

CAUTIOUSNESS vs. RASHNESS

CAUTIOUSNESS IS PLANNING FOR THE SUCCESS OF A VENTURE BY FOLLOWING THE WAYS OF GOD RATHER THAN MY NATURAL INCLINATIONS

“Lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths” (Proverbs 3:6).

DEFINITION OF CAUTIOUSNESS

Scripture describes the consequences of not using caution when it speaks of the man who is hasty in his words or actions. The Hebrew word *uwts* is translated as *hasty* and means “to be pressed, confined, or narrow; to insist; to urge.” This word describes the man who does not plan, resulting in poverty. (See Proverbs 21:5). Another Hebrew word, *maher*, warns of speaking rash vows to the Lord and means “quickly; soon; speedily.” (See Ecclesiastes 5:2).

Jesus taught the multitudes to count the cost of following Him, just as a man should count the cost of building a tower in order that he might carry it through successfully and not suffer mockery from bystanders. (See Luke 14:25-33).

WHAT IS CAUTIOUSNESS?

Cautiousness starts with the recognition that we have natural inclinations that contradict God’s ways. These tendencies seem right but lead to destruction and death. “There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death,” (Proverbs 16:25, New American Standard). “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” (Isaiah 55:8-9).

If we act according to our natural tendencies, we will act foolishly and pay a heavy price. “He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool” (Proverbs 28:26). “Lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths” (Proverbs 3:6).

When people speak evil of us, we naturally tend to speak evil of them. Scripture teaches the opposite response of doing good to them. “Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? Do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? Do not even the publicans so?” (Matthew 5:44-47).

Cautious people conquer the urge to speak before they get all the facts. “He who gives an answer before he hears, it is folly and shame to him,” (Proverbs 18:13, New American Standard). “Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath” (James 1:19). Cautious people also allow time to test the credibility of their course and the stability of their steps. “The plans of the diligent lead to profit as surely as haste leads to poverty,” (Proverbs 21:5, New International Version).

HOW DOES CAUTIOUSNESS RELATE TO INIQUITY?

Iniquity means doing what seems right to us. It would seem right, for example, to preach and do many good works, yet if the Spirit of God does not motivate and direct these activities, they are iniquity. Jesus said, “Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? And in thy name have cast out devils? And in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity” (Matthew 7:22-23). Acting apart from the life and power of God results in iniquity. “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all” (Isaiah 53:6).

There was no iniquity in Jesus Christ because of His divine nature. He did nothing of His own will but only what His Heavenly Father directed Him to do. Jesus said, “I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me” (John 5:30). A cautious person will also seek God’s will for each situation.

Waiting on the Lord for guidance forces us to reevaluate priorities and identify the “needful” things of life (See Luke 10:41-42). “But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk and not faint” (Isaiah 40:31).

HOW DO WE DEVELOP CAUTIOUSNESS?

1. Acknowledge that our natural inclinations are often wrong, and cry out to God for His wisdom.

“Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty things” (Jeremiah 33:3). “Call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me” (Psalm 50:15). “Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Romans 10:13).

“If thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; If thou seekest her as silver and searchest for her as for hid treasures; Then shalt thou understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God” (Proverbs 2:3-5). “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him” (James 1:5).

2. Learn from the experiences of others.

The biographies that God wrote in the Bible are filled with rich counsel on how to do things God’s way—and what happens when God’s ways are rejected. “The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple” (Psalm 19:7).

King David thought that bringing the holy Ark of God to his capital city of Jerusalem would be a good idea. He organized a huge procession and began the venture. However, he failed to exercise the cautiousness of checking Scripture. The Ark was sacred, and God had given special instructions on how it should be moved. The Philistines, who captured the Ark, put it on an ox-drawn cart to return it to Israel. David thought he could use the same method; however, his idea ended in death. When the cart was driven on uneven ground, it tipped, and the Ark began to slide off. A priest reached out to steady it and instantly died, because no one was to touch the Ark. (See II Samuel 6:3-8).

Later, David exercised cautiousness by following God’s regulations for carrying the Ark. Two poles were put through the rings on opposite sides of the Ark, and it was carried on the shoulders of four priests. They brought the Ark safely to Jerusalem, and all the people rejoiced. (See I Chronicles 15:11-15 and Exodus 25:10-14).

3. Consider the opposite action of natural inclinations.

Since our natural inclinations often contradict God’s universal principles, ask yourself, “What would I naturally do?” and then see if Scripture confirms the opposite action.

NATURAL INCLINATIONS	GOD’S WAYS
1. Reject unchangeable physical or family features.	Accept these as God’s means of developing inward character, and thank Him for them.
2. React to parents and others in authority who do not give us what we want.	Recognize that God has established all human authorities to praise those who do good and punish those who do evil.
3. Cover our secret sins and failures so others will not think less of us.	Humble ourselves by confessing faults, asking forgiveness, and making restitution where appropriate. “Before honor is humility” (Prov.15:33), but he that covers his sin will not prosper (see Prov. 28:13).
4. Reject our offenders and eagerly hope that they will be damaged.	Forgive those who offend us, and look for ways to benefit their lives.
5. Claim ownership of our possessions and use them for our own pleasure.	Dedicate our possessions to God, and use them to advance His kingdom.
6. Reprove those who fail to respect our personal rights.	Yield our rights to God, and thank Him for whatever happens beyond our control.
7. Enjoy the pleasures of sensuality and lust.	Dedicate our bodies to God as “living sacrifices” and daily yield our members to Him.
8. Desire to be rich so we will have security, nice possessions, and the praise of others.	Purpose to be a “giver” rather than a “taker,” and learn how to serve others to make them successful.

4. Seek out wise counsel.

A caution sign on the highway usually means that others have not exercised sufficient cautiousness in that spot and have paid a costly price for it. A cautious driver will slow down, make sure he follows all the rules of the road, and be extra alert to danger. God sets up similar “caution signs” on the highway of life. Others have failed to heed them and have painful memories to share. They will usually offer to tell their stories to others who want to avoid the consequences they experienced. A wise person will listen to their mistakes. Get experience as inexpensively as you can—others have paid a high price for it.

HOW CAUTIOUS ARE YOU?

1. Do you seek God’s will for every situation?
2. Do you ask for counsel from wise and experienced people, including your spouse?
3. Do you learn from the mistakes of others?
4. Do you think about what you are going to say before you speak?
5. Do you consider the right timing for doing a good deed?
6. Do you consider how your actions will affect others?
7. Do you plan ahead and count the cost, especially for big endeavors?