

Beware of the Scoundrel

WISDOM'S WARNINGS (PART 3) • PROVERBS 6:12-15

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Four Lakes Church of Christ
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****COVID-19 SPLIT SERVICE****

It is a great blessing to be together this morning! If you are joining us online or on the phone, we are glad you can be with us as well. Just a few quick notes concerning the bulletin:

- First of all, I hope you are getting the bulletin! 90% of our bulletin distribution goes out by email every Saturday. If you are not getting it and would like to get it, let me know by sending a message to furlakeschurch@gmail.com. I only print about 15 bulletins on actual paper these days, half of those are mailed, and half are put in the cubbyholes. Please let me know if you are being overlooked, but with the virus, email is preferred.
- Secondly, concerning the bulletin itself, I hope you've noticed that we have beefed up how we report our attendance figures. Everything is weird, so it took us a while to figure this out. On the back, on the left, we have the figures under "OUR ATTITUDE." We have the in-person attendance combined from both services, and then we also have the YouTube audience and the number of those who join us on the phone, for both Sunday and Wednesday. You'll notice we have a little "+" out beside those figures, due to the possibility of multiple people joining us on the same device.
- And then finally, I hope everybody sees the note under "Upcoming Events." Ann Grodi is coordinating a collection of supplies for the students at Sennett Middle School (this is where Keola teaches). The deadline is next Sunday. We know it's quick, but we can do it! Checks can be sent to the church's P.O. Box (and Ann will do the shopping for you), or items can be brought here next week and left under the table in the entryway. If you have any questions, please get in touch with Ann.

With that said, I hope all of you have the elements for the Lord's Supper with you, either from home or from the table in the entryway. Last week, somebody asked about giving, so, we have put a reminder on our opening slide – if you are here, you can leave your offering in the basket on the table in the entryway, but if you are joining us online you can go to our website for more information concerning giving through [tithely](https://tithely.com) (either with

a credit or debit card or through a transfer from a bank account). Or, you can mail a check to the church's P.O. Box – PO BOX 8637, MADISON WI 53708. A number of us have set up "web pay" with our banks, where we have a check automatically mailed every week, and there are usually no fees with this. So, we have several good options. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to ask for help. After the Lord's Supper, we plan on singing "Purer in Heart, O God" (#542), so if you are joining us from home, you might want to be ready for that.

As we have done from the beginning, we are also sharing a summary of God's plan for our salvation. Jesus came to this earth to die for our sins, he was buried, and he was raised up on the third day. In response, we obey that good news. We believe it, we turn away from sin, and we allow ourselves to be buried with Jesus in baptism for the forgiveness of sins. At that point, we are born into God's family, and the Christian life begins. And once again, we have several examples, starting with Kayla, who was baptized in Henderson, Tennessee, yesterday. Kayla is a student at Freed-Hardeman University, where our daughter is going to school right now.

We continue with Phillip at the Northwest Church of Christ in Fort Worth, Texas. We rejoice with Phillip and the Northwest congregation this morning.

We have several baptisms in Liberia over the past week or so. Liberia is two nations to the west of Ghana – Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire, and then Liberia. Those pictured here are Mathaline, Bayogar, Tenneh, Betty, and Babygirl. We rejoice with our new sisters and brother in Liberia on this Lord's Day.

The last example this week is of Karl Ico, baptized just a few days ago at the congregation in Schertz, Texas (a suburb of San Antonio). Karl visited a worship service in late August, he already knew the fundamentals, and was baptized after doing a bit more study of the scriptures. And again, we share these images by way of example – what they have done over the past few days, you can do this morning. If you have any questions, if there is anything holding you back, we would love to hear about it, and we would love to study with you.

This morning, we return to our short series of lessons from Proverbs 6, "Wisdom's Warnings." We started several weeks ago by looking at the first five verses, with a warning about co-signing on a loan. We are to be compassionate, but we need to demonstrate love in ways that are truly helpful. Last week we looked at verses 7-11 and we took some lessons from the six-legged preacher, and we learned that although the ant does not have a manager, they still work diligently as they prepare for the future. We also learned something about the danger of laziness: Excessive sleep leads to poverty.

Today, we continue with verses 12-15 as King Solomon goes on to warn his sons about the danger of associating with SCOUNDRELS. Some translations use the word "*scoundrel*," others refer to a "*villain*," a "*worthless man*," a "*wicked man*," a "*troublemaker*," a "*man of iniquity*." The King James refers to a "*naughty man*." The Message refers to "*riffraff and rascals*." And in this passage, King Solomon paints a picture for us. He describes this kind of man as somebody who is skilled at communicating, but he uses that skill to manipulate and deceive and to wreak havoc. And Solomon knows that as the future king, his son would need to know how to identify people like this. And so he gives us a detailed description. These are the warning signs.

This morning, then, I want us to listen in on this conversation between a king and his son, I want us to listen to the description, and then I want us to hear the warning. But first, let's look at the passage itself – the words of King Solomon in Proverbs 6:12-15,

- ¹² ***A worthless person, a wicked man,
Is the one who walks with a perverse mouth,***
¹³ ***Who winks with his eyes, who signals with his feet,
Who points with his fingers;***
¹⁴ ***Who with perversity in his heart continually devises evil,
Who spreads strife.***
¹⁵ ***Therefore his calamity will come suddenly;
Instantly he will be broken and there will be no healing.***

So again, let's look at the description, and then let's end with the warning.

I. We start as King Solomon describes a WORTHLESS AND WICKED MAN.

And so, we are talking about a man whose life brings no real profit. He's a low-down, good-for-nothing scoundrel, a troublemaker. Most of us have run into people like this – in the world, but sometimes even in the church, I suppose. And King Solomon goes on to describe this person. These are the symptoms. This is what you need to watch out for. And it's interesting to see how the whole body is involved. This man is so worthless that it's almost as if every part of his body is involved in causing trouble...

A. ...starting with his MOUTH.

This "**worthless**" "**wicked**" man is "**one who walks with a perverse mouth.**" The word translated here as "**perverse**" refers to something being "twisted" or "crooked." I learned very early on in life that when you go to the lumberyard to pick out wood, you don't just pick from the top of the pile. And the reason is: Wood is often twisted! You really don't want to be building something with twisted wood, so you need to go through the pile piece by piece. You take it out, look down the length of the board, and if it's too weird, you put it to the side and keep on going. Otherwise, you get home and discover that the project gets a lot more complicated when you are dealing with twisted lumber. Now, what is true of a 2x4 is also true of people: Twisted speech causes trouble. And this man is described by Solomon as one who "**WALKS**" with a perverse mouth. This is who he is. The warning from Solomon to his son, then, is: Watch out for this guy! If you notice that somebody is constantly wreaking havoc with the things they say, be careful, be on guard. The crooked and perverse and twisted words are a warning sign.

B. The second red flag is that the worthless and wicked man WINKS WITH HIS EYES.

Especially these days, we know that it's possible to communicate with the eyes! I just read an article last week about health care providers trying to learn how to show various emotions with their eyes. We know that eyes communicate – surprise, happiness, sorrow, hatred, even rebellion. We think about rolling our eyes or the resulting stare of doom from a parent to a child. But here, Solomon refers to winking, and even today, we know that winking has a way of communicating. It was in the news again this week that Kim Jung Un winked at Press Secretary Sarah Sanders during a nuclear summit in Singapore back in 2018. The president's response to that was profane and I can't repeat it, but it's clear that a message was sent with that wink. A wink may be considered flirting of some kind, but it might also signal that what I'm telling you right now is not really the truth at all. And yet it's done in a way that's hard to prove. Nobody hears it, it's hard to document a wink in court, it can be done publicly across a room, but only two people know about it. A simple wink can be both powerful and deceptive.

C. The next warning sign is similar as the scoundrel SIGNALS WITH HIS FEET.

As far as I know, I haven't done too much communicating with my feet, but I'm assuming it might have been important in that culture – the shuffling of the feet, kicking up dirt – we know that some agreements were made by swapping sandals and sitting on the sandal of the person you were making an agreement with (we see this with Boaz at the end of the book of Ruth). We think of Jesus telling his apostles to shake the dust off their feet if they are rejected by a particular village. So, feet can send a message.

D. Solomon goes on to describe the worthless man as someone who POINTS WITH HIS FINGERS.

By pointing a finger, we can accuse somebody, even falsely. We can point somebody in the wrong direction. We might point as we make a demand of some kind. Maybe you've seen someone gesture with a finger in traffic here in Madison. Fingers have a way of communicating. We might give a high five, or the "OK" sign, a thumbs up or a thumbs down. We speak without even saying a word. Several years ago, I was driving down the hill in front of Huegel School on Prairie Road down on the southwest side of Madison. It was mid-morning on a school day, and from a long way off I could see a kid on a bicycle riding right toward me, right in the middle of my lane, staring right at me. I slowed down and moved over, but right when he was right in front of me, he threw a gang sign at me. It was very distinctive, so I went home and looked it up, and that is exactly what it was. Like Solomon says here, he communicated with his fingers.

E. In verse 14, the scoundrel also PLOTS EVIL WITH DECEIT IN HIS HEART.

And he does this continually. But this shows us where all of the mouth, eye, feet, and finger action is coming from! It comes from the heart. He devises evil with perversity in his heart. It starts in the heart, but it moves out from there – it grows, it spreads like an infection, invading every part of the body. A man with a scoundrel heart will do things that scoundrels do. He plots evil continually. He's always inventing new ways to do terrible things. He's an innovator of evil, and this evil comes from the heart. What my mouth, eyes, feet, and fingers do starts here (in the heart).

F. We come to the end of this first part by noticing that the scoundrel SPREADS STRIFE.

Literally, he "sends it out." He slings it! He launches strife out into the world. He is a strife flinger! Over the years, I've learned to use a seed or fertilizer spreader to put salt on the icy sidewalks in the winter. It spreads it evenly, and I've found that I actually use less salt. The scoundrel, though, does this with strife or conflict. He spreads it. He sends it out. He wants everybody fighting, and so he gets it out there. He promotes the hatred and division that's in his own heart. I've had to unfollow a number of people on social media the past few weeks – for this reason. And some of these are people I agree with! I posted an article on the church's Facebook page earlier this morning, an article from the Christian Chronicle about COVID and some of the division and hate we see all around us. And in that article, the author says something interesting near the end, "Unfollow those who don't bring you closer to Jesus." Yes! But this is the warning: Beware, because the scoundrel and villain will spread strife! The scoundrel manufactures conflict. He's on a mission to stir up conflict. However, we as God's people do not need to participate. As the saying goes, we don't need to participate in every fight we are invited to. That's some good advice. The worthless man spreads strife, and we need to avoid it.

II. **As we come to the end of this passage, we come to the CONSEQUENCES – we come to the reason for the warning.**

And as Solomon explains to his sons, the reason he's been warning them about the wicked man is that this kind of wicked behavior always leads to SUDDEN CALAMITY and BROKENNESS. The wicked man will not be able to do these wicked things forever. There is an end coming, it's coming quickly, and there's no cure for it. There's no escaping it. They might think their secret signals won't be prosecuted, they might think they can get away with all of this, they might think they are beating the system, but God sees what is happening here. As Solomon himself says in the very last verse in Ecclesiastes, ***"For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil."*** And as Jesus says over in Matthew 12:36, ***"But I tell you that every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the day of judgment."***

Conclusion:

The only remedy is repentance, but this is the one thing the scoundrel is unwilling to do. As we close, then, let's start by asking whether we see ourselves in this passage, and if we do, let's have a change of heart. Let's turn away from this. If we are the ones thinking we can get away with deceiving others, if we think we can get away with causing conflict and spreading strife, let's have a change of heart. Let's rethink what we post online, and let's back away from those things that spread strife and division, so that we are not the ones who need to be broken.

I was reading something a while ago, pointing out the danger of sharing some of this politically heated rhetoric on social media. We might share something that's even true, but there's no context to it, and it's not face to face (so there's no immediate feedback), we're all comfortable at home in bed or on the couch. We're pretty sure we won't get punched in the face for what we post, and so we are somewhat emboldened. There are no consequences. Meanwhile, you know who's reading this? Somebody younger, perhaps newer to the Christian faith, maybe even just starting to consider the Christian faith, and they are starting to wonder: Am I welcome in this group? Is the person posting this stuff somebody I would go to for spiritual advice and encouragement? And often, their answer is, "No." So, we need to be careful that we are not the scoundrel and villain spreading strife and division. And if we are, let's turn away from it.

I hope this passage has been helpful in some way. Hopefully we can come together again next week to look at the next few verses, a list of seven behaviors that are an abomination to the Lord.

As we close, let's go to God in prayer:

Our Father in Heaven,

You are the one and only eternal God, creator of the heavens and the earth and everything that we see around us. This morning we are thankful for your word and for your wisdom, passed along to us through King Solomon in the advice he gives to his sons.

We pray that your word would take root in our hearts, that we would look at ourselves, and that we would be so careful not to be the worthless man Solomon describes in Proverbs. You know our hearts, you hear our words, you see what we do (even in private). You are the all-knowing God, and so we recommit this morning to building each other up with our words and actions.

We continue to pray for those who are struggling with their health. We pray that you would bless them, give them strength, and bring them back to full health. We also ask for your special comfort for the seniors of this congregation, especially for those who are still isolated at home due to health concerns. We pray that the rest of us would continue to find new ways to encourage and serve.

We come to you this morning in the name of your Son, Jesus, thanking you for hearing our prayer. Lord, come quickly. AMEN.

To comment on this lesson: fourlakeschurch@gmail.com