

Thursday Evening Bible Class. Discretion Proverbs 1:4
28th May 2020

**Additional contributions to supplement Brother Michael's
Introduction**

**Proverbs 1:4 To give subtilty to the simple, to the young man
knowledge and discretion.**

Point 1

Discretion is not mentioned very often in the Bible. In Psalm 112:5 *A good man shows favour, and lends: he will guide his affairs with discretion*, and in Isaiah 28:26 *For his God doth instruct him to discretion, and doth teach him*. The Hebrew word used for discretion in these two passages is *mishpat* – which essentially means correct judgement. In Jeremiah 10:12 *He hath made the earth by his power, he hath established the world by his wisdom, and hath stretched out the heavens by his discretion*. The Hebrew word here for discretion is *tabuwn* and means intelligence, caprice, understanding, wisdom, so quite a bit different. However in the rest of the passages, which are all in the book of Proverbs, the Hebrew word used is *mezimmah* – which basically means a plan, which is usually wicked, witty invention, lewdness, mischievous device- but sometimes good. The NET Bible explains it thus: The word מְזִמָּה (*mezimmah*, “discretion”) is the ability to know the best course of action for achieving one’s goal. It is knowledge and understanding with a purpose. This kind of knowledge enables one to make the right choices that will protect him from blunders and their consequences.

Now we can see that this attitude of mind can be put to good use, or bad use. In Proverbs 1:4 which we are looking at, again the NET Bible gives a useful alternative translation: *To impart shrewdness to the morally naive, a discerning plan to the young person*.

One particular example which springs to mind of this discerning mind, and looking ahead to the consequences of decisions, is the lesson Jesus gave in Luke 16: 1-8: *And he said also unto his disciples, There was a certain rich man, which had a steward; and the same was accused unto him that he had wasted his goods. And he called him, and said unto him, How is it that I hear this of thee? give an account of thy stewardship; for thou mayest be no longer steward. Then the steward said within himself, What shall I do? for my lord taketh away from me the stewardship: I cannot dig; to beg I am ashamed. I am resolved what to do, that, when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses. So he called every one of his lord's debtors unto him, and said unto the first, How much owest thou unto my lord? And he said, An hundred measures of oil. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and sit down quickly, and write fifty. Then said he to another, And how much owest thou? And he said, An hundred measures of wheat. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and write fourscore. And the lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely: for the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light.*

Jesus is not saying that we should be like this unjust steward, but instead asks us to focus on how he used a careful discerning plan to enable him to escape. And he then teaches believers to notice the care that unrighteous people use, to escape certain consequences of their mistakes, and says in verse 10 *He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much.* Therefore how much more should believers use care, and consideration, and planning, when using the opportunity to escape the certain consequences of sin? By showing this level of understanding and there is no need to blunder from one mishap to another.

Point 2

In Genesis 41:33 We read: *Now therefore let Pharaoh look out a man **discreet** and wise, and set him over the land of Egypt.* And again Genesis 41:39 *And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, Forasmuch as God hath shewed thee all this, there is none so **discreet** and wise as thou art:*

The Hebrew word for discreet here is *bene* - separate, understand, cunning, eloquent, skill, wise. It is very interesting that we have this example of Joseph who showed a level of maturity in his young age which seemed to exceed the rest of his brothers, whereby he was able to see the bigger picture, and did not get bogged down with petty jealousies and envies like his brothers, nor did he get down or depressed when everything seemed to go against him. It is because he understood that God was in control, and he was able to think differently as a result, behaving with smart confidence and assurance, which separated him out.

Other examples which spring to mind: 1 Samuel 25:32 & 33: *And David said to Abigail, Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, which sent thee this day to meet me: And blessed be thy advice, and blessed be thou, which hast kept me this day from coming to shed blood, and from avenging myself with mine own hand.* In the ASV and other translations, the word for advice is translated as discretion. One can see why, how Abigail acted with careful prudence, exercising a careful balance between loyalty to her churlish husband and hospitality to a kind stranger who had offered protection, she was put in a difficult position, yet managed by her integrity and courage to exercise discretion to ultimately solve the problem.

Daniel 2:14 *Then Daniel answered with counsel and wisdom to Arioch the captain of the king's guard, which was gone forth to slay the wise men of Babylon:* Other translations have the words for counsel and wisdom as tact and discretion. Again we can see why, how Daniel had to answer the powerful representative of the megalomaniac emperor with particular carefulness, as lives were at stake. The misplaced word, or wrong expression, the wrong tone, could have

endangered the lives of the other so-called wise men. On the other hand we recall a moment when the time came to throw caution to the wind, when Daniel's three friends had no opportunity to exercise discretion, and had to boldly state their case in chapter 3:16

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, answered and said to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter.

Occasionally there is no time or place for discretion, it isn't often, but here they stated they would rather be thrown in the furnace than bow down to false gods. Fortunately, we do not live in such drastic times, and discretion is a useful characteristic to learn.

Shakespeare was the playwright who coined the phrase *Discretion is the better part of valour*, in Henry IV Part I when he described a fat loveable rogue named Falstaff who always managed to slip out of the fighting by making excuses. But it is true, best to avoid confrontation until there is no other alternative, try and solve the problem using less drastic measures first. As in Proverbs 19:11 The discretion of a man deferreth his anger; and it is his glory to pass over a transgression.

Point 3

The New Testament has a couple of mentions of this characteristic:

Mark 12:34 *And when Jesus saw that he answered discreetly, he said unto him, Thou art not far from the kingdom of God. And no man after that durst ask him any question.* This is interesting, as we can see the atmosphere was one poisoned, with many of the Sadducees trying to catch him out. They were the aristocratic ruling and priestly class, who like the Pharisees were opposed to this itinerant preacher, who the crowds loved so much. This scribe who asked Jesus the question was one who was well versed in the law, and understood by Jesus responses, that this man was even better in understanding than the law than he, and being curious, rather than antagonistic he posed a basic question. In seeing Jesus immediate, full, accurate

response, rather than trying to be a smart alec in front of the crowds, he agreed with Jesus, and added verse 33: *And to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love his neighbour as himself, is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.* In this he was admitting that the spirit of the law was far more important than the letter of the law, which was exactly what Jesus was demonstrating in his life. Maybe the scribe could see that Jesus was the only one capable of fulfilling the law in this way, which is why Jesus who was the epitome of discretion appreciated the scribe's answer, saying you are not far from The Kingdom of God.

One last passage in the New Testament is Titus 2:5 *To be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed.* This is Paul giving advice to the younger women. The word for discreet here in Greek is *sophron* and means safe self-controlled, moderate, temperate. Not loud, outlandish, brash and in your face, not a show off, but solid dependable, this passage comes to mind: Proverbs 11:22 *As a jewel of gold in a swine's snout, so is a fair woman which is without discretion. Ridiculously out of place, garish, and cringeworthy!*

Certainly, lessons in all these passages, which show that the principles of exercising discretion are wide ranging, and a very useful characteristic for the servant of God.

Further passages in the Proverbs which may or may not have been picked up by other brothers:

Proverbs 2:11 *Discretion shall preserve thee, understanding shall keep thee:*

Proverbs 3:21 *My son, let not them depart from thine eyes: keep sound wisdom and discretion:*

Proverbs 5:2 That thou mayest regard discretion, and that thy lips may keep knowledge.

Brother Terry