

Gaining and Governing

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[0 : 00] Heavenly Father, it is our deepest desire to please you.

You are our King, our Lord. You are our God. You are our loving Father. But in order to please you, we need to train up our discernment to know your good and perfect will.

To know all that you desire for us that which is true, right, and good. So as we open up your word together, please teach us this evening to know your will and grant us the humility, the fear of God, to follow you and obey you.

No matter the cost in every aspect of our lives. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen. I will read Proverbs 28 and 29.

Please follow along with me in your Bibles. The wicked flee when no one pursues, but the righteous are bold as a lion.

[1 : 32] When a land transgresses, it has many rulers. But with a man of understanding and knowledge, its stability will long continue. A poor man who oppresses the poor is a beating rain that leaves no food.

Those who forsake the law praise the wicked, but those who keep the law strive against them. Evil men do not understand justice, but those who seek the Lord understand it completely.

Better is a poor man who walks in his integrity than a rich man who is crooked in his ways. The one who keeps the law is a son with understanding, but a companion of glutton's shames his father.

Whoever multiplies his wealth by interest and profit gathers it for him who is generous to the poor. If one turns away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer is an abomination.

Whoever misleads the upright into an evil way will fall into his own pit, but the blameless will have a goodly inheritance. A rich man is wise in his own eyes, but a poor man who has understanding will find him out.

[2 : 47] When the righteous triumph, there is great glory, but when the wicked rise, people hide themselves. Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy.

Blessed is the one who fears the Lord always, but whoever hardens his heart will fall into calamity. Like a roaring lion or a charging bear is a wicked ruler over a poor people.

A ruler who lacks understanding is a cruel oppressor, but he who hates unjust gain will prolong his days. If one is burdened with the blood of another, he will be a fugitive until death.

Let no one help him. Whoever walks in integrity will be delivered, but he who is crooked in his ways will suddenly fall. Whoever works his land will have plenty of bread, but he who follows worthless pursuits will have plenty of poverty.

A faithful man will abound with blessings, but whoever hastens to be rich will not go unpunished. To show partiality is not good, but for a piece of bread a man will do wrong.

[3 : 58] A stingy man hastens after wealth and does not know that poverty will come upon him. Whoever rebukes a man will afterward find more favor than he who flatters with his tongue.

Whoever robs his father or his mother and says, There is no transgression, is a companion to a man who destroys. A greedy man stirs up strife, but the one who trusts in the Lord will be enriched.

Whoever trusts in his own mind is a fool, but he who walks in wisdom will be delivered. Whoever gives to the poor will not want, but he who hides his eyes will get many a curse.

When the wicked rise, people hide themselves, but when they perish, the righteous increase. He who is often reproved yet stiffens his neck will suddenly be broken beyond healing.

When the righteous increase, the people rejoice, but when the wicked rule, the people groan. He who loves wisdom makes his father glad, but a companion of prostitutes squanders his wealth.

[4 : 59] By justice, a king builds up the land, but he who exacts gifts tears it down. A man who flatters his neighbor spreads a net for his feet. An evil man is ensnared in his transgression, but a righteous man sings and rejoices.

A righteous man knows the rights of the poor. A wicked man does not understand such knowledge. Scoffers set a city aflame, but the wise turn away wrath.

If a wise man has an argument with the fool, the fool only rages and laughs, and there is no quiet. Bloodthirsty men hate one who is blameless and seek the life of the upright.

A fool gives full vent to his spirit, but a wise man quietly holds it back. If a ruler listens to falsehood, all his officials will be wicked. The poor man and the oppressor meet together.

The Lord gives light to the eyes of both. If a king faithfully judges the poor, his throne will be established forever. The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child left to himself brings shame to his mother.

[6 : 04] When the wicked increase, transgression increases, but the righteous will look upon their downfall. Discipline your son, and he will give you rest. He will give delight to your heart.

Where there is no prophetic vision, the people cast off restraint. But blessed is he who keeps the law. By mere words, a servant is not disciplined, for though he understands, he will not respond.

Do you see a man who is hasty in his words? There is more hope for a fool than for him. Whoever pampers his servant from childhood will in the end find him his heir. A man of wrath stirs up strife, and one given to anger causes much transgression.

One's pride will bring him low, but he who is lowly in spirit will obtain honor. The partner of a thief hates his own life. He hears the curse, but discloses nothing.

The fear of man lays a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord is safe. Many seek the face of a ruler, but it is from the Lord that a man gets justice. An unjust man is an abomination to the righteous, but one whose way is straight is an abomination to the wicked.

[7 : 17] This is God's holy and authoritative word. The Bible is not an exhaustive rulebook that has a corresponding rule for every conceivable situation.

And if you treat it that way, you will be disappointed because it doesn't answer all of your questions. Rather, it's God's personal revelation. It's a way that God has chosen to reveal himself personally to us.

And for that reason, it culminates with the revelation of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who is the very image of the invisible God. And when we read the Bible in this sense, then we are not merely familiarizing ourselves with the rules for life, but rather we are familiarizing ourselves with a person.

In much the same way we get to know each other through conversing with one another. We get to know God by reading his word. We learn to think his thoughts after him.

Another way to put that is that we grow in discernment. The ability to discriminate between what is good and what is evil. Discernment is something that requires training.

[8 : 30] Romans 12.2 says, Do not be conformed to the world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Paul says in Philippians 1.9-11, that your love may abound more and more with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ.

Hebrews 5.14 similarly says, Solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment, trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.

We live in a complex universe where many situations are not black and white, where even Christians who agree that Scripture is God's inspired and inerrant word still disagree on a number of issues.

This is why we need to grow in discernment, to learn not only the content of God's word, but also the tenor of God's word, to learn to know what God's good and perfect will is.

[9 : 39] These two chapters in Proverbs are all about discernment. The word understand or understanding, which is ESV's rendering of the Hebrew word for seeing or discerning something, occurs six times in these two chapters.

And these chapters tell us that we are to train our discernment of God's will by keeping the law, that's in chapter 28 verses 1 to 12, and repenting from sin, submitting to discipline, and fearing the Lord.

And this last point, fearing the Lord, is really the sum of all four of the points, that we are to train our discernment by living with the fear of the Lord. So first, let's start in the obvious place.

We are to train our discernment by knowing and keeping the law of God. Verses 1 to 12 mentioned the importance of keeping the law four times. It says in 4 to 5, verses 4 to 5, those who forsake the law praise the wicked, but those who keep the law strive against them.

Evil men do not understand justice, but those who seek the Lord understand it completely. In a similar way, that common sense, which we take for granted, or tend to assume most people have, is actually not that common.

[10 : 53] In a similar way, this assumption that everyone has basically the same conscience, the same sense of right and wrong, is also misleading at times.

While human beings do have the innate, God-given sense of right and wrong, due to our sinful rebellion against God, we have become futile in our thinking, we have become foolish and darkened in our hearts, as Romans 1 talks about, apart from the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit.

And because of this, as Proverbs 16.25 earlier said, there's a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death. It means people's consciences are often confused.

People don't know what is right from wrong. So what results is verse 4. Those who forsake the law praise the wicked. We should not be surprised, as we live in this sinful world, when people praise that which God says is wicked.

We should not be surprised by that. We should expect that. Because these people, this world, has forsaken God's law. But as those who keep the law, we strive against them.

[12 : 07] Evil men do not understand justice. Don't assume that when people use, people of this world use the same words that we use, words like justice, words like righteousness, don't assume that they mean the same thing that the Bible does.

Only those who seek the Lord understand justice completely. If you want to grow in your discernment, we need to seek the Lord. We need to keep His law.

Because ultimately, our sense of right and wrong must come from Him and not from our own head. As it later says in verse 26, whoever trusts in his own mind is a fool, but he who walks in wisdom will be delivered.

Because our consciences are shaped by our personal experiences, by our cultural context, by our feelings, we need consciously to strive to conform our minds to God's revealed will in Scripture.

We need to train our discernment by searching and keeping God's Word. So verse 7 says, the one who keeps the law is a son with understanding, but a companion of glutton shames his father.

[13 : 22] We possess discernment when we keep God's law. And whenever Proverbs gives us a command, it also provides corresponding motivation for us to follow. It says in verses 1 to 2, So one reason that we should continue and keep God's law is that it lets us live without fear.

The wicked are flighty because they're always looking over their shoulders to see if they'll be found out for their wickedness because they're always trying to cover their tracks behind them.

And due to this insecurity, the wicked flee when no one is pursuing them. They're easily spooked. They live with constant fear of being found out and punished. Moreover, it says, when a land transgresses, it has many rulers, but with a man of understanding and knowledge, its stability will long continue.

This verse 2 is matched by verse 12, which together bracket this subsection. Verse 12 says, when the righteous triumph, there is great glory, but when the wicked rise, people hide themselves.

The word great in verse 2 is the same word that's translated, great in verse 12 is the same word that's translated many in verse 2. So then in a country where the righteous prevail, there's much glory.

[14 : 42] But in a country where the wicked prevail, there are many rulers. In other words, when a kingdom is founded on righteousness, it promotes stability, prosperity, and longevity.

But when it is founded on transgressions, it breeds chaos and conflict with many rulers vying for power. And while righteousness encompasses many things, there's a particular aspect of righteousness that chapter 28 focuses on, namely the way we treat the most vulnerable members of society.

Verse 3 says, a poor man who oppresses the poor is a beating rain that leaves no food. It's not only the rich who oppress the poor. The poor also oppress the poor.

This is particularly grievous because the fellow poor you would expect compassion from, who of all people should know what it's like to be poor and should have pity, instead betrays the fellow poor and takes advantage of him, oppresses him.

In the same way, a rain, you expect the rain to bring life, to enable you to farm and to produce grain that will bring life to your community. But instead, when you get a beating rain that actually sweeps away the gains of hard work of farmers, it surprises.

[16 : 01] In the same way, this poor man who oppresses is like the beating rain that leaves no food. In contrast, the discerning man understands verse 6. Better is a poor man who walks in his integrity than the rich man who is crooked in his ways.

In Hebrew, nouns can be singular, plural, or dual, indicating just two, the two of one thing. And the word ways at the end of verse 6 is dual.

So it highlights the duplicitous and double-dealing ways of this crooked man. He not only does evil, he deceives others while doing so.

And even though this seems to work for him for a little while because he gets rich off of it, in the end, he will be punished by God who stands behind his standard of justice. And it says in verses 8 to 10, whoever multiplies his wealth by interest and profit gathers it for him who is generous to the poor, if one turns away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer is an abomination.

Whoever misleads the upright into an evil way will fall into his own pit, but the blameless will have a goodly inheritance. We've seen this over and over again throughout Proverbs that God has embedded this paradoxical principle in the general working of the universe so that those who defraud others will ultimately be impoverished, but those who are generous with others will ultimately be enriched.

[17 : 21] Those who lead others to ruin for their selfish gain will themselves come to ruin, while those who live blameless, selfless lives will have a goodly inheritance. This is why it's in our best interest to train our discernment by keeping God's Word.

In verse 9, it says, if one turns away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer is an abomination. Even something as commendable as prayer becomes an abomination to God if you do not keep His Word, if you do not hear His Word.

So this is actually a key principle. If you want your prayers to be effective, do you keep God's Word? Do you actually believe, do you have faith in God's Word enough to obey it, to walk in accordance with it?

Because genuine faith is always accompanied by good works. And this is the chief defect of the rich wicked. Verse 11 says, a rich man is wise in his own eyes, but a poor man who has understanding will find him out.

That's his problem. He is wise in his own eyes. So he sees no need for God's Word, no need for instruction from God. But he will be exposed by the discerning poor man.

[18 : 43] For all Bible-believing Christians, Scripture is the theoretical authority. But for many Christians, Scripture is not the functional authority.

Instead, for some people it serves merely to lend support to our own hunches, our own opinions, or the spirit of the times. But such people will be found out by a poor man who has understanding.

And this is why we must train our discernment by keeping God's law. The second way we are to hone our skills of discernment is by repenting from sin. That's the subject broadly speaking of chapter 28 verse 13 to chapter 29 verse 2.

And verse 13 is actually one of the clearest explanations of what repentance is. It says, whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy.

The word conceal is contrasted by two words, confess and forsake. This reveals two reasons why people typically hide their sins.

[19 : 49] One reason is this, they don't want their sins to be discovered because they want to avoid the shame and reproach that is associated with it. That's why they don't confess it because it's shameful.

Second reason is this, they want to persist in their sin. And if they want to keep sinning in that same way, then it's not possible, that's no longer possible if it gets found out so they keep it hidden.

And because these two reasons exist for people to hide their sins, we must do two things in response to sin in our own lives. We must confess it. That's the first thing we must do, acknowledge it.

because the darkness of shame and guilt is what incubates sin. If we confess our sins, it says 1 John 1, 9, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Sin loses its power when it's brought into the light of God's mercy and forgiveness through confession because the shame and the guilt is dealt with in light of Jesus Christ.

[20 : 53] The second thing we must do is forsake sin. When we talk about repenting of our sins, repenting doesn't just mean to feel sorry for one's sins. It's not the same as regretting it.

To repent means to turn away from it, renounce your sins and to turn toward God. If your teacher spots an error in a math problem that you are solving and you keep going trying to solve it the way you were doing it instead of going back to solve the issue, would he not think that you did not understand what he was trying to tell you?

If while you're driving south and someone tells you that you're supposed to be driving north, but after acknowledging your mistake, you continue to drive south, wouldn't the person who corrected you and gave you directions be right to think that you didn't hear him or didn't understand him or didn't believe him?

True repentance means to believe in God enough to renounce the sins that are in your own life, to turn away from it. That's why repentance is also a fight of faith because if you really see and you really believe what sin is, if you see the ugliness of sin for what it is, if you see the destructiveness of sin for what it is, if you really believe what God says about it, you will turn from it.

You will renounce it. And it's only those who confess and forsake their transgression that will obtain mercy. And that wonderful reality should set our hearts toward repentance, soften our hearts for it.

[22 : 28] It says in verse 14, Blessed is the one who fears the Lord always, but whoever hardens his heart will fall into calamity. Verse 14 is matched by chapter 29, verse 1.

He who is often reprov'd yet stiffens his neck will suddenly be broken beyond healing. The word hardened and the word stiffen are different translations of the same word. When we are corrected by the word of God or by our brothers and sisters in Christ, we must repent by confessing and forsaking.

A misshapen pottery that's been hardened already will be shattered by the hand of God's discipline because it's no longer malleable. But if that piece of pottery is softened, if that clay is softened by the water of God's mercies, then it will be molded to fit God's purposes and priorities.

So how do you respond to godly correction? Is your habit to respond in defensiveness and denial? Or do you have a posture of humility before God and others?

We are to train our discernment by repenting from our sins. The rest of the subsection offers specific examples of how we need to live with the fear of God in governing society and gaining income.

[23 : 49] Verses 15 to 18 focus on governance. It says, Like a roaring lion or a charging bear is a wicked ruler over a poor people. A ruler who lacks understanding is a cruel oppressor, but he who hates unjust gain will prolong his days.

So earlier in Proverbs 19, 12, and 22, 20 verse 2, the king's righteous wrath punishing evildoers was compared to a roaring lion.

And so the repurposing of that same metaphor is shocking because here we see that the king, who should be executing justice on behalf of the poor, instead turns against his own poor people.

Instead of protecting his own, he preys upon them. And he does this because he lacks discernment, lacks understanding. He's untrained.

And for that reason, he will suffer the consequences. Verse 16 says, He who hates unjust gain will prolong his days. The word unjust gain is literally something that is cut off, a rip off, a short changing of somebody.

[24 : 58] And this forms a neat contrast to the word prolong. He who short changes others, the king who short changes others will be short lived. Instead, the king should be an enforcer of justice.

It says in verses 17 and 18, If one is burdened with the blood of another, he will be a fugitive until death. Let no one help him. Whoever walks in integrity will be delivered, but he who is crooked in his ways will suddenly fall.

The one who sheds innocent blood will be a fugitive until death. He will, it says, the word fugitive is just a noun form of the word flee in verse 1 where he said, The wicked flee when no one pursues, but the righteous are bold as a lion.

So the lion imagery makes an interesting connection to verse 15. The ruler who preys upon the innocent poor like a roaring lion will shrink and shrink until he is no longer bold as a lion like the righteous, but instead becomes a flighty fugitive.

Looking over his shoulders, suspicious that his officials will be talking behind his back or conspire against him, fearful that his subjects will rebel against him, and increasingly filled with fear as he feels the grip of God's sovereign justice closing in around him.

[26 : 11] As verse 18 summarizes, Whoever walks in integrity will be delivered, but he who is crooked in his ways will suddenly fall. A person who has nothing to hide has nothing to fear. And after addressing the importance of governing justly, verses 19 to 27 deals specifically with gaining justly.

Verses 19 to 20 says this, Whoever works his land will have plenty of bread, but he who follows worthless pursuits will have plenty of poverty. A faithful man will abound with blessings, but whoever hastens to be rich will not go unpunished.

This is the right way to earn a living with honest hard work, faithfulness, constancy, dependability, rather than relying on or seeking a stroke of luck or a get-rich-quick scheme.

And then verses 21 to 25 give us five more examples of bad ways of earning money. One is taking bribes. Two is being stingy. Three is flattery.

Four is robbery. And five is quarreling. I'll just expand a little bit on the robbery and the quarreling. Verse 24, it says, Whoever robs his father or his mother and says that is no transgression is a companion to a man who destroys.

[27 : 30] Robbing one's own parents who raised him and selflessly provided for him is contemptible. In Mark 7, 9 to 13, Jesus rebukes the Pharisees for doing exactly this.

For they used their piety as a pretext for withholding provisions from their parents. They would tell their parents, Hey, what I have is actually dedicated to God. So I can't give it to you.

I can't help you. There are many ways nowadays that adults, adult children can shirk their feeling of responsibility to care for their parents.

They could rationalize that it's all wealth that will eventually come to them anyway. Well, it's all my money. It's all in the family. It's all shared. Or they might argue that their parents are too infirm or incompetent to manage their own finances.

I'll take it over. I'll manage it. They might pocket their parents' earnings, their social security checks, or like the prodigal son in Luke 15, and presumptuously demand their inheritance prematurely.

[28 : 37] All these are ways that children can rob their parents and those who hasten after wealth in this way through bribery, being miserly, or flattering others, robbery, or quarreling, will be punished by God for their destructive ways.

Verses 26 to 27 sum it up this way. Whoever trusts in his own mind is a fool, but he who walks in wisdom will be delivered. Whoever gives to the poor will not want, but he who hides his eyes will get many a curse.

Again, the counterintuitive principle that those who are generous to the poor will be enriched. In this next subsection, chapter 29, verses 3 to 21, we once again see contrasting pictures of the righteous and the wicked, and then we are taught how to train up righteous people.

Namely, by training them up through timely discipline. So that's the third point. Submitting to discipline is one way we are to grow in discernment. This subsection contains several rearing proverbs, parenting proverbs.

Verse 3 says, he who loves wisdom makes his father glad. Verse 17 says, discipline your son and he will give you rest. He will give delight to your heart. In other words, the wise son who loves wisdom is raised through parental discipline.

[30 : 03] Similarly, verse 15 says, the rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child left to himself brings shame to his mother. The rod and reproof bring together corporal punishment on the one hand and verbal reproof on the other.

They join them together as they did in chapter 26, verses 3 to 5. Both are necessary because sinful human beings left to their own devices will err.

They need correction. Similarly, verses 19 to 21 speak of the importance of discipling or disciplining those under one's authority. It says, by mere words, a servant is not disciplined for though he understands, he will not respond.

Do you see a man who is hasty in his words? There is more hope for a fool than for him. Whoever pampers his servant from childhood will in the end find him his heir. So what's in view here is a foolish servant?

We know that because in Proverbs 17, 2, it said that a wise servant will actually take over for a son who is a shameful son and he will become one of the brothers of the children.

[31 : 07] So there are some servants, wise servants, that you want to become your heir. Someone who you want as your successor. But the one here is not a wise servant but a foolish servant who needs discipline.

And it says that this servant will not learn from words alone. So if you have someone who is foolish under your charge, whether it's as a, maybe, whether it's as your role as a parent or as a manager at workplace or if you're a governing authority or just, you're in some kind of organization, have some kind of leadership role, and if you have a person who under your charge who needs to be corrected, who needs discipline, you need to bring in some kind of negative and positive reinforcements, something more than words to discipline them.

And if you're the type of person who, as verse 20 says, is hasty in his words, perhaps you're quick, too quick to utter threats, empty threats or rash promises in order to control this employee's behavior that you have no intention of following through on.

If you're that type of person, it says there's less hope for you than for the fool that is under your charge. You need to be careful, measure in your words, and you need to exert discipline in order to bring that person into the right order.

Loving discipline is one of the ways that God also disciplines his children. Hebrews 12, 5-6, says, My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him, for the Lord disciplines the one he loves and chastises every son whom he receives.

[33 : 00] Even Jesus, it says, in Hebrews 5, verse 8, although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. Though Jesus was perfect, he did not need to be disciplined for any wrong he had done because he was without sin, he nonetheless learned obedience through what he suffered.

And we know from Luke 2, verse 52, that Jesus, even though he was fully God because he was also fully man, he increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.

So then Jesus learned what fullness of obedience entails through his suffering on the cross in obedience to his Father. God has ordained that we, as his children, train our discernment by submitting to his fatherly discipline.

I know that many people in our church are going through some really rough patches in their lives, whether it's dealing with illnesses, depression, or family issues, different kinds of trouble.

Often, if this is a measure of hope, comfort for you, often periods of intense suffering are the times of most prolific growth for the Christian.

[34 : 20] Because it's through the crosses we bear, because it's through the sufferings we endure that we, like Jesus, learn obedience. We learn to grow in our discernment through testing.

And the rest of this subsection tells us about the consequences of not submitting to God's discipline or the discipline of those who have authority over us.

It says, one might become a companion of prostitutes who squander his wealth, verse 3, or a king who exacts gifts from his subjects and tears his kingdom down, verse 4, a man who flatters his neighbor and thereby spreads a net for his neighbors and ultimately his own feet, verse 5, or a wicked man who disregards the rights of the poor, verse 7, or a scoffer who sets a city aflame, in verse 8, or a fool who rages and laughs and gives full vent to his spirit instead of being self-controlled, in verses 9 and 11.

It says in verse 12, when a ruler listens to falsehood, all his officials will be wicked. If you're in a position of authority and leadership and you give ear to falsehood, it will make all your officials wicked because they will see and they will learn that you're not interested in the truth and then they will start to tell you what you want to hear.

That's how kingdoms crumble. That's how organizations crumble. And it's interesting how we've seen over and over again throughout these two chapters but also in previous chapters of Proverbs that the author often puts rearing Proverbs, parenting Proverbs, right next to Proverbs that deal with governing a society.

[35 : 57] Proverbs about kings. This is because the family is the nucleus of civilization. It's the backbone of a society. When a generation of parents fail to bring up their children in the instruction and discipline of the Lord, society itself crumbles.

Verse 18 continues this dire warning where there is no prophetic vision. The people cast off restraint but blessed is he who keeps the law. The author envisions a time like the one described in 1 Samuel chapter 3 verse 1.

It says, The word of the Lord was rare in those days. There was no frequent vision. It's a scary thought. Or like Lamentations chapter 2 verse 9, The law is no more and her prophets find no vision from the Lord.

Imagine how scary that would be. The silence of God. The absence of the word of God. The guiding law of God. When there is no one in this world who can discern God's will for the people.

When the guidance of God through His prophets and through His teachers, through His word are lost, people cast off restraint. And the absence of God, absence of God's law does not result in freedom.

[37 : 22] It results in anarchy. Which is the absence of freedom where no one is free. This is why it's so important for us as God's people if we don't want that to happen to our world, to our nation, to our city, to our neighborhoods, to our church.

We need to train our discernment by submitting to the discipline of our Lord. And the final subsection, chapter 29, verses 22 to 27, it sums up all the preceding sections by telling us that we need to train our discernment of God's will by living with the fear of the Lord.

It ends the chapter with the same dilemma that we started out with. An unjust man is an abomination to the righteous, but one whose way is straight is an abomination to the wicked.

We've seen throughout these two chapters the conflict between the righteous and the wicked that runs through these entire two chapters, and there's no middle ground in this conflict because a decision is forced upon us.

But when there are conflicting visions for what a just society should look like, how are we to discern the will of God? That's the problem we started to answer.

[38 : 44] And the key, as I've said throughout, is to train our discernment, and we do that by living with the fear of the Lord. What the man of wrath who causes much transgression in verse 22, and the partner of a thief who hears God's threat of a curse, and yet still does not disclose his accomplice, they have one thing in common, and that is pride.

The prideful assumption that God will not hold him to account. Verse 23 says, One's pride will bring him low, but he who is lowly in spirit will obtain honor.

This is the paradoxical way that God works. Whoever exalts himself is brought low. Whoever lowers himself, however, is exalted because God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.

And humility before God is essentially what the fear of the Lord is. To fear the Lord is to live before the presence of God under the authority of God for the glory of God.

And the fear of the Lord is the only antidote to the fear of man described in verse 25. The fear of man lays a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord is safe.

[40 : 00] Many seek the face of a ruler, but it is from the Lord that a man gets justice. In his insightful book, *When People Are Big and God Is Small*, counselor and seminary professor Edward Welch gives us two diagnostic questions to figure out whether or not we struggle with what the Bible calls the fear of man.

One diagnostic question is this, have you ever experienced peer pressure? Maybe as an adolescent. If you experienced it as an adolescent, it probably still resides within you.

It just manifests itself in different ways, in more adult ways. That's just another term for the fear of man. Second diagnostic question is this, is self-esteem a critical concern for you?

If you're very concerned for others to support your own sense of well-being and identity, your esteem of yourself, then you deal with the fear of man.

Because in both cases, your life revolves around what others think about you. And the heart of the problem is that you need people for your own glory rather than loving people for God's glory.

[41 : 15] the antidote to this fear of man is the fear of the Lord. To be consumed for the glory of the Lord. To be so aware of God's importance, of God's power, that what man says about you matters very little.

And the fear of man ensnares us. So if you're driven by the fear of man in your life, you're not going to discern rightly the will of the Lord. Instead, whoever trusts in the Lord is safe.

If we falsely believe that our fate, that our well-being, our future depends on a human being, a human ruler perhaps, then we will do everything in our power to curry that person's favor, whether it's flattery or bribery.

But if we trust that from the Lord the man gets justice, we will discern what is right and live with integrity. that's the key to living with the fear.

Living with the fear of the Lord is the key to growing in discernment of God's will. I mentioned earlier in chapter 28 verse 13 of how God promised us when we come to him to confess our sins and forsake them that we will obtain mercy.

[42 : 36] The word obtain mercy is actually derived from a Hebrew root for the word womb. it describes the kind of emotion, the compassion that a mother feels for the baby in her womb.

That tender compassion for that vulnerable, frail human being that belongs to you.

Do you know that about God? if you've been wallowing in guilt, if you've been ashamed of the sin that you are dealing with, the life that you live, do you know that God's not shaking his head in reproach?

That his heart is not callous toward you? Do you know that he's not shaking his head in disappointment and disgust, but that his posture toward you is this womb-like, tender mercy?

mercy? That that's his heart toward you? And that heart is displayed most perfectly in the sending of God's own Son, Jesus Christ, as it says in Luke chapter 1, verse 78 and 79, in Zechariah's prophecy, he says that the Lord himself will come to us.

[44 : 00] Why? He says in verse 78, because of the tender mercy of our God. literally the bowels of mercy. The mercy that springs, that wells up from the very heart of God for his people.

Because of the tender mercy of our God, whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.

That prophecy is fulfilled in the coming of Jesus Christ. The only way we can be forgiven when we come to God and confess our sins and forsake our sins is because someone has paid the price for it.

It's because Jesus has paid the price for it. There's no forgiveness of sin without shedding of blood. There's no forgiveness of sins unless someone, a death has taken place to bear the punishment for our sins.

And that's what Jesus did. And Jesus did it not begrudgingly, not merely out of duty, but because of the tender mercies that God has toward us.

[45 : 17] And it's only when you believe in Jesus, you forsake your sins and turn to Him as your Lord and Savior, believe that He died for your sins and was raised from the dead, only then do we receive the Spirit of God.

Only then do we have the law of God written on our hearts so that we can actually walk out these two chapters, discerning the will of God, keeping in step with the Spirit, and living in the manner that pleases Him.

Please take a moment to reflect on that truth. How has God been training you to grow in discernment of His will?

How has He shown His tender mercy to you? Reflect on that for a few moments and then we're going to respond together corporately by praying. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[46 : 34] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.