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Christian
Behave!

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Series: Living Lessons From Proverbs

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INTO HIS LIKENESS RADIO

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That's the sum total of God's Word as we approach the next segment of our study on self-control from Proverbs. Paul summarized it for us in Ephesians 4. Paraphrased by Ken Taylor, it goes like this:

Let me say this, then, speaking for the Lord: Live no longer as the unsaved do, for they are blinded and confused. Their closed hearts are full of darkness; they are far away from the life of God because they have shut their minds against him, and they cannot understand his ways.

They don't care about right and wrong and have given them- selves over to impure ways. They stop at nothing, being driven by their evil minds and reckless lusts.

But that isn't the way Christ taught you!

If you have really heard his voice and learned from him the truths concerning himself,

Then throw off your old evil nature—the old you that was a partner in your evil ways—rotten through and through, full of lust and shame.

Now your attitudes and thoughts must all be constantly changing for the better.

Yes, you must be a new and different person, holy and good. Clothe yourself with this new nature. (So much for your nature. Now as for behavior.)

Stop lying to each other; tell the truth, for we are parts of each other and when we lie to each other we are hurting ourselves.

If you are angry, don't sin by nursing your grudge. Don't let the sun go down with you still angry—get over it quickly;

For when you are angry you give a mighty foothold to the devil.

If anyone is stealing he must stop it and begin using those hands of his for honest work so he can give to others in need.

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Don't use bad language. Say only what is good and helpful to those you are talking to, and what will give them a blessing.

Don't cause the Holy Spirit sorrow by the way you live (or behave). Remember, he is the one who marks you to be present on that day when salvation from sin will be complete.

Stop being mean, bad-tempered and angry. Quarreling, harsh words, and dislike of others should have no place in your lives.

Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God has forgiven you because you belong to Christ. (Ephesians 4:17-32 TLB)

Follow God's example in everything you do just as a much loved child imitates his father.

Be full of love for others, following the example of Christ who loved you and gave himself to God as a sacrifice to take away your sins. And God was pleased, for Christ's love for you was like sweet perfume to him.

Let there be no sex sin, impurity or greed among you. Let no one be able to accuse you of any such things.

Dirty stories, foul talk and coarse jokes—these are not for you. Instead, remind each other of God's goodness and be thankful. (Ephesians 5:1-4 TLB)

So be careful how you act (how you behave); these are difficult days. Don't be fools; be wise: make the most of every opportunity you have for doing good.

Don't act (behave) thoughtlessly, but try to find out and do whatever the Lord wants you to. (Ephesians 5:15-17 TLB)

What Paul is saying is, "Christian, behave yourself." It's not an option; it's an essential. It's not a process; it's a principle.

As we move into the next phase of our study of Principles from Proverbs, we now see emerge a more tangible set of instructions for Christian behavior. And we will see, I trust, that here self-control is even more definable, and we are, therefore, even more accountable.

Our title for today's introductory lesson into this new phase of our study is "Christian...Behave!" And our outline for this lesson is as follows:

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I. Into His Likeness

- A. The Process of becoming
- B. The Principle of behaving

II. Into His Life

- A. Projects from Proverbs on behaving
- B. Common denominators to consider
 - 1. Behavior is a choice
 - 2. Behavior carries consequences
 - 3. No Man is an island
 - a) Sin is against God
 - b) Sin affects others
 - c) Sin destroys your testimony

This is another of those transitional lessons designed hopefully to be a bridge between two islands of truth found in Proverbs which, of course, are also found like threads of gold woven into the tapestry of every page of every book of God's precious Word.

It is the second face of Wisdom, "Self-Control", that has been occupying our thoughts for these past twelve studies. Self-control is defined as the life under the control of the Spirit responding to the Word, even over the objections of the emotions. It's a life under control because God's in control by choice.

We began with a look at the more intangible, not so easily definable forms of self-control addressed in Proverbs. We called them "Internal Responses."

Impulsiveness—decision-making based on the will's response to the emotions rather than the Word. Anger—Envy— and finally, Fear—the absence of confidence in the sovereignty of God.

Each of them dealt with issues some of us had once called emotions or responses, internal responses. But we determined in each case that they were all, in essence, choices, not emotions, and that God had a process for changing our responses over a period of time until as Paul said,

And we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into His likeness from one degree of glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.

(II Corinthians 3:18 NAS)

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Into His Likeness

by Degrees

from Glory to Glory

that's how a Christian grows!

And as we honor His Word and obey His voice, His Spirit through time transforms us. Attitudes begin to change. Motives begin to change. Responses begin to change. Patterns of impulsiveness, anger, envy, and fear vanish. The impulsiveness is replaced with decisiveness, the anger with love, the envy with contentment, and the fear with faith. And the world sees the difference. Internal self-control leads to gradual, but continual transformation.

In ever increasing splendor
From glory to glory we go
Daily transformed by His power
Into His likeness we grow.

In ever increasing splendor
May I transparent be
That in ever increasing measure
The world may see Jesus in me.

That's the process of growing into His likeness. It is the process of becoming new. But hold on for a minute. I want to throw a thought at you that may seem revolutionary to some of you, but it is, in essence, the cornerstone of this lesson and the foundation stone of the lessons to follow. The thought is this. While the process of becoming takes time, a lifetime in some areas, the process of behaving doesn't. While the transformation of attitudes takes time, the transformation of behavior ought to take no time at all. Therefore, most of the commands in Scripture dealing with behavior are immediate, specific, and without excuse.

We may wear buttons that say, "PLEASE BE PATIENT, GOD ISN'T FINISHED YET." And it's true. God isn't finished making us more tender, more pure, more unselfish, more considerate, more giving, more loving, and more sharing. And it's true; God is dealing with our impulsiveness, our anger, our envy, and our fears. And gradually they are vanishing. However, we were not given such latitude in our changed life where behavior is concerned.

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Example 1: Don't steal.

Let him that stole steal no more: (Ephesians 4:28a)

It doesn't say you grow into it. You don't steal four cars in April, two cars in May, one car in June, and say, "Wow, what progress!" The moment Christ comes into your life, He revokes your license to steal anything— money, time, affections, anything! You say, "Well, I still 'feel' like stealing." Well, so what? Your feeler has been programmed by another spirit. God says no more stealing, not now, not ever. If you've stolen before, make it right. Then go out and get a job and earn what you can and give all you can away, Paul says. You don't "grow into it." It's immediate!

Example 2: Stop lying.

Don't tell lies to each other. It was your old life with all its wickedness that did that sort of thing; now it's dead and gone. (Colossians 3:9 TLB)

You don't grow out of lying. That's the devil's lie. He's the father of lies and in him is no truth at all. The day you come to Christ you're to stop lying, and you're to tell the truth for the rest of your life.

Example 3: Stop reckless living.

From now on, then, you must live the rest of your earthly lives controlled by God's will and not by human desires.

You have spent enough time in the past doing what the heathen like to do. Your lives were spent in indecency, lust, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and the disgusting worship of idols.

And now the heathen are surprised when you do not join them in the same wild, reckless living. (I Peter 4:2-4 GNB)

(But) The end of all things is near. You must be self-controlled and alert. You must be able to pray.

(I Peter 4:7 GNB)

You don't just taper off your indecency, Peter says, or your participation in worldly forms of entertainment that glorify lust, alcohol, immorality, or idolatry. You say, "No thank you, I'm a Christian." You don't go to those places. You don't do those things. Peter says in verses 5-6, you can expect to be misunderstood and made fun of; but that's just part of it. Peter says, just remember, they're the ones who are yet to face the judge. And God will deal with them in due time. As for you and immorality, Stop it, and

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stop it now!

Well, the illustrations are endless: homosexuality, adultery, fornication, cheating, gossiping, drunkenness, gluttony, filthy language.

God says, “Stop It! Stop It Now! Don’t wait to grow out of it. Stop It!” And God will grow you in your understanding as you go. Then your motives will change. Then your emotions will change. Then your desires will change. But while you’re waiting for the change in heart, your behavior puts on the brakes.

A child in the physical realm is our best example of how we as spiritual children are to behave. You don’t wait until your child understands why playing in the street is dangerous and comes to the mature decision that it is unwise, so he doesn’t “feel right” about playing football on IH-10. Neither he nor his friends would be around long enough to reach that point of maturity. So you pass a law at your house: Don’t Play On The Freeway! Yes, I know it’s fun dodging the semis and hopping over the rabbits, but it’s bad for your health. So here’s a rule: Thou Shalt Not Play On The Freeway. Legalism? No! Wisdom. While the child is growing in his understanding, he stays off the freeway, so he stays alive long enough to grow up. Once he’s grown, of course, he doesn’t play on the freeway. Now he sees the wisdom of the command. Until he was old enough to see it, he just did it because his father said to.

Do you get the picture? You grow into His likeness. That’s the process of becoming. But, you immediately begin to obey. That’s the principle of behaving. While you’re becoming (all the while) you’re behaving. And, Satan won’t like it. He’ll feed you at least four excuses to justify your continuing to behave as an unbeliever. Listen to his lies:

Argument 1: Satan says, “Nobody’s perfect.”

WRONG! Jesus is perfect (and He lives in you.) The issue isn’t perfection; the issue is obedience. Quote him,

but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct,

because it is written, “Be holy, for I am holy.”

(1 Peter 1:15,16 NKJV)

And watch him flee! Satan’s lies never change. He’ll say, “Ole

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Deacon Brown lies. I heard him. Nobody's perfect." Well, I don't know about Deacon Brown, but it wasn't Deacon Brown who died for you. It was Jesus. He never told a lie, and He said to you, don't you ever lie again.

Argument 2: Satan says, "God will understand. God is love."

Of course, God will understand, but He won't approve. Quote these verses,

I beseech [appeal] you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. [Natural thing to do.]

And do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

(Romans 12:1,2 NKJV)

We're to seek the approval of a holy God through obedience, not presume upon His grace through procrastination.

Argument 3: Satan causes you to question God's Word.

...Hath God said?

(Genesis 3:1)

That one goes back a ways doesn't it? Did God really say don't lie? Not even on your income tax? Not about your age? Come on, Satan says, be reasonable. Could all those good people be wrong? And so you measure the Word against the world and assume the Word to be out of date or out of sync. What we're to do is measure the world against the Word and discover how destitute the world has become.

"Hath God said?"

Homosexuality is a sin? Yes, He hath!!

Drunkenness is a sin? Yes, He hath!!

Adultery is a sin? Yes, He hath!!

Yes, God hath said, and what God hath said will not change. Tell Satan about these verses,

The counsel of the Lord standeth forever, the thoughts of His heart to all generations. (Psalms 33:11)

For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord that

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hath mercy on thee.

(Isaiah 54:10)

God said it, and what God hath said shall stand.

Argument 4: Satan says, "That's hypocrisy."

"If it feels right, do it." Or, "If you don't mean it in your heart, God won't honor it anyway." But that's not what God says, God says,

He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me. And he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father. And I will love him and will manifest myself to him.

(John 14:21)

God honors obedience, not feeling, and obedience honors God. So Satan will lie to you: It takes time. God understands. Nobody's perfect. Did God really say that? How hypocritical. But God simply says,

If you love Me [behave like it] keep My commandments.

(John 14:15 NKJV)

So if you're here today and have postponed your obedience in a key area of behavior, this lesson is for you. Internal transformation of attitudes and heart responses takes time. You're a tree. Plant yourself by the river and grow. But your behavior need not wait. You can stop lying. No, you must stop lying today. You must stop stealing today. You must put away drunkenness today. You must stop gossiping today. While you grow, you behave all the while.

Self-control has two parts: internal attitude, a process of transformation, and external behavior, a principle of obedience. It is into that painful second area that we are moving in our study of Proverbs. In our study of attitudes, impulsiveness, anger, envy, and fear, we were dealing with somewhat intangible qualities that did not appear on the surface to be absolute, though further study confirmed that they were. We spent much of our time just defining what they were and describing the subtleties of their intrusion into our character. Now we begin looking at behavior and self-control. Our job will be somewhat simplified. Most of us know the problems and few of us can disguise them before others as we could our teakettle anger, or our seething envy, or our subtle fears. Our job will also be easier because the book of Proverbs itself will hold enough dynamite to explode Satan's myths about behaving. Proverbs is a practical book, and we're

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headed for practical territory. As with the more subtle internal areas of self-control, we'll only take a sample, zeroing in on those most talked about in Proverbs. While we may not touch on your most serious behavioral problem, once again, the principles in Proverbs are constant. And while the problems are many, the solutions are similar. Shall we proceed?

I would like to introduce you to four public enemies of the Christian faith over which the Christian is commanded to exercise self-control, not just gradually as he grows, but immediately and continually. We will look at them individually in the next few lessons. Right now I simply wish to list them, to define them, and to give you a sample of what the Scripture says about them, and thus warn you of what's ahead.

Public Enemy 1: Sexual Immorality!

It includes adultery, fornication, homosexuality, and all forms of behavior which deviate from the portrait of salvation God painted in Scripture.

Sexual immorality defined: The deliberate violation of the image of God by physically denying God's spiritual truth.

The world has relaxed its standards of sexual conduct because the world is applying relative standards thus denying Scriptural absolutes. And because Satan, in control of the world system, despises the portrait sex was intended to portray, if he can remove the Scriptural boundaries of God's view of sex, he can destroy God's portrait of man's spiritual union with God. But sexual immorality is not something the Christian grows out of. It's something he stops immediately. In time, his heart will grow in understanding. His desire to please God will surpass his desire for earthly pleasure. But in the meantime, he is to behave sexually.

In our study, we'll look at God's clear warnings about the fruits of immorality. Passages such as Proverbs 5, which paraphrased, include such warnings as these:

But afterwards [an act of immorality] only a bitter conscience is left to you, sharp as a double-edged sword.

(Proverbs 5:4)

Young men, listen to me, and never forget what I'm about to say:

Run from her! Don't go near her house (the temptation to adultery),

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Lest you fall to temptation and lose your honor, and give the remainder of your life to the cruel and merciless;

Lest strangers obtain your wealth, and you become a slave of foreigners.

Lest afterwards you groan in anguish and in shame, when syphilis [disease] consumes your body, [Herpes is not new.]

And you say, "Oh, if only I had listened! If only I had not demanded my own way!

Oh, why wouldn't I take advice? Why was I so stupid?

Now I must face public disgrace."

Drink from your own well, my son—be faithful and true to your wife.

Why should you beget children with women of the street?

Why share your children with those outside your home?

Be happy, yes, rejoice in the wife of your youth. [Let your manhood be blessing.]

Let her breasts [charms] and tender embrace satisfy you. Let her love alone fill you with delight.

Why delight yourself with prostitutes [other women], embracing what isn't yours?

For God is closely watching you, and he weighs carefully everything you do. (Proverbs 5:7-21 TLB)

Hardly much room for doubt, is there?

Public Enemy 2: Drunkenness.

Drunkenness involves yielding control of the mind and body to any addictive agent that counterfeits the fruits of the Holy Spirit with Satanic imitations. The man or the woman who succumbs to this temptation is:

- a) in direct conflict with the Word of God and thus with the will of God.
- b) choosing to open his or her life up to Satanic spirits whose objective is to generate in the realm of the feeling cheap imitations of the fruits of the Spirit, and
- c) asking for Satanic strongholds because by the nature of addicting agents they generate control through the flesh to another spirit.

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I believe the Christian who truly understands what alcohol is and what alcohol does will flee from it as they would any other invading enemy. God understands. That's why He paints such a graphic portrait in Scripture. For instance, we'll look at Proverbs 23 where it says this:

Whose heart is filled with anguish and sorrow? Who is always fighting and quarreling? Who is the man with bloodshot eyes and many wounds? It is the one who spends long hours in the taverns, trying out new mixtures.

Don't let the sparkle and the smooth taste of strong wine deceive you.

For in the end it bites like a poisonous serpent; it stings like an adder.

You will see hallucinations and have delirium tremens, and you will say foolish, silly things that would embarrass you no end when sober.

You will stagger like a sailor tossed at sea, clinging to a swaying mast.

And afterwards you will say, "I didn't even know it when they beat me up... Let's go and have another drink!"

(Proverbs 23:29-35 TLB)

So if you don't care to look in the mirror when you've been drinking, then at least look at God's Word when you're sober, and get an instant replay of what you looked like and a picture of the future and where you're headed. We'll look at the fruits of God's Spirit produced by the new wine of the Holy Spirit, and at the fruits of Satan's spirit produced by alcohol. We'll see that Satan has a cheap imitation of each one.

Public Enemy 3: Gluttony.

Gluttony = the stomach in control of the mind.

It is living to eat, rather than eating to live.

The good man eats to live, while the evil man lives to eat.

(Proverbs 13:25 TLB)

And remember, it's not how fat you are. Some gluttons couldn't gain weight if they ate concrete. They're just born to be thin. (Don't you just hate 'em!) But they may be far greater gluttons than many who vie for the Miss Piggy look alike contest.

Public Enemy 4: The Tongue.

James defines it as,

The tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. (James 3:6a)

Every kind of beast, and bird, of reptile [snakes] and creature of the sea [fish], is tamed and has been tamed by mankind.

But the no man can tame the tongue. (James 3:7,8a NKJV)

The tongue is a flame of fire. (James 3:6a TLB)

I have so far found more passages in Proverbs on the tongue than on any other subject.

We'll look at principles from Proverbs on:

- Boasting- Using the tongue to exalt self
- Bad Report- Using the tongue to accentuate the negative
- Flattery- Using the tongue to gain acceptance
- Gossip- Using the tongue to destroy character
- Nagging- Using the tongue as sandpaper to wear down another's resistance
- Sarcasm- Using the tongue to destroy under the guise of humor
- Filthy Speech- Using the tongue as a garbage dispenser

As well as,

- Lying
- Arguing
- Meddling
- Complaining, etc.

The tongue is the fire no man can tame, but God can. And the minute Christ comes into our lives, He expects to do so.

So "Christian, behave," seems like an apt title for a preview into such a study as this. I'm not looking forward to it, and I know you're not; but we cannot journey the pathways through the Proverbs and ignore the concepts that seem to occupy such a large portion of its proverbial sod. The whole issue is self-control.

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The key passage is Proverbs 25:28. Paraphrased it says,

A man with no self-control is defenseless. He's like a city whose protective walls have crumbled around him.

So we must look at the issue of self-control and behavior. And as we close let me give you a few things that all four of these areas of behavior, all four of these public enemies, have in common.

1- They are all choices. We choose with our will, in defiance of God's Word, every time we lie or get drunk, or yield to gluttony, or yield to immorality. Once again, these are choices. We are not victims of society or our upbringing. James says,

But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed [trapped].

Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.

(James 1:14,15)

So don't let Satan sell you the lie that we just can't help it. All forms of behavioral self-control are the result of choices. For some, one choice is hard, another easier. But either way, for all, each is a deliberate choice.

Secondly, remember, behavioral disobedience always carries clear-cut consequences in Scripture. God never leaves you in the dark over what to expect. He tells you what adultery leads to, what drinking leads to, what gluttony leads to, what the misuse of the tongue will produce. There are always consequences, predictable consequences. And the Scripture pulls no punches.

Thirdly, all four of the sins we're looking at are self-perpetuating and increasingly destructive. You start out with a little lie. (It changes your standards slightly.) Eventually it leads to a bigger lie until the truth no longer clearly exists. You start out with a little alcohol. "Not me," you proclaim, "I'll never become a victim." But alcohol carries its own death warrant and needs greater quantities to satisfy the same appetites as time goes by. Satan uses it to destroy, and once you begin, the process is in motion.

It's so true of gluttony. You form patterns, and small compromises pave the way for new eating habits until the stomach calls the signals, and the mind is no longer in control of the game.

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And oh, sexual sin, is the cardinal example—never satisfied, always seeking more thrills until the desire becomes the controlling desire of the life and destroys the life in the process.

And fourthly, all of these public enemies echo with one refrain, “No Man Is An Island.” Satan sold Eve the lie, “Do what’s best for you. It’s every one for himself.” She bought it, and thousands of years later, as sin has left its ugly scars on mankind and destroyed the lives of millions of people, *we know it was a lie*. Everything you do affects someone else.

First, they are all sins against God. When you’re a glutton or a liar or an adulterer, you break the laws of God and the heart of God. That, in itself, is all the reason we need to obey.

Secondly, they are all sins against others. We ARE our brother’s keeper. Others imitate what we do. Others are hurt by what we do. Some sins directly affect our brother. All sins affect them indirectly.

And thirdly, they are all sins against the testimony of the cross. It says, “Yes, Jesus died for me. Yes, Jesus said, ‘Don’t lie.’ But I’ll lie anyway. Sure Jesus is Lord, but not of my tongue.” (No wonder the world is confused.)

So remember as we go through this somewhat unpleasant terrain in the next few lessons, every time you disobey and misbehave, there are specific prescribed consequences that that particular sin produces. Yes, God is mercy. He forgives, but the reaping and the sowing go on. Every time you are tempted to ignore God’s clear warnings, remember, “No Man Is An Island”. Your sin breaks the heart of God, destroys the lives of others, and tramples underfoot the testimony of the cross. It is true, we grow steadily, continually, into HIS likeness as we behold HIS face in the mirror of HIS WORD. But Christian friend, it’s equally true that while we’re growing, and while we’re beholding, we must be behaving.

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Oh, Christian, behave!
That's God's clear call
And that call He has not repealed.
He intends for His saints
To live up to His Word
And the standards His Word has revealed.

Yes, we are to grow
In His likeness, that's true,
What joy—from glory to glory...
But still as we're growing
God says, Christian, Behave!!
That's the oft untold part of the story.

So, Christian, behave!
Live life on God's plane
And a clear testimony you'll tell.
You'll build up the saints,
You'll lift up the cross,
And you'll please God's dear heart as well.

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