

Behind The Mask

Memory Text: “Do not exalt yourself in the presence of the king, and do not stand in the place of the great.” (Proverbs 25:6)

Setting The Stage: Fred Demara must have been one of the most curious people to have ever lived. For most of the time he wasn't even Fred Demara. At one time he was Martin Godgart, a high school teacher. He was also known as Dr. Robert Linton French, a college dean; Dr. Cecil B. Hamann, a law student; and Brother John, a Catholic Monk. In addition, he worked as a hospital chaplain, a Hollywood actor, and most unbelievable of all, a surgeon aboard a Canadian navy destroyer. Demara was probably the greatest pretender of our time. Demara was simply trying to be someone other than himself.

Self-pretension – the claim to be something we're not, ends up cheating ourselves and others. It's deadly. The master of pretense (“an attempt to make something that is not the case appear true”) is Satan (Gen. 3:1-6 – dazzling serpent uttering sweet words, seeming so concerned with Eve's happiness, yet plotting her death; 2 Cor. 11:14 – an angel of light preparing traps for us). We live in a world where we need to be constantly alert to the enemy's deceptions and snares. There are also people we interact with who don't care about us, only their own ambitions, and they won't mind taking advantage of us to get there.

In this week's lesson in Proverbs, the wise man counsels us to step out from behind the mask of self-pretension in 5 areas.

Sunday – The Mystery Of God

Proverbs 25:2, 3; Deuteronomy 29:29; 1 Corinthians 13:12

No. 1 – **Don't pretend to know all the answers.** Life is full of mysteries (refer to Physicist David Deutsch comment on Sunday's lesson). If mere water molecules confound us how can we know the mysteries of God? Try to wrap your head around the idea of infinity, a number without end (∞ , lemniscate)! **Proverbs 25:2, 3.** Conceal – “to hide,” “to be hidden,” “secret things,” or things that God has decided to keep from us for one reason or another. In other words, God's ways are mysterious to finite minds, much like a parent's ways may be hard for a child to understand.

Isaiah 45:15: “Truly You *are* God, who hide Yourself, O God of Israel, the Savior!”

Romans 11:33: “Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable *are* His judgments and His ways past finding out!”

Deuteronomy 29:29: “The secret *things belong* to the LORD our God, but those *things which are revealed belong* to us and to our children forever, that *we may do all the words of this law.*” Those things in His words and law that He has revealed to us, are for us to know and to embrace.

If an earthly monarch’s mind is as difficult to understand (princes have their *arcana imperii—state secrets*), as the height of the heavens (troposphere-11miles-where most of earths weather; stratosphere-30miles-where ozone exists to block suns rays; mesosphere-52miles-where meteors burn up; ionosphere-430miles-where satellites & space station orbit; exosphere-620-6,214 miles-where it merges with interplanetary space / The furthest galaxy from the earth is 13.3 billion light years away-light travels at 186,000 mi/sec or 5.88 trillion mi/year) and the depth of the earth (3,958 miles to center and we’re still not sure what it’s entirely made up of and we won’t know seeing it is suggested that the temperature of the earth’s core is 7,000K or 12,140F – deepest mine TouTona gold mine in South Africa, depth at 2.2 miles, with temperatures at 131F), then how much more the mind and ways of God!

We can trust God with those things we do not understand and know that He will explain the perplexities and disappointments we experienced here when we make it to heaven (see 1 Cor. 13: 12).

Monday – The Fool As Wise

Proverbs 26:11, 12; 2 Peter 2:21, 22; Judges 21:25

No. 2 – **Don’t pretend to be wise when you are not.** It doesn’t take long before you realize that you’re not always right and your way is not always the best way (driving on left side of the road in America). What would happen if there were no absolutes (red light, no N on the compass - a way that seems right, Prov. 14:12)? What would happen if there were no moral absolutes? Anarchy would ensue. There would be no right or wrong.

Proverbs 26:11, 12. What must we be careful of here? We need to remember how sick a foolish decision made us and to not return to it. Peter says that it would have been better for a person to not know the way of righteousness, than for that person to know and turn from it (2 Pet. 2:21, 22). We must not succumb to insanity – doing the same thing over again expecting different results. This mentality is fueled by an insistence that you are right no matter what!

Matthew 9:12: “When Jesus heard *that*, He said to them, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.”

Romans 12:16: “Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion.”

Revelation 3: 17: “Because you say, ‘I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing’—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked.”

Judges 21:25: “In those days *there was* no king in Israel; everyone did *what was right* in his own eyes.” – the danger of conceit and disobedience to God’s revealed will.

Tuesday – The Sluggard

Proverbs 26:13-16; Proverbs 6:9-11

No. 3 – **Don’t pretend to be doing your best when you are not.** Laziness has produced more shortcuts and inventions that we would probably give it recognition for. Why walk over to your bookshelf when you can roll over there on your chair? Why stand up and change the channel on your TV when you can do it from your couch with the remote control?

After thinking about laziness someone said, “Some people would do anything to be able to do nothing.” (Old mountaineer and his wife sitting by fire – “Jed, get up and go see if it’s raining.” – “Aw, can’t we just call the dog in to see if he’s wet.”). Just as a student who spends more time and energy on preparing to cheat on an exam than studying for it, it is ironic that lazy people work hard to find excuses for their laziness.

Proverbs 26:13-16. “There’s a lion in the road!” – an exaggeration and excuse to not face challenges. We’re to go out on a limb because that’s where the fruit is. “Door on hinges” – there’s movement but the lazy man isn’t going anywhere. “Buries hand in bowl” – so lazy that he can’t bring the food back to his mouth, half-committed, folding of arms. “Wiser in own eyes” – intellectual laziness, close-mindedness. “Answer sensibly” – given thoughtful consideration to the issue versus the lazy man who adapts to preconceived ideas, opinions of others, and won’t think for himself.

Spiritual lethargy is fatal. “In the judgment men will not be condemned because they conscientiously believed a lie, but because they did not believe the truth, because they neglected the opportunity of learning what is truth.” (Patriarchs & Prophets, p. 55)

What’s the answer to the lazy bones ways? **Proverbs 6:6-8.** The sluggard is encouraged to consider the ant and be wise, which does what it needs to do to provide not only for itself but its colony as well. It doesn’t have a cheerleader or a personal trainer. It just does what it does because it knows it needs to live.

Wednesday – The Friend As Enemy

Proverbs 26:5, 6, 17; Galatians 2:14; Matthew 26:49

No. 4 – **Don’t pretend there isn’t anything wrong when there is.** True friends care about each other enough to correct a wrong in the other person in order to help them. What type of friend would I be if I saw my friend in danger and didn’t alert him to it or try to help him avoid it or get him out of that trouble? True friendships are based on truth and trust.

Proverbs 27:5, 6. “rebuke” – open, undisguised censure, lovingly declared. Naturally, we’re not talking here about condemning a person, but rather, aiding a person. This type of reproof rises from a genuine concern for another, is based on sufficient grounds or reasonable proof (versus suspicious hunch), is given after serious consideration (versus rashly), and is designed for correction (versus ventilation). “Love concealed” – or love without action, that compliments our neighbors in their sins. See Gal. 2:14 – Paul’s rebuke to Peter.

“Wounds of a friend” – It might hurt when first rebuked, but it doesn’t last long as the rebuked knows it comes from a friend who has their best interest at heart. “Kisses of an enemy” – To find that out that you’ve been tricked by the flattering words and kind deeds of someone you thought was truly your friend can be devastating. Nothing hurts as bad, except being betrayed with a kiss. See Matt. 26:49 – Judas betrays Jesus with a kiss.

Proverbs 27:17: “As iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend.” – According to this verse, what can be the effect of confrontation between friends? This doesn’t mean that one provokes or enrages another, but there’s a reciprocal benefit. The quality of the friendship itself is improved and each are stimulated and strengthened by their interchanges and better prepared for the next struggle. Can’t benefit from this if you lock yourself away from others. It’s a wise leader who surrounds himself with like-minded people and who welcomes varying opinions. He/she will grow in knowledge and character.

Thursday – The Enemy As Friend

Proverbs 26:18-23; Matthew 10:16

No. 5 – **Don’t pretend so as to advance your own interests.** We live in enemy territory. While we shouldn’t live in paranoia we should be aware that there are people alive today that don’t mind doing us harm so they can advance their agenda, and they don’t mind lying to you or flattering you to achieve their desired end.

Proverbs 26:18-23.

v. 18, 19 – There is no greater madness in the world than to intentionally plot against your neighbors welfare all the while pretending to be neighborly, and then when found out brush it aside with the words, “I was just kidding.” Serious harm is if often caused by those who enjoy seeing their friends hurt as a result of foolish tricks (removing a wet floor sign, telling someone who likes a particular person that that person likes them too when it’s not true, elected officials making promises to the general public they never intend to keep and when confronted about their unfilled promises claim that that’s not what they really meant).

v. 20, 21 – When the fuel is consumed the fires goes out. And many quarrels would quickly cool off if malicious gossips pretending to be friendly did not keep adding fuel to the fire. As a hot coal gets a fire going again so does a combative and

argumentative person who pretends he has your best interest in mind, fuel the fires of division and strife.

v. 23 – Fervent (“hotly to pursue”) lips can hide a deceitful heart. Politicians wanting to be elected, salesman wanting to profit, playboy wanting a woman, or the preacher wanting to line his pockets all know how effective smooth and eloquent words can be. Like lead monoxide (dross) forms a glaze upon the earthenware and makes it smooth and pleasant to the touch while the materials beneath are rough and of little value, the mouth may speak warm words of friendship while the heart is cold and self-seeking.

What words of caution are given to God’s people who are surrounded by deception on every hand?

Proverbs 26:25: “When he speaks kindly, do not believe him, for *there are* seven abominations in his heart;”

Matthew 10:16: “Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents [alert and cautious and not provoking danger] and harmless as doves [be above reproach in speech and conduct]”

Appeal: A life of pretension is shallow and harmful to yourself and others. God calls us to abandon our masks, live a life of transparency by his grace, and avoid becoming food for hungry wolves by living wisely and harmlessly.