure; but even their mind and conscience is defiled.

How do you get to a place as a child of God that you have absolutely no conscience before God and what we do? It is easy. Just start hanging out with the wrong crowd and take their instruction over God's instruction, and start walking in their counsel. Start sitting with them and then start becoming part of the scorning process. It will all take care of itself.

Note it says they do not sleep until they cause someone to fall. There are people out there, brother, that will work 24/7 on you once they know you want to do what is right, to get you to fall. One, they will do it because that is what the devil uses them to do. Two, they want to do it because they know that you claim to be a child of God and probably are trying to get your life right, and you cast a great shadow in their life because they do not. So, in their minds, they try to get you to sin so you will be just like them, so they do not have to feel any bad about what they do.

I have seen brothers do that to sisters. I have seen sisters do that to brothers. I have seen some Christian friends, Christian couples, do it to other couples. I met one couple in my life one time that was a Christian couple, and I believe they were, and I will tell you what, any couple that got within 50 feet of them died spiritually. Then I have seen parents say, "Oh, get with them, get with them! Oh, they are wonderful, they are wonderful! Oh, we have birthdays together. We have this,

we have that." You are an idiot. You are a fool. They will justify their conscience by getting other Christians to sin with them and then say, "I am okay."

Look at Proverbs 4:17.

Proverbs 4:17

For they eat the bread of wickedness, and drink the wine of violence.

We saw this crowd all through Proverbs in our study so far.

Proverbs 1:16

For their feet run to evil, and make haste to shed blood.

Proverbs 1:10

My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not.

Proverbs 1:15

My son, walk not thou in the way with them; refrain thy foot from their path:

Proverbs 2:14

Who rejoice to do evil, and delight in the frowardness of the wicked;

Proverbs 2:17

Which forsaketh the guide of her youth, and forgetteth the covenant of her God.

They make a royal party out of sin. They will try to take as many of God's people in it as they can. You are who you associate with.

VI. The End Result: Light Versus Darkness

Then he begins to contrast in Proverbs 4:18-19 this great passage by showing us the end result. Look at Proverbs 4:18.

Proverbs 4:18

But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.

There is the process I have been talking about of your spiritual growth. Every day of our lives, when we walk with God and receive His instructions, apply His principles, we get brighter and brighter every day. "Unto a perfect day," that is when the Lord comes back. You get stronger and you get stronger. That is exactly what I gave you last week in Ephesians 4:13, where it says:

Ephesians 4:13

Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ:

We grow up into Him. That is day by day getting brighter and brighter, and in our final promotion to glory, a light in our life that every day gets brighter and brighter, and people see it.

Now Proverbs 4:19, the great contrast.

Proverbs 4:19

The way of the wicked is as darkness: they know not at what they stumble.

Just as the child of God who follows the instructions of his Father simply gets better and better and brighter and brighter, the child of God or the unsaved man who will not receive God's instructions—either salvation or the Christian lifestyle—only gets more into the darkness, and he is worse than he ever was before he got into it.

John 1:5

And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.

You cannot get the two of them together. You simply get to the place where you do not even understand anymore why you can continue to stumble in everything in your life. I have seen God's people—I believe they were saved—completely lose any moral compass that points them in their life toward the Word of God. The path of righteousness and the path of unrighteousness are so wide apart. One takes you constantly to God; the other one takes you constantly away from God.

I have seen people, Christians, that were out here, and they want to get right, and they come back in, and they get on that path for two or three weeks, and then, boy, they are right back out to it again. That is the way it works. That is the way it works. That is the way it works. Let me say this, and you better listen to what I am about to say: you can get so far down the wrong path that you will never be able to find the right path again. I am not talking about losing your salvation. I am talking about you getting so far down the wrong path with your booze and your drugs and your carousing and all the things that the world likes to do. You get so far down that path and so far away from God's path of righteousness that you cannot, and there is nothing but wilderness in between. It starts out here, and 30 years later it is way out here, and you are never going to get back. I deal with it all the time. You just cannot because of where you have allowed yourself to go and who you have associated with.

VII. Samson: A Picture of Spiritual Suicide

In closing, I have got a few minutes left. We are going to be done earlier today. You will be happy about that. Let me go back and talk about Samson for a minute. Judges 14 and 16. You do not have to turn to it; you can just listen to me here.

The end result of his life. I think Samson is probably the premier, perfect picture of a Christian who is a child of God who gets so far out in left field and goes his own way that he just cannot ever get back. He is the perfect picture of it. He is the perfect picture of what is going to happen to every child of God, and believe me, you may not see it because of your world and where you are at. I deal with it every day. I have dealt with it for four years, almost on a weekly, daily basis.

My phone rings 20 times a day with problems that people are struggling and going through. I look through this thing, and I see the examples like this of Samson and the end result of his life.

Here is a guy who took a vow to serve God and never accomplished one thing that he ever said he was going to do for God. He could never get the world out of his life. There was always something there that took precedent over God. It was, "I am going to go to a basketball game instead of go to Bible study." "I was going to go here instead of come to church." "Well, I was going to go do this with the church, but now this presented over here." He is just that kind of guy. He is always looking for an opportunity to never miss an opportunity not to be where God wants him to be. He is a Christian in type, in God's Hall of Fame.

When you look at his life and categorize your life, you will find that there are three aspects to his life and his sin. It is the reason why he could never get back, and I do not know if you know the story or not, but he died a suicide. You may never die a suicide physically, but I guarantee you there are a hundred million of God's people out there this morning that have died a suicide spiritually. They are never getting back where God wants them to be. It is not that God will not let them, and not that God does not want them. It is not that God will not forgive them. It is the fact that when you put so much distance between you and God, He is not going to come looking for you. He did that the day of salvation, and you stuck a sharp stick in His eye. You are going to have to come get Him now. He will come get you to get saved. You are going to have to find your way back after you get saved when you give Him the stick, so to speak.

When you look at Samson, you see exactly what happens in our lives. When it all came down to an end in his life, when he had went through a lifetime and God finally said, "That is it. This guy was supposed to be a Nazarite unto Me. I had a job for him to do. And all he did was live his life and do what he wanted to do." He let the Philistines take him. The Philistines, who he thought were his friends, wound up in the end deceiving him. The world that you think is your friend today is going to wind up deceiving you.

Those Philistines took him, and they put his eyes out. That is very instructive to me because when you live a lifestyle outside of the things of God and you just keep going your own way, do you know what sin does? Sin blinds you. He could not see the things of God anymore. The world had blinded him. The world will take you when you give yourself to it and you go on that path of unrighteousness. Just like Samson, the world will put your eyes out and they will blind you to the things of God.

Do you know the next thing they did? They took ropes and chains and they wrapped them around him. They bound him. Not only could he not see anything, he could not move. He was bound by the chains of Babylon. He was bound by the fetters and the ropes of the world system. When a child of God goes so far in that path of unrighteousness, the reason why they cannot get back is because the world puts your eyes out and then they bind you. They bind you, and you cannot move.

The last thing they did after they put his eyes out and they bound him up, they put him on a grinding wheel. For the rest of his life, he was destined to go around in a 12-foot circle pushing an 800-pound grinding stone. That is a picture of your life being a dead-end street at the end of

the path of unrighteousness. What future is there in your life going the way God's people go? In a circle all of his life, the rest of his life, bound to that wheel, blinded, not seeing anything. All he could hear was the world that he thought was once his friends, the Philistines who he used to party with and drink with and hang out with. Now they are laughing at him, making sport of him. He is naked, grinding a wheel, blind and bound. The aristocracy of Heaven, a child of God, naked before the world, being mocked, chained, blind to a grinding wheel.

This is why so many of God's people who think they can play with God and do their own thing with God and forsake the path of righteousness and go down—this is why you get into alcohol and you cannot get out. This is why you get into drugs, and after a while you cannot get rid of them. This is why you get into the world and you go that way, and you try to get back. You want to get back, but you cannot. You have been blinded. You have seared your conscience, and now you are bound to the world, and you are going to grind the rest of your life. Naked, blind, chained to the grinding wheel of this old world for the sport and the merriment of all the world who now laugh at you, the child of God. Your sin will wind up grinding away your life and in time take all the joy out of your life and anything and all of the relationship that you could ever have with God.

I leave you with three things out of Samson's life that go down the path of unrighteousness:1.) Sin will blind you.2.) Sin will bind you.3.) Sin will grind you.

VIII. Conclusion: Two Simple Life Choices

The two simple choices of life. There may be a hundred thousand jobs of opportunities and careers you may follow, but at the end of the day, from a Bible standpoint, there are only two paths you are going to go on. You are going to go on to one of righteousness or you are going to go on to one of unrighteousness, and there is no middle ground in between. One will bless you and give you the desires of your heart. The other one will deceive you and blind you and bind you and grind you.

Samson wound up a suicide. I do not think that most of God's people today that are in this condition will ever go out and probably commit suicide. Some probably will. You do not have to commit physical suicide. I have seen many, many, many of God's people who have committed spiritual suicide. They have come to the point where God can no longer use them because you have used and abused, and you just cannot get back, and you will never now in your life, because of the path you have been on for so long and so far, ever be able to give. It has absolutely nothing to do with God not being able to forgive you, God being able to cleanse you, God being able to wash you in His blood as a sinner through your daily sins. The problem is that you are so far out, you will not let yourself get back. You have destroyed every conscionable thing in your life. Your booze, your drugs, your lifestyle is a delight to you. Where we get delighted on Thursday night about getting into the Bible and studying it, or on Sunday morning and getting it down, you get delighted in the things that you want to do that have nothing to do with God. That is where it is at, and that is where it ends. Path of righteousness, the path of unrighteousness.

Let us pray. Father, we thank You and praise You for the Lord Jesus. We do love You.