

Sermon to the saints of God at Topeka – Sunday, May 27, 2018

The main thrust of this sermon is to first set the proper spiritual framework for how we should view one another in the context of giving and receiving counsel, given how God commands us to look upon one another in this blessed place; and then to hopefully give some practical application on the matter of getting and giving counsel that is driven by and informed by the blessed word of God. Consider the scripture:

And it came to pass on the morrow, that Moses sat to judge the people: and the people stood by Moses from the morning unto the evening. And when Moses' father in law saw all that he did to the people, he said, What is this thing that thou doest to the people? why sittest thou thyself alone, and all the people stand by thee from morning unto even? And Moses said unto his father in law, Because the people come unto me to enquire of God: when they have a matter, they come unto me; and I judge between one and another, and I do make them know the statutes of God, and his laws. And Moses' father in law said unto him, The thing that thou doest is not good. Thou wilt surely wear away, both thou, and this people that is with thee: for this thing is too heavy for thee; thou art not able to perform it thyself alone. Hearken now unto my voice, I will give thee counsel, and God shall be with thee: Be thou for the people to God-ward, that thou mayest bring the causes unto God: and thou shalt teach them ordinances and laws, and shalt shew them the way wherein they must walk, and the work that they must do. Moreover thou shalt provide out of all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place such over them, to be rulers of thousands, and rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens: and let them judge the people at all seasons: and it shall be, that every great matter they shall bring unto thee, but every small matter they shall judge: so shall it be easier for thyself, and they shall bear the burden with thee. If thou shalt do this thing, and God command thee so, then thou shalt be able to endure, and all this people shall also go to their place in peace. So Moses hearkened to the voice of his father in law, and did all that he had said. And Moses chose able men out of all Israel, and made them heads over the people, rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens. And they judged the people at all seasons: the hard causes they brought unto Moses, but every small matter they judged themselves. And Moses let his father in law depart; and he went his way into his own land. – Ex. 18:13-27

Moses was a man who had talked to God. He was a man who was chosen by God to lead His people out of bondage. He was a man who had been given extraordinary gifts, wisdom and strength of spirit. But he was becoming wearied of mind and couldn't see a thing that was obvious to his father in law. And a pretty important thing it was. Moses could have cast aside the words of his father in law in his pride. He could have thought, "I'm a judge of God's people – what can *this* man tell me?" But he humbled himself in a sweet reasonableness, rather than chafing in his arrogance, and listened. And the counsel was good!

The Providence of God comes in many ways, but the main way we see it manifested is through Him sending someone to give good words, fitly framed for precisely the right purpose.

Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: so shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it. For ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace: the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree: and it shall be to the LORD for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off. – Isa. 55:6-13

The scriptures are rife with exhortation and commands to seek good counsel, continually.

Deceit is in the heart of them that imagine evil: but to the counsellors of peace is joy. - Pr 12:20

Without counsel purposes are disappointed: but in the multitude of counsellors they are established. - Pr 15:22

One of our main 'go to' verses, at least in the years that I've been blessed to sojourn here amongst you blessed sheep, is:

Where no counsel is, the people fall: but in the multitude of counsellors there is safety. – Pr. 11:14

This verse does not merely mean that when you have some hard decision to make, or something comes up that you don't know much about, that you ask others what they would do – so that you won't make a bad decision. It does mean that, but it does not JUST mean that.

In broader terms, it means that there is a beautiful, true, comforting, peaceful life situation that is described as 'safety' in dwelling amongst a multitude of wise, godly counsellors, as long as that is how you view them. And that safety doesn't just mean you won't make a decision that will cost you a little money or create some minor inconvenience in your life.

But whoso hearkeneth unto me shall dwell safely, and shall be quiet from fear of evil. – Pr. 1:33

That 'safety' delineates a very special, blessed situation that God has placed His elect in – that He hasn't left us to our own devices – that He has placed us in a blessed, safe spiritual position of nestling us amongst those who would apply His word to their situations in life – rightly dividing His word of truth – and imparting wisdom and experience to one another. It is a life situation that hedges against us leaning too heavily and for too long upon our own understanding (if we be His) – in other words, the dross drops off the silver in the Providence of God through showing us our folly. It is the most blessed life situation imaginable: that men who love and fear the Lord, and therefore have earnest care for your soul, would watch for you, help you, exhort you, comfort you, and help you at every turn. One of the chief benefits of the local, called out assembly that is enjoyed by its members is the notion of us looking out for each other and to get and give good counsel amongst one another. But the opposite of the safety described is danger, and it is a great danger to be placed in this blessed situation by the hand of God and NOT view that situation as completely blessed. And when a man or woman, who should continually seek wisdom and godly counsel, rejects, ignores, avoids, bristles at and otherwise doesn't proactively seek counsel, that man or woman in no way, shape or form views their life situation aright. That person is wise in his own eyes and is steeped in pride.

Every way of a man is right in his own eyes: but the LORD pondereth the hearts. - Pr. 21:2

The Lord knows our pride, our stubbornness, our arrogance, our 'self-sufficiency.' Nothing is hid from Him.

When pride cometh, then cometh shame: but with the lowly is wisdom. - Pr 11:2

Only by pride cometh contention: but with the well advised is wisdom. - Pr 13:10

The word for pride there is *zid* (zeed), and it literally means 'to boil'. Such an inflated, know-it-all arrogant view of oneself leads to quarreling. In contrast a humble, wise spirit makes one willing to learn and take advice.

The fear of the LORD is to hate evil: pride, and arrogancy, and the evil way, and the froward mouth, do I hate. Counsel is mine, and sound wisdom: I am understanding; I have strength. - Pr. 8:13, 14

He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool: but whoso walketh wisely, he shall be delivered. - Pr. 28:26

If a man thinks that his way to wisdom and therefore godliness is to close himself off from all counsel of godly men and to lean almost exclusively upon the strength of his own understanding of scripture in all spiritual and practical matters, that man is acting out of foolishness and pride and is barking up the wrong tree.

The way of a fool is right in his own eyes: but he that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise. - Pr. 12:15

Hearkeneth there doesn't mean merely 'enduring' the words – but seeking out, attending to and drinking in the words of wise counsellors. And only God's wisdom makes men capable of honestly holding and faithfully discharging the duties of a counselor or instructor. In a man's pride, he will not generally seek counsel. He looks upon himself as self-sufficient. Even a Christian man can fall into this trap. "I know the Bible," "I'm one of God's elect," "These men don't know anything that I don't know," "I can figure this out," "I don't want anyone suggesting that I should do things any differently than I've already determined," "I don't want to be 'told' what to do," etc. So-called self-sufficiency is a stiff-arm against counsel and is often just a mask for pride in not wanting others to weigh in on any matter that pertains to your life. It is a long-developed habit, and a horrible habit of thought that is hard to break once it becomes one's main way of thinking. It absolutely

cripples spiritual growth. A man can study the Bible every day, go to church on Sunday, go to singing, reading, and picket every day (these are all very good things!), but he will still be absolutely stunted in his spiritual growth and in rightly dividing the word of truth while self-pickled in his so-called self-sufficiency. It is good to know how to do things and to tend to one's affairs, but one of the chief good things to know how to do is to get and give good counsel. It should be a part of a Christian man's daily life – he should delight in it, and therefore get really good at it as a matter of experience and specifically as part of his reasonable service to the Lord.

But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil. - Heb 5:14

The Lord determined to describe His people who lived contemporaneously, together, in terms of their continual communion – not just living in proximity to one another:

Then they that feared the LORD spake often one to another: and the LORD hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon his name. - Mal. 3:16

That speaking often to one another is neither only reading the Bible with one another, neither only in talking about each other's work, or kids, or projects, etc., but also in speaking to practical applications of the commandments of God: to wit, giving and getting counsel together. Helping each other by reason of their experience, both spiritual and practical; seeing what the other person might not see, either because of inexperience or by being too close to see it in focus.

Thy testimonies also are my delight and my counsellors. - Ps. 119: 24

What is at the core of not getting counsel is pride. What is at the core of not looking upon correctly or having the right spiritual perspective on your co-elect (especially your elders) as counsellors is pride. Consider these words from J.C. Ryle in a sermon he delivered specifically to young men (although I think these concepts apply to us all, in many respects): *There are some special dangers against which young men need to be warned. I know well that all souls are in fearful peril. Old or young, it matters not; all have a race to run, a battle to fight, a heart to mortify, a world to overcome, a body to keep under, a devil to resist—and we may well say, “Who is sufficient for these things?” But still every age and condition has its own peculiar snares and temptations, and it is well to know them. He that is forewarned is forearmed. If I can only persuade you to be on your*

guard against the dangers I am going to name, I am sure I shall do your souls an essential service. One danger to young men is pride. Pride is the oldest sin in the world. Indeed, it was before the world. Satan and his angels fell by pride. They were not satisfied with their first estate. Thus, pride stocked hell with its first inhabitants. Pride cast Adam out of paradise. He was not content with the place God assigned him. He tried to raise himself and fell. Thus sin, sorrow, and death entered in by pride. Pride sits in all our hearts by nature. We are born proud. Pride makes us rest satisfied with ourselves, think we are good enough as we are, stop our ears against advice, refuse the Gospel of Christ, and turn everyone to his own way. But pride never reigns anywhere so powerfully as in the heart of a young man. How common is it to see young men heady, high-minded, and impatient of counsel! How often young men think they are not valued and honored as they deserve! How often they will not stop to listen to a hint from an older person! They think they know everything. They are full of conceit of their own wisdom. They reckon (advice from) elderly people to be stupid, dull, and slow. They fancy they want no teaching or instruction themselves: they understand all things. It makes them almost angry to be spoken to. Like young horses, they cannot bear the least control. They must needs be independent and have their own way. They seem to think, like those whom Job mentioned, "We are the people, and wisdom shall die with us" (Job 12:2). And this is all pride. Young men, do not be too confident in your own judgment. Cease to be sure that you are always right, and others wrong. Be distrustful of your own opinion when you find it contrary to that of older men than yourselves. Age gives experience, and therefore deserves respect. It is a mark of Elihu's wisdom, in the book of Job, that "he waited till Job had spoken, because they were older than himself" (Job 32:4). And afterwards he said, "I am young, and you are very old; wherefore I was afraid, and durst not show you mine opinion. I said, Days should speak, and multitude of years should teach wisdom" (Job 32:6, 7). Modesty and silence are beautiful graces in young people. Never be ashamed of being a learner: Jesus was one at twelve years; when He was found in the temple, He was "sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions" (Luk 2:46). The wisest men would tell you they are always learners and are humbled to find after all how little they know. The great Sir Isaac Newton used to say that he felt himself no better than a little child who had picked up a few precious stones on the shore of the sea of knowledge. Young men, if you would be wise, if you would be happy, remember the warning I give you: Beware of pride.

We should each watch for one another's souls, and the Lord has also given some who have that specific and keen duty to do so with constancy and diligence:

Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you. - Heb 13:17

When a man repeatedly stiff-arms, chafes at or otherwise dodges counsel, he makes it a grievous task, over time, for those who are appointed to that keen watching and counsel. This is a real phenomenon. And I have been on both sides of the fence on this. Hear me clearly on this point. Do not make it hard for others to help you with thinking through any aspect of your life or walk from a sound, scriptural perspective. Being knit together in love is a most blessed state, but only if it is unfeigned. Otherwise, it is a state most wretched. Much of what we do has some impact on one another, and that impact should be positive, loving, humble and eager to hear.

Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. - 1Pe. 5:5

None of us is submitting ourselves to anyone who we simply don't want to hear from. That is the reverse of submitting. It is one of the most dangerous manifestations of the flesh in our sojourning together, as it will naturally coat our perspectives of each other in secret distrust and disdain and provides a fertile environment for roots of bitterness to spring up.

Sometimes men seek only the counsel they want – looking only for the 'amen corner,' or voices that simply concretize and validate what a man has already set himself on doing, regardless of his words. Getting counsel, however, has to do with getting good advice on what to do, or asking others to help you think through a thing in case you missed something, not merely getting a rubber stamp for something that you've already thought through. Such behavior is merely checking a box, or engaging in man-pleasing, or desiring to make a fair shew. Rejecting counsel - especially of those more experienced than yourself, in favor of counsel that merely aligns with your own thinking – is the dangerous gamesmanship of pride.

And Rehoboam went to Shechem: for to Shechem were all Israel come to make him king. And it came to pass, when Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who was in Egypt, whither he

had fled from the presence of Solomon the king, heard it, that Jeroboam returned out of Egypt. And they sent and called him. So Jeroboam and all Israel came and spake to Rehoboam, saying, thy father made our yoke grievous: now therefore ease thou somewhat the grievous servitude of thy father, and his heavy yoke that he put upon us, and we will serve thee. And he said unto them, Come again unto me after three days. And the people departed. And king Rehoboam took counsel with the old men that had stood before Solomon his father while he yet lived, saying, What counsel give ye me to return answer to this people? And they spake unto him, saying, If thou be kind to this people, and please them, and speak good words to them, they will be thy servants for ever. But he forsook the counsel which the old men gave him, and took counsel with the young men that were brought up with him, that stood before him. And he said unto them, What advice give ye that we may return answer to this people, which have spoken to me, saying, Ease somewhat the yoke that thy father did put upon us? And the young men that were brought up with him spake unto him, saying, Thus shalt thou answer the people that spake unto thee, saying, Thy father made our yoke heavy, but make thou it somewhat lighter for us; thus shalt thou say unto them, My little finger shall be thicker than my father's loins. For whereas my father put a heavy yoke upon you, I will put more to your yoke: my father chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions. – 2Chr. 10:1-11

Ryle: Rehoboam... despised the counsel of the old experienced men who stood before his father, and hearkened to the advice of the young men of his own generation. He lived to reap the consequences of his folly. There are many like him. Such an one was the prodigal son in the parable, who must needs have the portion of goods which fell to him, and set up for himself. He could not submit to live quietly under his father's roof but would go into a far country and be his own master. Like the little child that will leave its mother's hand and walk alone, he soon smarted for his folly. He became wiser when he had to eat husks with the swine. But there are many like him. Young men, I beseech you earnestly, beware of pride. Two things are said to be very rare sights in the world: one is a young man humble, and the other is an old man content. I fear this saying is only too true. Be not proud of your own abilities, your own strength, your own knowledge, your own appearance, or your own cleverness. Be not proud of yourself or your endowments of any kind. It all comes from not knowing yourself and the world. The older you grow and the more you see, the less reason you will find for being proud. Ignorance and inexperience are the pedestal of pride; once let the pedestal be removed, and pride will soon come

down. Remember how often Scripture sets before us the excellence of a humble spirit. How strongly we are warned “not to think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think” (Rom 12:3)! How plainly we are told, “If any man think that he knoweth anything, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know” (1Co 8:2)! How strict is the command, “Put on humbleness of mind” (Col 3:12)! And again, “Be clothed with humility” (1Pe 5:5). Alas, this is a garment of which many seem not to have so much as a rag! Think of the great example our Lord Jesus Christ leaves us in this respect. He washed the feet of His disciples, saying, “Ye should do as I have done to you” (Joh 13:15). It is written, “Though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor” (2Co 8:9). And again, “He made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the like-ness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself” (Phi 2:7,8). Surely to be proud is to be more like the devil and fallen Adam, than like Christ. Surely, it can never be mean and low-spirited to be like Him. Think of the wisest man that ever lived—I mean Solomon. See how he speaks of himself as a “little child,” as one who “knew not how to go out or come in” or manage for himself (1Ki 3:7, 8). That was a very different spirit from his brother Absalom’s, who thought himself equal to anything: “Oh that I were made judge in the land, that every man which hath any suit or cause might come unto me, and I would do him justice” (2Sa 15:4). That was a very different spirit from his brother Adonijah’s, who “exalted himself, saying, I will be king” (1Ki 1:5). Humility was the beginning of Solomon’s wisdom. He writes it down as his own experience, “Seest thou a man wise in his own conceit? There is more hope of a fool than of him” (Pro 26:12).

Hear counsel, and receive instruction, that thou mayest be wise in thy latter end. - Pr.19:20

Without counsel purposes are disappointed: but in the multitude of counsellors they are established. - Pr. 15:22

That multitude of counsellors isn’t just referring to asking several people about some particular issue that should rear its head in your life, if you should so choose – it describes the very life situation of God’s elect, when they are rightly construing it: namely, the beautiful situation they have been placed in by the Lord in sojourning amongst many who delight in the word of God, have experience and are willing and able to give godly counsel. It is the life situation itself, not just a particular instance of seeking counsel. But it is only the life situation, itself, if it is perceived as that in the heart of a man. He can be amongst

many wise counsellors, and refuse, ignore or chafe at their counsel, rather than seeking it, as he should - like a dry sponge soaking up all the counsel it can.

Sometimes a person doesn't seek counsel but they get some anyway. Don't chafe against unsought counsel in your pride. Sometimes it is helpful and sometimes not right on point, but we should not heap a negative construction on that act in our minds, thinking that someone is trying control or manipulate us, or that someone is meddling in our affairs, 'telling us what to do.'

Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths. Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the LORD, and depart from evil. – Pr. 3:5-7

One of the ways that you acknowledge the Lord is in hearing and heeding the words that He delivers, in His Providential dealings, through his servants. Do not, in your mind, turn such love, beauty, help and mercy into merely a wrestling match of human wills. Such an outlook is an ugly perversion of the truth - and will pull your mind and heart so far off the reservation as to make you partial in the law and actually make you hate portions of God's word when delivered by certain of his saints that you have come to resent or chafe against in your heart.

A wise man will hear, and will increase learning; and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels. – Pr. 1:5

The word for counsels there is *tachbulah* (takh-boo-law) and its original meaning was that of skill involved in steering or navigating a boat or ship, but came to mean, more figuratively (but way more widely used) 'the skill of steering or guiding actions.' In the OT, *tahbulah* is used only in Job and Proverbs, always in its plural form. *Tahbulah* usually refers to the body of guidance, counsel, or strategy offered by a group of skilled counselors. The scriptures teach that the discerning man acquires wise counsel from skilled advisors.

And counsel doesn't even need to be received as a direct point-counterpoint - You don't have to ask counsel of a man to get and take it. You can be influenced by the ways of a man, whether good or evil - and adopt the behavior of that man. This is tantamount to taking the counsel of a man. By following his example.

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. But his delight is in the law of the

LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper. – Ps. 1:1-3

This does not mean that you simply reject worldly counsel and huddle with your Bible and steer clear of counsel available to you by godly men and women. That word *meditate* there means that the word of God is on your mind, tongue and ears – it forges your policies – it defines your thinking – and how much more complete of a forging and defining can be accomplished by hearing the words of those whose experience and wisdom would most assuredly augment our own should we only hear it with joy, in sheer thanksgiving to God for putting us in the blessed situation to be near to it – to have unfettered access to receive it.

So one last practical piece of counsel on counsel. I have often suggested to my children (and many others) to think of their particular clump of sins – that is, those sins that each of them has the strongest proclivity towards, or the sin which doth so easily beset each of us, as a large, deep pit in our front yard. I then ask them, “Since that pit represents those sins that you are most prone to, should you go over and stand next to it and see how close to the edge of it you can stand without losing your footing and falling in, or should you rather run as fast as you can to get to the back yard, as far away from that pit as you can go?” I give them that counsel, as I have learned that is the counsel I must take myself. So, I exhort those of you who are prone to cloister yourselves off and live primarily in the strength of your own counsel and your own understanding of scripture, to make it a proactive habit to start seeking counsel from a variety of souls on many matters. You probably have a long-standing, hard to break bad habit, and the only way to break that habit is by forming a new one that runs counter what you have already done. And I exhort those of you who are prone to live in a mindset of ‘self-sufficiency’ to seek the help of others – even in those areas that you may feel you already have figured out. You also probably have developed a bad habit of thinking that is hard to break. It is a good exercise in godly humility, the seeking of counsel and of sound, refreshing communion.

Beloved, the Lord has in great love and mercy placed us in life situations that are blessed above all men, nestling us together with many others who he has imbued with a love and fear of Him, and with a great variety of spiritual life experiences, and with much exercise by the Holy Spirit of God in comparing spiritual things with spiritual, and with great desire, yea, necessity of heart, to minister unto the saints of God as a vital role of their very being.

He has greatly insulated us against our own baser natures as we sojourn here together in fear and trembling, provoking us each, by one another, to remember what our one, ultimately proper desire is and should be. But all this advantage withers and comes to naught if we, becoming ever so subtly entangled in the vanities of this life, don't see it for the blessedness that it is and make full advantage of it in the ways that the Lord commands.

One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to enquire in his temple. – Ps. 27:4

I love you all dearly.