



The Most Important Kind of Vision
Proverbs 29:18
May 26, 2019

Would you rather look good or see good? YOYO for the former, but I'd like us to think together about the latter. What kind of vision do you think is most important?

"Where there is no vision, the people perish" (Proverbs 29:18, KJV). This verse is used regularly to establish the need for vision in the sense of "a mental image of what the future could look like." People with the imagination, innovation, foresight, or discernment to create such vision are valued in our culture. The leaders of many businesses and also churches create a vision to guide their people toward a "desired future." This kind of vision, like communication, is a useful leadership tool. It is not, however, the kind of vision Proverbs is talking about.

The meaning of vision in the Proverb can be seen in the second, contrasting line, "but he that keepeth the law, happy is he" (KJV). This "antithetical" parallelism contrasts "perish" with "happy" and "no vision" with "keeping the law." So the vision here is similar to the law. Both are messages received by revelation from God, one visually (dreams, appearances) and one written. This meaning is clear in the ESV: "Where there is no *prophetic* vision the people cast off restraint, but blessed is he who keeps the law." NIV translates more loosely but still captures the meaning: "Where there is no *revelation*, people cast off restraint; but blessed is the one who heeds wisdom's instruction." (For examples of God revealing his word through visions and/or dreams, see Numbers 12:6; 1 Samuel

3:1ff.; 1 Chronicles 17:15; Job 7:14; Isaiah 1:1; 29:7; Lamentations 2:9; Ezekiel 7:26; Matthew 17:9; Acts 16:9-10; 18:9; 2 Corinthians 12:1 and several others). While I don't think it is my place to say such visions cannot occur today, I will say things like this are subjective, open to misunderstanding and cannot be verified. We need to be very careful about visions and dreams (Jeremiah 14:14; 23:16; Colossians 2:18; Jude 1:8).

God's law, however, is more objective and can lead us in the right direction, as the second half of Proverbs 29:18 says. It is a lamp to our feet and light to our path (Psalm 119:105). We may have a negative view of the Law, due to the ways the Pharisees misused it, but when used as God intended, the Torah (Law or instruction) has a very favorable sense (Psalm 19:7-11). We do not live under the Law of the Old Testament, and yet it is still useful for teaching and guiding us (Romans 15:4; 1 Corinthians 10:1-11; 2 Timothy 3:14-17). When we also include the "perfect law that gives liberty," the teachings of the New Testament, we have a much more complete revelation from God to guide us. James 1:25 urges us to look into this law intently, continually, and obediently and says that it will lead to a blessing, just as Proverbs 28:18 says. I believe God's word in both Testaments is the most important kind of revelation for us to have.

God's word is not always easy to understand, however, and many people distort it (John 5:39-40; 1 Timothy 1:3-11; 2 Peter 3:15-16). We need to do our best to handle it correctly. This includes understanding it as God intends, but also putting it into practice personally, and sharing it with others helpfully. It is the Holy Spirit who inspired the Scriptures and uses them like a sword (2 Timothy 3:16-17; Ephesians 6:17), so we will need His help to grasp His word (cf. Psalm 119:18; Matthew 11:25-26; 1 Corinthians 2:12-16; Ephesians 1:17-18; Colossians 1:9; 2 Timothy 2:7). We can also help each other see and use it well (Romans 15:14; Colossians 3:16; Hebrews 5:12).

