

Introduction: Today is the first of three Sundays we will explore portions of the wisdom books of Scripture. We will take two weeks in Proverbs, the elementary school of wisdom. Then we will dig into a portion of Ecclesiastes which is college level wisdom. (The secondary school of wisdom consists of the Song of Songs and certain Psalms (1, 34, 37, 73, 111); and, the graduate school of wisdom is the book of Job. *** The short definition of wisdom is the application God's Word in our everyday lives. Somewhere in God's Word He has given us the specific word(s) we need to act rightly (wisely) in whatever circumstances we happen to find ourselves. *** Specifically, before God sent His Son to be born in Bethlehem to bring salvation to all who humble themselves before Him, the words in the last book of the Torah, Deuteronomy, were applied to everyday life through the book of Proverbs. Some two thirds of the book of Proverbs contains a series of two line insights about some single aspect of everyday life (chapters 10-30). *** This morning we are looking at two portions of the nine chapter introduction to Proverbs. These chapters contain paragraph portions of poetry of considerable length on both wisdom and folly, namely: the rewards of living wisely, and the dangers of foolish living. *** First, we will consider the thirteen line introduction to the entire book. It gives the twofold purpose of the book of Proverbs: to build righteous character in God's people, and to give them experiential knowledge of THE True God through reverential fear of Him: **Wisdom comes from the fear of Yahweh.** Then we will see the clear contrast between wisdom and folly: the wise are rewarded for their obedience, and the foolish are in danger of great punishment for their pride.)

I. The purpose of Proverbs. (Proverbs 1:1-7)

A. To build righteous character. (Verses 1-4a)

1. The proverbs of Solomon, son of David, king of Israel. (Verse 1)

Proverbs: Proverbs is an edited compilation of many of the one thousand proverbs Solomon was given (1 Kings 4:29-34; 3:1-15). Many were copied out by Hezekiah's men (Proverbs 25:1)

2. To know wisdom and instruction, to understand words of insight, to receive instruction in wise behavior. (Verses 2-3a)

Wisdom: Again, wisdom is the correct application of God's Torah of instruction in all phases of the lives of God's covenant people Israel.

Instruction: These are two of the three times this word is used in this introduction. It is instruction in godly discipline, often involving chastening.

Understanding: Understanding involves discernment (between good and evil, wisdom and folly).

Wise behavior: Wise behavior is the ability to act by careful consideration of all circumstances and possible consequences – to be circumspect (seeing the whole 'circle of life'.)

3. [Wise behavior is] righteousness, justice and equity – to give prudence (subtily – KJV) to the simple. (Verse 3b-4a)

Righteousness: To build right character, which includes both justice and the uprightness of a 'straight arrow' (i.e. God's character) in those who are simple (youthful, naïve, childish) is one of the two purposes of Proverbs.

Prudence: Paradoxically, prudence includes both shrewdness and craftiness. (Jesus said to be wise as serpents [in the midst of wolves], Matthew 10:16.)

B. To gain experiential knowledge of Israel's Covenant God. (Verses 4b-7)

1. To give to the young knowledge and discretion (of God's purpose for their life). (Verse 4b)

Purpose: The correct experiential knowledge of God is the primary purpose of life for every human being created in God's image (John 17:13). And this knowledge is the most important purpose of Proverbs. We learn from the negative consequences of the times we do not act according to God's wisdom; and, as we shall soon see, also the times we do act wisely and receive His appropriate reward.

2. The wise man will hear and he will increase in learning, and the man of understanding will acquire counsel in order to understand a proverb, and its interpretation, the words of the wise and their dark sayings. (Verses 5-6)

Hear: In God's Word hearing results in full understanding of what He said and obedience in faith.

Consider Abraham when he received a word from Yahweh concerning his son Isaac (Genesis 22).

Counsel: Counsel is good guidance and direction from godly and wise friends as to how to act in any and every situation.

Satiric enigma: What is being 'interpreted' is mocking and satirical poetry which is also a taunt disguised as an enigma. One of the proverbs collected by Hezekiah's men speaks of the faithful wounds of a friend.

It takes a good friend to 'cut us down to size' when we need it (Proverbs 27:5-6).

Difficult and dark: A dark saying is a difficult to understand word from God. It is often paradoxical and may be expressed in a parable. A good synonym is riddle.

3. The fear of Yahweh is the beginning of knowledge. (Verse 7a)

Fear of Yahweh: We have reached the climax of the powerful poetry of this brief introduction of the whole book of Proverbs. A highlight of the poetic devices inspired in Solomon is the various synonyms used for wisdom: instruction, insight, righteousness, justice, equity, prudence, knowledge, discretion, learning, understanding, counsel, interpretation, and riddle. There is also repetition. Understanding is used three times. Instruction will be used for a third time in the following line, and with a slightly different meaning from the first two times. It is the wisdom of THE Covenant God to use words with multiple meanings because this stretches His people out of the simplicity people prefer to the complex reality He created. To those who would complain about what they call 'ambiguity' Yahweh would answer with the LOVE of the Perfect Father He is: Allow Me to help you to grow in wisdom through the knowledge gained by the trial and error of experience. And, as you gain greater reverential fear of Me you will become wise (Job 28:28; Psalm 111:10).

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4. And fools despise instruction. (*Verse 7b*)

Fools: Here we have the beginning of the conflict between wisdom and folly which goes all the way back to Eden (Genesis 3). Fools despise the idea of gaining the wisdom of God. When wise people examine themselves, they know they have the need for God and His wisdom. Any self-assessment resulting in self-satisfaction is foolish.

Avoid foolish self-assessing

II. The blessings of obedience and danger of pride. (*Proverbs 3:1-8*)

- A. Love and truth produce favor with God and man. (*Verses 1-4*)

1. My son, my teaching thou will not forget, and my commandments thy heart will keep; because long days and years of life and peace they will cause to be added to thee. (*Verses 1-2*)

Relationship: A father teaches his son about God's Torah-wisdom per Deuteronomy (6:4-7; 20-25; 4:5-9; 10:12-13; 30:1-10).

Law-instruction: The father's teaching is Torah, namely instruction in all the commands and statutes THE Covenant God gave Moses on Mt Sinai to worship Him properly (Exodus 20-30).

Benefits: The two rewards added to all who keep, guard and preserve the Torah are: long days and years of life, and peace – complete welfare, health, prosperity and contentment.

2. Truth and LOVE thou will not let leave thee, thou must bind them about thy neck and thou must write them upon the tablet of thy heart; and, thou must find grace and good understanding in the eyes of God and man. (*Verses 3-4*)

Command to find favor: Only Young's Literal Translation correctly understands Solomon's command to his son to find grace and understanding before God and all humanity.

Love and truth: Solomon uses Ten Commandment wording to tell his son to not let THE Truth and LOVE of THE Covenant God to leave him: Thou will NOT let leave! And, he does not follow this strong command with a promise. Instead he gives his son an ordinary command to find grace.

- B. Turn away from pride and evil through faith and fear of Yahweh. (*Verses 5-8*)

1. Thou must trust in Yahweh in all of the heart of thee, and upon thy understanding thou must not be leaning; in all of the ways of thee thou must be knowing Him, and He, He will make straight and upright the paths of thee. (*Verses 5-6*)

Battle: In the continuing battle of wisdom and folly, good and evil, Solomon now gives his son three commands with a promise. The first two commands his son must obey to stay on the winning side of the battle are:

positively, to trust THE Covenant God; and, negatively, to not lean upon his own understanding of life, God and His ways.

Know Yahweh: This leads to the final command to experientially know Yahweh at all times and in all the ways God is leading him in his life.

He makes upright: The promise for obeying the three commands of his father is that Yahweh Himself will make the young man's paths in life to be straight (not twisted) so that his character will become upright, having the righteousness of wisdom promised in the introduction to the book.

2. Thou must not be wise in thy eyes; thou must fear Yahweh and turn aside from evil. (*Verse 7*)

Pride and evil: Pride is the folly of the son thinking to himself that he is the source of wisdom. Solomon strongly forbids this for his son. And, given what he did when he finally became king, it seems Solomon saw the roots of his future evil acts in his son Rehoboam, especially his harsh treatment of his people, the idolatry he allowed, and finally his securing of peace with Egypt by ransacking the Temple of all the golden articles for worship (1 Kings 11:41-12:24; 14:21-31).

Avoid foolish self-assessing

Fear Yahweh: The fear of Yahweh is everything. Rehoboam became lacking in all reverential fear and worship of THE Covenant God of Israel.

The woman Wisdom: At the end of the long narrative poetry introduction the woman wisdom calls out to all people on earth in a two chapter speech about how she was the first creation of God and has always been with Him (Proverbs 8-9). She calls on people to find life in her and grace with Yahweh (Proverbs 8:35); because all who fail to find her will be harmed, and those hating her love death (Proverbs 8:36). Her speech climaxes with: Beginning of wisdom (is) fear of Yahweh; knowledge of Holy One (is) understanding (Proverbs 9:10).

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3. Healing it (wisdom) will be to thy navel and refreshment to thy bones. (*Verse 8*)

Reward: Those who are wise through the fear of Yahweh are promised healing and refreshing.

Conclusion: Proverbs build righteous character in those who are wise and they guide the wise into experiential knowledge of THE Covenant God. Furthermore, obedience to God through wisdom results in rewards of favor, but pride leads to great loss. So, fear THE Covenant God in faith.

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