

What to Do in Dangerous Times

Proverbs 29:8

“Scornful men bring a city into a snare [set a city aflame]: but wise men turn away wrath.”

What should we do in these dangerous times? As you and I read the news about our nation, we grow more and more concerned. What will the end of these things be? How can order be restored? Anarchists, political leaders, and unethical journalists seem to have made common cause to use their rhetoric to bring about revolt. How do we stand against the open attempts to set our society on fire? Proverbs 29:8 shows us how.

Scorners Setting Cities Aflame

This verse describes skeptical scoffers (literally “men of mockery”). At the end of this document is a brief study of the scorner. The actions of the scorner are described by the Hebrew word [*puwach*]ⁱ meaning “to breathe or blow.” The word is frequently translated as “breathe,” “speak,” or “puff.” Here it carries the idea of someone blowing on glowing embers until a fire leaps forth.

Those of you who have started a campfire are familiar with this. You get down on your knees, and continue to blow on the embers until you see that little flicker that tells you the fire has begun in earnest. Then it is time to start gently piling on the fuel. The first phrase of this proverb helps us to understand that this is what cynical skeptics do to entire cities. By their persuasive speech and rhetoric, these people fan whole societies into flames of wrath. In these dangerous times, we need to know how to turn away that wrath.

What do scornful men ridicule?

- They scorn God and His Law.
 - Instead of delighting in God’s Law, the scorner rejects it. Psalm 1:1-2
 - Jesus was laughed to scorn, even on the cross. Luke 8:51-52, Matthew 20:19
- They scorn other people.
 - Job’s “friends” scorned him in his distress. Job 16:20
 - David said that the proud held him “in derision.” Psalm 119:51
 - Some children scorn the instruction of their parents, Proverbs 13:1

- Some political leaders are scornful men. Isaiah 28:14

The same two Hebrew words (from Proverbs 29:8) are used in Isaiah 28:14 to refer to political leaders:

“. . . you scornful men that rule who rule this people in Jerusalem . . .” Charles Bridges commented that “many of the kings of Judah and Israel thus brought the city into a snare. Their provocations of divine wrath did more to further its ruin than the most powerful foreign enemies. Their influence led the people into deeper aggravations of sin, and ripened them for judgment.” For instance, consider what 2 Chronicles 36:11-16 tells us about Zedekiah:

¹¹ Zedekiah was one and twenty years old when he began to reign, and reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. ¹² And he did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD his God, and humbled not himself before Jeremiah the prophet speaking from the mouth of the LORD. ¹³ And he also rebelled against king Nebuchadnezzar, who had made him swear by God: but he stiffened his neck, and hardened his heart from turning unto the LORD God of Israel. ¹⁴ Moreover all the chief of the priests, and the people, transgressed very much after all the abominations of the heathen; and polluted the house of the LORD which he had hallowed in Jerusalem. ¹⁵ And the LORD God of their fathers sent to them by his messengers, rising up betimes, and sending; because he had compassion on his people, and on his dwelling place: ¹⁶ But they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his prophets, until the wrath of the LORD arose against his people, till there was no remedy.”

Keep these haunting words in mind: “Till there was no remedy.” Zedekiah was the king when the southern kingdom was utterly destroyed by the Chaldeans in 586 B.C.

About the scorners, one commentator wrote, “Such folks often perceive themselves as social reformers. But they are, in fact, anarchists for whom God has the strongest of warnings.”ⁱⁱ Another wrote, “Mockers are radical fools. They not only lack wisdom; they also ridicule those who do. When they have influence over a city, whether officially or by their own assertions, they rock it in negative ways. They are those who would take a bad situation and intensify it into a riot.”ⁱⁱⁱ Haven’t we seen this in the news recently?

Matthew Henry observed, “Those are scornful men that mock at religion, the obligations of conscience, the fears of another world, and everything that is sacred and serious. Such men are the plagues of their generation; they bring God’s judgments upon a land, set men together by the ears, and so bring all to confusion.”^{iv}

Recently, Patrick Buchanan observed about the present crisis in our country, “Rarely have would-be revolutionaries been so open about their nihilistic desire to hurt people and break things. This, as much as anything else, demonstrates the toxicity of their movement. The inability to articulate, even rhetorically, a vision of human flourishing reveals a project that is purely negative and destructive.”^v (“Nihilism” is the belief that life is meaningless; it therefore rejects any moral or religious principles.) Buchanan’s comment that these rioting groups are purely negative and destructive deserves our attention and reminds us of our text.

Remember those haunting words from 2 Chronicles 36: “till there was no remedy?” Is there still hope for our country? When scornful men have fanned cities into flame – sometimes literally – is there still hope? Yes, and the hope is found in the second half of Proverbs 29:8: “. . . **but wise men turn away wrath.**” In these dangerous times, we need to know how to turn away that wrath.

Wise Men Turning Away Wrath

When scornful men are fanning our cities into flames of wrath, how can we turn away wrath?

Matthew Henry wrote, “Proud and foolish men kindle the fires which wise and good men must extinguish.”^{vi} How do we extinguish these flames – which threaten to destroy our society and the rule of law? We have to move forward by learning how to turn away wrath. This is the only way to heal our national wounds by the grace of God.

Former Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice expressed this need to move forward in an interview recently with *Face the Nation*, “We have a very painful history. That’s a very hard truth. But it is the truth of the past. We now have to talk about how to move forward. And when I talk to people of different colors, particularly my white friends, my white colleagues, I don’t want it to be in the language of recrimination. I want to be in the language of how do we move forward. I think we each have an individual responsibility. It’s a collective responsibility, yes, but

it's an individual responsibility to ask what am I going to do specifically? What am I going to do to help heal these wounds and to move our country forward? Because race is still very much a factor in everyday life in America.”^{vii}

In the words of Condoleezza Rice, how do we heal these wounds and move our country forward? Only by the grace of God, my friends, only by the grace of God. And by God’s grace, we can be wise men and wise women who “turn away wrath.” How do we turn away wrath?

The Righteous Wrath of God

Men and women are under God’s wrath at this very moment. **“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness;”** (Romans 1:18). In answer to that, we must share the message of the One who turns away God’s wrath. Only the Son of God can turn away the wrath of God.

How do we apply God’s answer?

- ❖ Place your complete trust in the finished sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ, knowing that we shall be saved from wrath through Him. Romans 5:9
- ❖ Proclaim the Good News of Christ who delivered us from the wrath to come. 1 Thessalonians 1:10; 5:9

Remember the illustration of the watchman in Ezekiel 33? This helps us to know how to share the Gospel with others like someone who is constantly watching for opportunities. There will always be those who insist that God’s way of justice and salvation are unfair and unequal (33:20). They may even treat your message as a source of entertainment for their itching ears (33:30-33). But the faithful watchman will proclaim God’s message to those who are in danger of God’s wrath (33:1-10). And God’s message is clear for men to turn away from the wrath of God:

¹¹ Say unto them, As I live, says the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?” (Ezekiel 33:11)

- ❖ Remember that the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men. Romans 1:18, John 3:36, Proverbs 11:23
- ❖ Pray earnestly, rather than giving way to wrath and doubting. 1 Timothy 2:8

Remember Abraham's example of prayer and intercession when he prayed for Sodom (Genesis 18-19). Those who know the Word of God know that their neighbors, their nation and their neighboring nations are in great danger. Like the description of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 18:20, our society is in danger "because their sin is very grievous." The Lord made this known to Abraham, and that godly man began to intercede for the people in those wicked places (Genesis 18:23-33). But the perverse violence of Sodom (Genesis 19:4-9) – which is not unlike the violence we are seeing today – brought God's swift judgment. (See Jude 1:7.) But God's grace met yet deliver us as we call for the Lord upon His throne of grace to give us grace to help in time of need (Hebrews 4:16).

How do we turn away from the wrath of men? How can we become what we want others to be?

The Wrath of Men (which does not work the righteousness of God, James 1:20)

How do we turn away from the wrath of men?

- Be swift to hear, slow to speak, and slow to wrath, James 1:19, Proverbs 14:29
- In your family: "Don't let the sun go down on your wrath." Ephesians 4:26
- In your family: Fathers, don't provoke your children to wrath. Ephesians 6:4
- Put away wrath, and be kind, tenderhearted and forgiving. Ephesians 4:31, Colossians 3:8
- Practice God-honoring submission to governmental authorities, Romans 13:4
- Don't take personal revenge. Give place to God's righteous wrath. Romans 12:19
- Learn how to use the soft answer that turns away wrath. Proverbs 15:1

- Don't force wrath, which only brings forth strife. Proverbs 30:33 Remember that it is an honor to stop striving and meddling (even in online discussions). Proverbs 20:3
- Do not become rebellious by reacting to the rebellious people around you. Ezekiel 2:8, Numbers 20:10-13
- Make peace in the only way possible – by Prince of Peace. Romans 15:13

The Life and Times of the Scorner

Scorn – to mock with sarcasm or cynicism. Hebrew “make a mouth at” or proudly scoff

The scorner is the skeptic and critic who will not devote his heart to God's concerns. He is the one who is critical, griping, sarcastic, or cynical. He or she publicly or passively challenges the authority of God, parents, pastors, teachers or other authorities.

I. How Scorning Affects the Scorner

A. The Scorner Enjoys His Scorning, Proverbs 1:22

1. He is characterized by his proud wrath. Proverbs 21:24
 2. He mocks at sin and confession of sin. Proverbs 14:9
- Test: Do you enjoy tearing others down?*

B. The Scorner Is Hindered by His Scorning.

1. He bears the consequences. Proverbs 9:12
 2. He doesn't really listen to authorities. Proverbs 13:1
 3. He is frustrated in his search for meaning. Proverbs 14:6
 4. He doesn't appreciate wise people. Proverbs 15:12
 5. He is critical of law, order and justice. Proverbs 19:28
- Test: Are you really concerned about God's concerns?*
- Test: Are you genuinely interested in your parents' wishes?*

II. How Scorning Affects Others.

A. How It Affects Those Who Have to Be Around the Scorner.

1. The Scorner is disgusting to others. Proverbs 24:9
 2. The Scorner is destructive to others. Proverbs 29:8
- Test: Are others successful because of you? Or are you destroying them?*

B. How It Affects those Who Try to Help the Scorner.

1. They will be ashamed for the attempt. Proverbs 9:7
2. They will be hated for the attempt. Proverbs 9:8
3. They will come to the conclusion that the scorner has to be put out. Proverbs 22:10

Test: How well do you take correction?

Test: How many times have others tried to help you and you despised them for it?

III. How God Responds to the Scorner

A. God's Attitude Toward the Scorner

- God scorns the scorner. Proverbs 3:34 (See Proverbs 1:24-33!)

This verse in Proverbs is quoted in the New Testament in 1 Peter 5:5 "God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble." *Test: Do you have a humble heart toward God?*

B. God's Actions Toward the Scorner

1. God will hurt or kill the scorner. Proverbs 19:25
2. God has judgment prepared for the scorner. Proverbs 19:29

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ⁱ "פּוּחַ (pûah) breathe, blow." (Victor P. Hamilton, "פּוּחַ 1741," ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 718.)

ⁱⁱ John A. Kitchen, *Proverbs*, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2006. p. 656

ⁱⁱⁱ Tremper Longman III, *Proverbs*, Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006. p. 503

^{iv} Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 1020.

^v Patrick Buchanan, Nation Hating Itself Cannot Survive, Newsmax, June 23, 2020, accessed at <https://www.newsmax.com/t/newsmax/article/973581/333>

^{vi} Matthew Henry, op.cit.

^{vii} Condoleezza Rice, Transcript: Condoleezza Rice discusses race on "Face the Nation," June 7, 2020, CBS News, June 7, 2020 accessed at <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/transcript-condoleezza-ricce-discusses-race-on-face-the-nation-june-7-2020/>